



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Corso di Dottorato di ricerca
in Lingue, culture e società
moderne e Scienze del linguaggio
ciclo 33

Tesi di Ricerca
in cotutela con The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Vladimir Nabokov's Bilingual Poetry:

A Study of Verse Self-Translation

SSD: L-LIN/21

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Note on Transliteration

The Library of Congress system of transliteration (without diacritics) was used throughout this work for transliterating Russian names and words. The combination of letters “ий” and “ый” was rendered as “y”.

Exceptions are represented by Russian names and surnames, whose spellings are already fixed in the English language (such as Dmitri, Jakobson) and by Vladimir Nabokov’s transliterations contained in quotations from his texts.

Abbreviations (works by Nabokov)

- A* *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969.
- AnL* *The Annotated Lolita*. Ed. with preface, introduction, and notes by Alfred Appel, Jr.; revised and updated edition; New York: Vintage International, 1991 [1970].
- BS* *Bend Sinister*. New York: Time Incorporated, 1964.
- EO* *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse by Aleksandr Pushkin*, 4 vols., trans, and with commentary by Vladimir Nabokov. New York: Bollingen, 1964.
- EO R* *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse by Aleksandr Pushkin*. Trans. from the Russian, with a commentary, by Vladimir Nabokov. Revised edition. With an Introduction by Brian Boyd. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018 [1975].
- G* *The Gift*. Trans. Dmitri Nabokov and Michael Scammell in collaboration with the author. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963.
- Gift typescript* *The Gift* Chapter 1. Emended typescript draft (partially carbon) of novel, translated by Dmitri Nabokov with Vladimir Nabokov's ms. corrections. The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature. The New York Public Library, New York.
- Glory* *Glory*. Trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author. New York: Vintage International, 1991 [1971].
- IB* *Invitation to a Beheading*. Trans. Dmitri Nabokov in

collaboration with the author. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.

- LATH* *Look at the Harlequins!* New York: Vintage International, 1990 [1974].
- LL* *Lectures on Literature.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1980.
- LM* "The Lermontov Mirage." *The Russian Review*, 1(1) 1941: 31-9
- LRL* *Lectures on Russian Literature.* Ed. Fredson Bowers. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1981.
- NoP* *Notes on Prosody and Abram Gannibal.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- NWL* *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940–1971.* Ed. Simon Karlinsky. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- PLT* *Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev.* London: Lindsay Drummond, 1947.
- Poesie* *Poesie.* Trans. Alberto Pescetto and Enzo Siciliano. Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1962.
- PP* *Poems and Problems.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.
- PP* *Poems and Problems Typescript* with ms. Corrections. The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature. The New York Public Library, New York.
- PT* "Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English." In *The Translation Studies Reader.* Ed. Lawrence Venuti. London:

Routledge, 2000 [1955].

- RL* *Russian Lolita*. in *Sobranie Sochineny*, Vol. 10. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1987 [1967].
- SK* “Stikhi i kommentarii. Zametki dlya avtorskogo vechera 7 maya 1949 goda.” *Nashe nasledie*, 55. 2000 [1949]: 74-89.
- SL* *Selected Letters 1940-1977*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark Layman, 1989.
- SM* *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. New York: Vintage International, 1989 [1966].
- SO* *Strong Opinions*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.
- SSoch* *Sobranie sochineny russkogo perioda v piati tomakh*, 5 vols. Ed. Natal’ia Artemenko-Tolstaia et al. St Petersburg: Simpozium, 1999– 2000.
- Stories* *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*. New York: Vintage, 2013.
- Stikhi* *Stikhi*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979.
- TPK* “To Prince Kachurin – for Edmund Wilson.” Introduction by Gennady Barabtarlo. *The Nabokovian*, Fall 1992, 29: 30-34.
- TWS* *Think, Write, Speak. Uncollected Essays, Reviews, Interviews, And Letters To The Editor*. Eds. Brian Boyd and Anastasia Tolstoy. New York: Knopf, 2019.
- VV* *Verses and Versions: Three Centuries of Russian Poetry Selected and Translated by Vladimir Nabokov*. Ed. Brian Boyd and Stanislav Shvabrin. Orlando: Harcourt Houghton Mifflin. 2008.

Introduction

This research represents the first complete effort to cover Vladimir Nabokov's practice as a self-translator of poetry. As the title suggests, it promotes a new area by combining two already existing fields in Nabokov studies: the role of self-translation and the place of poetry in his work.

The recognition of the importance of these fields has grown considerably over the years. The impact of Nabokov's bilingual (or, rather, trilingual) literary identity on his work can hardly be overestimated; it had been noticed during his lifetime and became object of subsequent systematic studies (Steiner 1972; Beajour 1989; Bethea 1995; Anokhina 2019). Nabokov's activity as a self-translator of prose texts (novels and short stories) has also become object of inquiry, starting from the late 1960's (Proffer 1968a; Cummings 1977; Grayson 1977; Barabtarlo 1988). In the third millenium the number of publications devoted to Nabokov's self-translations soared in the context of general academic attention to bilingual authors. Numerous journal articles explore Nabokov's novels and short stories from the perspective of translation studies, analyzing, among others, the cases of *Despair* and *Lolita*, as well the "double" process of self-translation that involved his autobiography (Osimo 1999; Akikusa 2006; Oustinoff 2011; Imposti 2013). Jane Grayson's pioneering monograph devoted to Nabokov's bilingual novels (1977) distinguishes between "major" and "minor" reworkings, and discusses the structural, thematic, and formal changes contained in his self-translations. Elizabeth Beaujour's book (1989), on the other hand, explores the phenomenon of bilingualism in writers of the "first" wave of the Russian emigration, and focuses on the neurological, emotional, and psychological implications of self-translation. Both these monographs, however, like the

journal articles, discuss Nabokov's prose self-translations, without turning to his bilingual poetry.

Despite an impressive body of his poetic work, as a poet Nabokov was less successful in gaining critical attention and in-depth analysis during his lifetime, when either negative or off-hand reviews circulated both among Russian fellow émigré critics (Adamovich, 1953; Struve 1956) and American ones. Anglophone readers, however, had only two collections at their disposal, the little 1959 *Poems* and the 1970 *Poems and Problems*, containing a selection of thirty-nine Russian poems published along their English self-translations. Shortly after Nabokov's endeavour to select his Russian poetry for a large collection (published posthumously by Ardis – *Stikhi*, 1979), academic interest gradually began to extend towards his work as a poet (Verkheil 1980; Rabaté 1985; Johnson 1991) and resulted in a number of important contributions that shed a light on our understanding of Nabokov's poetry and its relationship with his prose (Diment 1991; Scherr 1995; Eekman 1995; Dolinin 1999 among others).

Nabokov's heterogeneous publications in the field of translation include theoretical essays and translations of prose and poetry from several European languages. In my research, I refer mainly to two collections of Russian poetry Nabokov translated into English in the 1940s (*TRP*, *PLT*), and to his work on Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1963; revised edition 1975). These publications have enjoyed considerable critical attention, with attempts to find an explanation for the evolution of Nabokov's translation practice and his radical "shift" to literalism. In particular, Stanislav Shvabrin's monograph *Between Rhyme and Reason: Vladimir Nabokov, Translation, and Dialogue* (2019) presents a complete overview of Nabokov's practice as a "standard" translator of poetry. Shvabrin discusses Nabokov's experience in translating French, English, Russian authors and poets. In doing so, Shvabrin approaches this theme from a Bakhtinian perspective and observes translation as a form of dialogue between Nabokov and other poets. Investigating the close relationship that binds Nabokov's translations with his own literary production,

Shvabrin's book is not concerned with the issue of poetry self-translation. The link between self-translation and poetry is only beginning to emerge in Nabokov studies and calls for a closer examination. Luisa Cornettone's recent doctoral dissertation (2019), focuses on self-translation and shows how the technique of close reading can be applied to bilingual poetry. Cornettone analyzes a number of poems from the Russian section of *Poems and Problems* and approaches the originals of Nabokov's self-translated poems as "riddles" (Cornettone 2019: 18) that can be solved with the help of the translated version of the poem. While Cornettone adopts a poem-by-poem approach to close-read a selection of texts from *Poems and Problems*, the present study combines a closereading of examples with a methodological analysis that investigates Nabokov's practices in translating the main prosodic and semantic features of his poems. Unlike Cornettone's dissertation, the present study also deals with poems that Nabokov translated for his novels and short stories.

By filling this gap, the present work intends to pursue a range of aims based on the conviction that a study of Nabokov's poetic self-translations is a necessary step towards a fuller understanding of his work as a bilingual poet and a translator of poetry. It also tests and attempts to refine one of the central assessments of self-translation studies, namely the idea that the very existence of a self-translation generates a new textual entity, a bilingual text made of two parts that compensate each other and interact with each other (Grutman 2009; Bassnett 2013; Santoyo 2013).

Such premises were pivotal in defining the research's objectives and its methodology. I analyze Nabokov's self-translated poetry as a corpus of bilingual texts, and reflect on the significance of formal and semantic similarities or divergences between its Russian and English parts. My other goal is to examine the history of Nabokov's self translation as an *evolving process*. My third objective is to introduce and situate Nabokov's poetic self-translations in the context of his work as a bilingual poet-translator.

The analytic strategy used is close reading with the use of tools and findings of literary theory (Tynianov 1921; Bakhtin 1975; Riffaterre 1978; Fish 1980; Segre 1985) and translation studies, in particular studies devoted to poetry translation and self-translation (Levý 1963; Lefevere 1975; Fitch 1988; Hokenson and Munson 2007). The empirical part of this study discusses the results of a comparative analysis conducted on the full corpus of Nabokov's bilingual poems, in terms of such fundamental features of Nabokov's poems as prosody, euphony, meter, syntax, and vocabulary. Special attention is devoted to the signs of the self-translated poems' addressivity, – in particular, to the rendition of culturally specific features and such hardly translatable intertextual elements as parody and allusions to other literary texts.

An important aspect of this work is its attention to the double nature of the textual material under examination. Two main categories can be discerned in the body of Nabokov's bilingual poems: poetry embedded in works of fiction and poetry published under the author's own name. The research is structured according to this division.

Following the theoretical framework on translation of poetry and self-translation, and a brief overview of Nabokov's work as a poet and a translator of poetry (Chapters 1 and 2), the study moves to a discussion of the poems contained in Nabokov's novels and short stories. Chapter 3 is entirely devoted to embedded poetry: the English translation of poetry in the 1938 novel *Dar* (the poems attributed to its protagonist Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev were translated by Nabokov himself) and the verses with which Humbert Humbert attempts to enrich his narration in *Lolita* (1955), self-translated in Russian in 1967.

In the sections devoted to these two novels, Nabokov's bilingual poetic compositions are approached as an integral part of the prose text that frames them. Consequently, the methodology of studying the poetic text in terms of its meter, euphony, and semantic and syntactic content is adapted to the role that poetry plays in each novel. In the case of *Dar* the analysis of meter was conducted with the support of Andrey Bely's prosodic studies,

which play an important role in the early stage of of the protagonist's artistic maturation. This is not relevant to the poems attributed to Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*: these poems are discussed as falling into two groups, parodic and "original."

The other major part of the dissertation is the chapter devoted to the bilingual section of Nabokov's 1970 collection *Poems and Problems*. Here, the focus is on the relationships between the translations of Nabokov's own poems — a selection of Russian texts that covers half a century of his poetic production — and his lifelong experience as a translator of classical Russian poetry. The analysis takes into account the function of the paratextual elements of this section of *Poems and Problems*, including the author's introduction (which presents his reflections on the experience of poetic self-translation) and the notes that accompany the English versions of the thirty-nine Russian poems.

While the secondary literature that contributed to shaping this research is introduced in the theoretical framework, the most important primary sources are represented by the texts of Nabokov's poems. The analysis conducted here incorporates findings of a study of Nabokov's English translations of Russian poetry. It also takes into account his theoretical reflections on poetry translation and prosody. Archival material — the typescripts of *The Gift* and *Poems and Problems* with Nabokov's holograph annotations — has also provided some valuable information on alternative variants that were considered but discarded by Nabokov.

While the very existence of a corpus of bilingual poetry in Nabokov's oeuvre is only beginning to emerge in Nabokov studies, by means of this research I wish to underscore the importance of studying Nabokov as a poet and a translator of his own poetry. I see his bilingual poetry as an invitation to perform an act of comparative reading, which allows to observe the self-translator's work as a process that combines elements of standard interlingual translation with moments of creative writing.

Translation Studies: Theoretical Framework

1.1 Translation of Poetry

The problem of poetry translation generated numerous debates among translators and translation theorists. This section provides a brief overview of the key theoretical concepts and methodological approaches in Translation Studies, supplemented with reflections made by poets and especially poets who translated poetry. The chapter eventually situates the phenomenon of *poetry self-translation* in the conceptual field of Translation Studies and thus provides a theoretical basis for the analysis of Nabokov's practice of poetry self-translation.

For a relatively young academic discipline, Translation Studies (the term was proposed by André Lefevere in the collected papers of the 1976 Leuven Colloquium¹) — has developed numerous research directions. While methodological boundaries are often blurred (and, perhaps, rightly so), most of these can fit into two macro-categories: the linguistic approach, which studies the process of transferring a text from a source language to a target language by analyzing syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic elements; and the cultural approach, which researches the cultural, literary, and historical role played by

¹ Lefevere defined Translation Studies as the discipline that focuses on “the problems raised by the production and description of translations” (Lefevere 1978: 234). He stated that the purpose of translation studies was to “produce a comprehensive theory which can also be used as a guideline for the production of translations.”

translations within literary systems, in addition to studying translation and translators from a political and ideological perspective.

This section follows the development of a *communication model* that describes the translation of a poetic text by focusing on the main operations and actors involved in the process. The goal here is to delineate their major features with the help of the findings of both linguistic and cultural approaches and to prepare the ground for a study of self-translation and self-translated texts, thus narrowing down the findings of the vast field of Translation Studies.²

Poetry, like all literature, doubles as a form of communication. A message is usually sent to be received and understood. In order for this to happen, the addresser and the addressee must share a code.³ If the addressee does not possess the linguistic skills required to decode the message, the chain of communication will require a mediation from a bilingual person, who is both able to read the text in its current form and rewrite it in a language he or she shares with the addressee.

Hence, interlingual translation is also a form of communication: Jakobson's famous model, centered around an addresser, a message and an addressee, can also be used to represent a process of standard translation. All these models work thanks to operations of decoding and recoding of messages, which, in the case of poetry translation, are usually written texts.

² For more on the different theories in Translation Studies, see Venuti 2000, Baker and Saldanha 2009.

³ "For the addressee to understand the message's addresser, they need to share an intermediary – language" (Yu. Lotman 1998: 25). Unless otherwise indicated in the Works Cited section all translations from Russian, Italian, and French are mine. I quote the original Russian source along with a literal English translation only when necessary, e.g. when textual analysis includes references to Russian poetry.

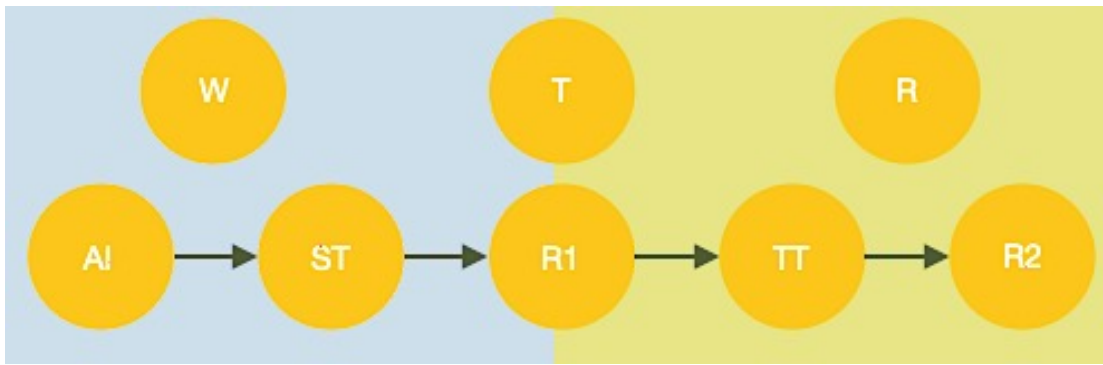


Fig. 1.
W = writer; T = translator; R = reader;
AI = authorial intent; ST = source text; R1 = first reading (reception by the translator); TT = target text; R2 = second reading (reception by the reader).

Figure 1 represents the chain of communication involved in the translation of a poem. The chain implies three actors — a writer (W), a translator, a reader — and two types of actions, decoding and recoding of messages. A message is thus first coded into a written source text (ST), decoded by the translator in the source language (R1), rewritten in the target language (TT), and decoded by the target reader as a translated text (R2).

1.1.1 Writing as a Form of Translation

In 1925, after he almost finished writing his first novel, *Mashen'ka* (1926), Nabokov wrote to his mother:

I know how each one [of my characters] smells, walks, eats, and I understand how God as he created the world found this a pure, thrilling joy. We are translators of God's creation, his little plagiarists and imitators, we dress up what he wrote, as a charmed commentator sometimes gives an extra grace to a line of genius. (qtd. in Boyd 1990: 245)

In this letter Nabokov — who started out as a poet but after a few decades and numerous novels would step into the shoes of the “charmed commentator” to his own translation of *Eugene Onegin* (1964) — compares the work of a writer to that of a translator. Within the boundaries of this metaphor, the world is seen as a big “source text”

created by an Artist and “translated” by a writer into a more limited and somewhat inferior imitation.

One can sketch a *petit histoire* of the idea that writing is itself a form of translation, a translation of one’s thoughts and inner self into pre-existent words and structures of a language. According to Nikolay Gumilyov (1990: 70), poets think in images. Similarly, when asked in what language he thinks, Nabokov famously replied “I think in images, not in words” (SO, 14). As reported by Efim Etkind, before “translating” (that is, writing) his poems, Alexander Blok was illuminated by a “flash” and the poem was subsequently composed in an inner language of his own:

A thought flashes through his consciousness like a blinding lightning, and only gradually does it acquire an expression in words. "In one’s native language"? Yes, because it seems that what was born appeared first in a language that only the poet understands. A. Blok said that he always started writing “in some other language,” and only afterwards did he translate into Russian. Blok confessed to his interlocutor: “Some of my poems I never finished translating.” (Etkind 1970: 134)

If we follow Paul Ricoeur’s view of translation, the inner images or thoughts mentioned above are “translated” by poets into words in a second stage, in the act of translating the self, translating experience into words. Jiří Levý proposed a similar view of the writing process. In his book *The Art of Translation* (1963) he explains that a work of art is created “[a]s the outcome of subjective selection and the transformation of elements of objective reality [...]; more precisely, a certain ideo-aesthetic content is realised in verbal material” (2011: 25). Reconnecting this idea to Nabokov’s letter, writing can be seen as an operation of selection of material from the world of the author, transformation of this material in the mind of the author and, ultimately, its externalization in the form of language.

1.1.2 The Source Text

The primary difference between a poem and a text written in prose is associated with the visual dimension: our sight is the first of our senses to suggest that we are about to read a

poem rather than a short story or a novel. Lineation characterizes poems regardless of their metric structure. The visual aspect of poems was extensively explored and employed as an expressive method by 20th century avant-garde artists such as Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Another sense profoundly involved in our way of experiencing poetry is hearing. Poetry's origins go back to oral and musical traditions, and sound effects such as rhythm, sound repetition, and onomatopoeia, are still prominent in the art of poetry; if a prose text is rich in intentional rhythmic effects and consonances, we usually deem it a "poetic" one.

The function of poetic language is different from that of ordinary language: in everyday life, we use language to encode oral or written messages that update or persuade our listener/reader, whereas poetry's aim is usually to "entertain or to give heightened emotional or intellectual experience" (Jones 2011: 117). While this function characterizes also literary works written in prose, poetry has been defined by Paul Valéry as a particularly "permanent" form of communication (1958: 60). Normally, language vanishes as soon as it is decoded — it is replaced in our memory by the content of the message, having thus achieved its communicative function (indeed, only if we do not understand our addresser do we ask for the message to be repeated). Poetry, on the other hand, lingers with us: after reading we retain a memory not only of its content but also of its form.

According to Andrey Bely, "form" in a poem is not limited to its rhythm or rhyme but includes all levels of construction of a poetic text, such as images and motifs (which are often assigned to the level of content). In Bely's view, poetic form is not just a passive container, but an active creator of content, because intonation and rhythm can often enhance the expression of a poem's content even more efficiently than the semantic meaning of the chosen words (Bely 1929: 262-63).

In his "Razgovor o Dante" (1933) Osip Mandelstam observes that Dante proposed an unusual metaphor in which form was seen as juice that must be squeezed out of a poem's content, which, in turn, appears as an envelope of form ("Io premerei di mio concetto il suco" [I would press the juice of my concept], Inf. XXXII, 4). The fact that Mandelstam

misinterpreted the verb “premere” (used here as a synonym of “esprimere,” i.e. to express) makes this passage no less interesting for us: Mandelstam further developed his idea by stating that “one can only squeeze something from a damp sponge or cloth. No matter how tight we twist a concept, we will not be able to squeeze from it any form, unless it was already a form in itself” (Mandelstam 2010: 167). In Mandelstam’s view, to think of poetry in the dichotomic terms of form vs meaning is not only absurd but dangerous. In totalitarian regimes, indeed, poets were instructed to create state-approved art by stuffing “beautiful” form with prefabricated sets of meanings and themes. True poetry, on the other hand, is endowed simultaneously with form and meaning at its very birth. As reported by Nadezhda Mandelstam, when her husband conceived a poem, it started from a sound that was already filled with content: poetry “was always born from a single impulse – the initial ‘ringing in the ears,’ before the formation of words, already embodied what is called ‘content’” (N. Mandelstam 1983: 187).

Thus poetry develops a special relationship between form and meaning, a relationship in which both play a fundamental role. A poetic text can be seen as a system or a structure where, as argued by Etkind, all the parts both on the level of content and that of form are inseparable, inter-related and inter-dependant.⁴

Whereas in prose an author’s style is also distinctive and important, poetry in general occupies a different space. In his 1970 book *Razgovor o stikhakh* Etkind states that “in prose, the atmosphere of style is created in a more or less extensive space by all the elements that contribute to making up this style” (1970: 206). In poetry, on the other hand, “within the narrow, extremely compressed space of poetic language a single hint, a

⁴ In his article “Stikhi i poeticheskoe sodержanie” Etkind shows how in 1835 Pushkin intended to reply to his friend P. A. Pletnev with a poem. In his drafts, Pushkin tried several forms such as an Onegin stanza, an octave, and alexandrine. Etkind shows that different poetic rhythms and stanzas led the poet to substantial changes in the content of the poem itself: despite a general idea, which remained the same, literally every single word of the poems changed (1977: 72-74). Etkind therefore concludes: “The peculiarity of poetry is that all its semantic, formal, inner and outer components are indivisible. They are interrelated and depend on each other: rhythm and sound, meaning and word order, line and phrase, word length and metrics” (1977: 75).

single individual bright word can suffice [...] for the creation of stylistic character” (ibid.) Hence a symbiotic relationship between form and meaning is associated with — and in part generated by — the more limited textual space that a lyrical poem usually occupies if compared to a standard prose work. Poetry can indeed be a uniquely efficient way of communication, especially in terms of the correlation between a text’s length and the complexity of its message. This efficiency was pointed out by Herbert Spencer in his essay “Philosophy of Style” (1884): according to Spencer, an effective literary text economizes the reader’s mental effort and energy, which is available in only limited amounts for a writer to count upon. Spencer called it the law of “effective speech,”⁵ and, following his view, “poetry, regarded as a vehicle of thought, is especially impressive partly because it obeys all the laws of effective speech, and partly because in so doing it imitates the natural utterances of excitement”⁶ (1884: 38).

In his preface to the essays that he chose for the collection *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry*, Joseph Brodsky notes that “poetic thinking, which is often called metaphorical, is in fact synthetic thinking,” also understood as “intuitive synthesis” (1976: 7). Brodsky describes poetic thought in geometrical terms as a diagonal line, “the shortest-stylistic-distance between two points.” Hence, for Brodsky, “tautology is the sin which is least

⁵ This law is enunciated by Spencer as follows: “A reader or listener has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available. To recognize and interpret the symbols presented to him requires part of this power; to arrange and combine the images suggested requires a further part; and only that part which remains can be used for realizing the thought conveyed. Hence, the more time and attention it takes to receive and understand each sentence, the less time and attention can be given to the contained idea; and the less vividly will that idea be conceived” (1884: 11). According to Spencer’s law, even metre participates in economizing the reader’s attention: “if the syllables be rhythmically arranged, the mind may economize its energies by anticipating the attention required for each syllable” (40).

⁶ In introducing his theory of *ostranenie*, Shklovsky criticized Spencer (or rather Potebnia as influenced by Spencer) by arguing that this principle can be applied to “practical” forms of communication, whereas difficulty, and the resultant prolonging of the reader’s attention, is part of the aesthetic experience (1925: 8). However, difficulty was not completely denied by Spencer: his principle of economy refers to not expending time on unnecessary words, whereas aesthetic experience is achieved by lingering over efficient poetic images. In this sense, Spencer’s essay does not entirely oppose Shklovsky’s theory.

characteristic of poetry” (1976: 8): a good poem is a “harmonic whole” where human thought finds its deepest but also most efficient and intuitive form of expression.

Linguists and semioticians also studied this feature of poetry. Samuel Levin devoted his linguistic study based on Jakobson’s conception of equivalence to explaining the “special unity of structure” (Levin 1962: 60) that is characteristic of poetry; whereas in his book *Semiotics of Poetry* (1978) Michael Riffaterre discusses poetic unity from a semiotic point of view, arguing that this unity is both formal and semantic. Riffaterre sees unity as “significance” and claims that “[f]rom the standpoint of meaning the text is a string of successive information units. In terms of significance the text is one semantic unit. Any sign within that text will therefore be relevant to its poetic quality, which expresses or reflects a continuing modification of the mimesis” (1978: 2-3). Riffaterre concludes by stating that in poetry the unit of significance is the text as a whole: “Within the wider realm of literature it seems to me that poetry is peculiarly inseparable from the concept of text: if we do not regard the poem as a closed entity, we cannot always differentiate poetic discourse from literary language” (6).

In interpreting a poem’s form and meaning as an indissoluble whole, these scholars and poets – some belonging to Nabokov’s cultural context – were undoubtedly influenced by the cultural and political conditions of their time, and may have overstated the case. However, these two facets of a poetic text certainly do coexist in a close interrelationship. Such a perspective on the poetic text applies also to poetry translation (section 1.1.5 below).

1.1.3 Reading Poetry

A written text — as it is to written poetry that this study is devoted — differs from oral communication not only in that a different channel is used to convey the message but also in that the addresser is usually distant in space and/or time from the addressee when the message is received. The main consequence of this distance, as pointed out by Cesare Segre, who split Jakobson’s communication chain into two dyads (addresser-message and

message-addressee), is that the addresser cannot adjust his message to the reception of the addressee, cannot intervene in the reading process, and ultimately cannot control the understanding of his text *ex tempore* (Segre 1985: 6). The poem's reception is thus up to the reader.

In Segre's view, a written text exists in a state of "potentiality" until it is read (35). Indeed, it is only through the process of reading that a text's meanings are activated, or, to use Wolfgang Iser's words, "concretized" (Iser 1978: 150). Reading also actualizes meanings if a text is not contemporary to its culture. This concretization is, of course, to a certain degree an operation of interpretation and transformation, since it is through the process of reception that a written text — an objective and permanent entity — enters the realm of subjectivity.

Riffaterre distinguished two stages of reading a poetic text. First, the readers must "hurdle the mimesis," that is, apprehend the meaning thanks to their linguistic and cultural competence. They should perceive not only the given text but also its relation to other texts in a given culture and society:

Wherever there are gaps or compressions in the text — such as incomplete descriptions, or allusions, or quotations, — it is this literary competence alone that will enable the reader to respond properly and to complete or fill in according to the hypogrammatic model. (1978: 5)

The second stage of reading is what Riffaterre calls "retroactive reading," a second interpretation and a truly "hermeneutic" reading: "As he progresses through the text, the reader remembers what he just read and modifies his understanding of it in the light of what he is now decoding" (1978: 5). All poetry-specific features such as ungrammaticalities and rhetorical devices are therefore charged with meaning during the second stage, becoming fully understood as coherent, "grammatical," and as part of a carefully constructed structure, a system of interrelated elements. Reading, especially in the second stage, is an active and attentive practice, during which the reader is "reviewing, revising, comparing backwards" different parts of the poetic text.

According to Levý, “The perception process ends with the concretization of the text, i.e. the creation of its image in the mind of the reader” (2011: 28). As noted above, a text can be seen as a translation of inner images into words, but do the images that occur in the reader’s mind match the images that generated it? Given the distance that separates the addresser from the addressee, this is not likely.

Since any reading of poetry occurs at a certain historical moment and in a certain geographical space, no reader exists within a sterile abstract environment, because readers always belong to what Stanley Fish (1980) called an “interpretive community,” i.e. to a cultural, historical, and linguistic context which changes with time and influences the reader’s interpretation of the text according to his or her identity politics or cultural competence. Whereas the historical writer cannot influence the individual reading process except through the in-built rhetoric of the text, the reading process is always influenced by the cultural and literary system to which the reader belongs.

In his essay “Kak chitat’ sovremennuiu poeziyu” (“How to read contemporary poetry”) poet and translator Grigory Dashevsky discusses two poems constructed around the same image: a sail ship. Dashevsky argues that the Romantic reader of Mikhail Lermontov’s “Белеет парус одинокий” interprets the text as a reflection on the poet’s soul and emotional state, even though no “lyrical I” is mentioned in the text. On the other hand, Horace also wrote a famous poem about a ship, but in this case the poet — and his audience — were well aware that the ship in danger was a metaphor of the State: as Dashevsky argues, “Horace’s reader’s main concern was about the unique whole to which he belonged, whereas the romantic reader's main concern is focused on his own unique self” (2015: 145). The authorial intent was captured by the reader because both the author and his audience belonged to the same interpretive community: as pointed out by Fish, different readings can arise because readers belong to different interpretive communities,

characterized by a “temporary stability.”⁷ A reader of contemporary poetry is compared by Dashevsky to a “paranoiac” who is obsessed with an important idea and looks for it throughout the text:

The correct poetry reader [...] persistently thinks about a thing that is important for him, like a prisoner who is always thinking about escaping. He looks at everything from this point of view: this thing here can be used as a tool for digging, through this window I may get out, this guard can be bribed. And if he enters the prison as [...] an idle tourist, he will only see what is different from his previous ideas, or what he is shown by someone else. (Dashevsky 2015: 146)

Reading is thus a process that activates the potential meanings of a poem, but there can never be just one reading, or one correct reading. In his introduction to a collection of Marina Tsvetaeva’s writings published in New York in 1979, Brodsky reported her now famous words that “reading is co-participation in creation” (Brodsky 1979: 8) and added that only a poet could have uttered this statement. A reader of poetry is thus an active figure, who reads and re-reads, in what emerges as a subjective intellectual experience, which is also inevitably connected to and influenced by the historical moment and the cultural environment in which the subject exists.

1.1.4 The Translator as Reader

According to translation scholar Mary Snell-Hornby, a good translator has to be “not only a bilingual, but also a bi-cultural (if not a multicultural) specialist working with and within an infinite variety of areas of technical expertise” (1995: 11). Linguistic skills in both languages must be combined with reading and writing skills that, in turn, demand understanding of the literary and cultural contexts in which both source and target texts are immersed.

These proficiencies are needed not only in order to actually perform the translation. They are also required to approach the source text: any translator is first and foremost a

⁷ The stability is temporary because “interpretive communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from one [community] to another” (Fish 1980: 170-71).

reader; according to Levý, a good translator is “above all” a good reader (2011: 31). Francis R. Jones opened his list of skills required of a translator of poetry with that of reading: a good translator needs “expert poetry-reading ability in the source language; expert poetry-writing ability in the receptor language; and mediating between the demands of ST [source text] loyalty and TT [target text] quality” (2011: 172).

Given his role of mediator between two different linguistic codes, ideally a translator must decode the source text in order to retrace the authorial intention that generated the poem and recode it in in the target language. Thus, in the case of a poem, a translator must recognize and interpret “a highly complex set of meanings and poetic features, conveyed through meaning and form” (Bouchard 1993: 149).

However, as seen above, reading is a tricky subjective process, which can be influenced by many factors. The almost telepathic ability to retrace precisely the bare abstract ideas or else specific synesthetic experiences behind the source text can hardly be expected from a translator, unless he is closely collaborating with the author (but this would take us to the field of collaborative translation).

In 1874 Dante Gabriel Rossetti stated that a translation “remains perhaps the most direct form of commentary.”⁸ Commentators, critics, and scholars usually try to reconstruct the authorial intention that lies behind a text, and indeed so does the translator: according to James Holmes, poetry translation can be seen as a part of the “meta-literature” that develops around a poem, like critical commentary and criticism in the source language (1988: 23). However, Holmes specifies that verse translation is also fundamentally different “in the very basic fact that it makes use of verse as its medium, and hence manifestly aspires to be a poem in its own right”; therefore, the metapoem “interprets, as William Frost has pointed out, not by analysis, but by enactment” (Holmes 1988: 24). I discuss enactment in translation in section 1.1.5.3.

⁸ Quoted in Nida 2000: 126.

In distinguishing a “regular” reader from a reader-translator, Levý also found a parallel between the work of the critic and that of the poetry translator. He claims that what is required of a good reader-translator is to set “similar constraints to those imposed on interpretation in literary criticism,” because if our task is to present a realistic rendering of a poem, we need to avoid the translator’s subjective opinions as much as possible and try to base his interpretation on “ideological and aesthetic values expressly or latently inherent” in the source text:

A translator who discovers a previously unrecognised aspect of the work or introduces a justifiable emphasis on a particular aspect may present a fresh view of the work. Above all, the translator should not impose his personal conception, either ideological or artistic [...]. [The translators’] conception of a work will be realistic only if they manage to avoid succumbing to cheap personal sentimentality and self-projection when reading it. (Levý 2011: 44)

Therefore, as a reader, a translator is less free in the interpretation of the text. Unless the translator’s intent is to use a literary work as a source of inspiration for something new, for a work of art of his own (but we would not be discussing translation anymore), a translator as a reader is required to limit his subjective experience and opinions when approaching the source text. On the other hand, this does not preclude multiple readings by different translators producing very different results even if they are not influenced by personal or ideological opinions.

1.1.5 Translation

1.1.5.1 Otherness in Comprehension and Translation

Speaking from a Saussurian perspective, it is possible to claim that we grasp meaning through difference: a sign does not contain meaning if it is received separately from its differential relation to other signs. Hence, understanding is a process within a dimension of negativity rather than positivity. In his seminal book *After Babel* (1975), George Steiner famously asserted that to understand is to translate. Influenced by Hegelian and

Heideggerian positions on understanding as an appropriative act that is charged with a movement of aggression, Steiner argued that “each act of comprehension must appropriate another entity that we translate into” (1998: 314). From an etymological point of view, comprehension is indeed a process that requires cognitive “encirclement” and “ingestion.” Steiner goes on to claim that when a message undergoes a process of understanding in order to be translated into a new literary and cultural system, this understanding entails invasion of the target system:

The Heideggerian “we are what we understand to be” entails that our own being is modified by each occurrence of comprehensive appropriation. No language, no traditional symbolic set or cultural ensemble imports without risk of being transformed. (ibid.)

Since every translation enters a pre-existing network of cultural products, translation is described by Steiner as an act of potential aggression which can modify and therefore “dislocate or relocate the whole of the native structure” whatever the degree of “naturalization” of the translated text, of its adaptation to the target culture (Steiner 1998: 315).

This threat of negativity, otherness, and aggression characterizes any process of understanding, of welcoming something new into our beings. Therefore, any consequent process of translation is related to the translator’s task of mediation between different systems. Regardless of how the approach to translation has been labelled — domestication or foreignization, illusionist or anti-illusionist, formal or dynamic equivalence, literal or free, visible or invisible (some of these concepts are discussed below) — a translator usually faces a choice between two translation strategies: whether to move the source text towards the target reader or to let the target reader make the effort of moving towards the source text and its cultural-literary background. One approach will allow the otherness to enter the new cultural milieu in a somewhat disguised way by means of adaptation, the other will work as a support, a map for the reader who will attempt to cross the line between familiar and unfamiliar.

In this regard, conflicting theoretical positions have emerged, often supported by different motivations. German idealist philosopher Schleiermacher romantically believed that the translator's task consists exactly in bringing the reader to the source text, whereas in his view what today is most often called a foreignizing strategy is too much of a challenge to the reader (1813). *Pace* Steiner, who believed that the "other" must be preserved in a good translation, Levý tried to conceptualize translation as a proper artistic genre and advocated an illusionist translation method, which requires a work of literature to "look like the original, like reality."⁹ Similarly, to use Eugene Nida's terms, a translation can seek "dynamic equivalence" (complete naturalness rather than preserving the culturally specific features of the source text) or "formal equivalence," which is "designed to permit the reader to identify himself as fully as possible with a person in the source-language context, and to understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression" (2000: 129). The 1990's Cultural Turn in Translation Studies brought up the issue again, contrasting "domestication," the strategy that creates an illusion of fluency and culturally adapts the source text to the target reader, to "foreignization," the strategy that, instead of hiding, preserves and even highlights the cultural differences. Lawrence Venuti famously reported the predominance of domestication strategies and criticized these practices for causing the phenomenon of the translator's invisibility, which, according to Venuti, is far from being harmless and comes along with subversive effects, or "the violence of translation" (2008: 13). Hence, the Cultural Turn stressed the political and socio-cultural implications of translation, which is why Venuti advocates a foreignizing translation practice and claims that it "can be a form

⁹ More precisely, having detected three relationships in a process of translation (the objective content of the work and its twofold concretization as performed by the reader of the original and the reader of the translation), Levý, states that a translation must minimize the differences between these perceptions. He adds that anti-illusionist translations are rare "since a translation has primarily a representative goal; it is supposed to 'capture' the source" (2011: 20).

of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations” (2008: 16).

French scholars Henri Meschonnic and Jean-René LADMIRAL brought up a similar methodological dichotomy, that of *sourciers* and *ciblistes*. The terms were coined by LADMIRAL back in 1983, but the distinction is still actual (see LADMIRAL 2014). However, at the core of this discussion we find the same problem: the former approach advocates a target-oriented translation that adapts the source text to a new audience, thus creating the illusion of reading an original rather than a translated text; the latter is a source-oriented approach that counts on the reader’s effort to move towards the foreign text by accentuating its otherness.

Franco Buffoni (2011: 70) compared these debates to different methodologies used in architectural restoration practices. As in foreignized translations, it is possible to highlight the process of renovation of an ancient palazzo by displaying the methods and the materials used to strengthen or repair the building, thus admitting that an old “original” architecture was modified by a contemporary architect. Or, similarly to what occurs in “adapted” translations, where the translator becomes “invisible,” the restoration process can be hidden as much as possible, in an attempt to retrace and reimagine the original appearance of the palazzo, and recreate it afresh as if it were just built for the enjoyment of the observers.

1.1.5.2 Poetry Translation as Sacrifice – The Translator as Commentator

A literary text stems from a process of selection of input from the outer world, including literary input. A translation, and, in particular, the translation of a poem, cannot carry everything across the language border; thus it also implies a process of selection: even in prose, where the concentration of rhetorical devices is usually lower and the space for

semantic search wider, total translatability has been acknowledged as an impossible task because each language has unique features.¹⁰ In his *Voprosy teorii khudozhestvennogo perevoda* (1964) Givi Gachechiladze defined translation through the metaphor of the mirror: a literary text reflects a fraction of the world as experienced and reinterpreted by the author, whereas translation is another mirror, that shows us a reflection of the source text. A reflection of a reflection can hardly occur without loss, and, while the mirror reflects in a spontaneous way, translation is the result of a series of deliberate choices made by the translator: the moment when a translator decides what to keep and what to give up is crucial for the outcome of the translation.

In a reflection on the aesthetic features of language, Yury Lotman observed that “using one or another natural language, the language of art gives substance to its formal side” (1998: 31). This is the reason why even the most literal and precise translation of a poetic text is able to convey only that part of the poem’s language which is shared between poetic and non-poetic discourse: a poem will always be partly non-translatable, and its elusive details must be compensated for by something else. Therefore, according to Lotman, it is not precision that should be evaluated in a translation but the target text’s tendency to functional adequacy.

Anxieties about untranslatability have often been associated specifically with poetry: thus Jakobson claimed that poetry is untranslatable,¹¹ and Robert Frost observed that poetry is what gets lost in translation. When reading a poem, a translator must discern its lexical, grammatical, syntactical, phonological, cultural, and intertextual features that converge in a carefully designed system. Many of these elements, such as phonological or

¹⁰ See, for instance, Raffel Burton’s claim that “[t]he impossibility of translation is in a sense not debatable. If every human language is distinct (as it is) in structure, sound, and vocabulary, and if every language contains unique features, then clearly it is literally impossible to fully render anything written in one language into another. This is not a judgment about the translatability of poetry: it is a judgment about translatability in general” (1988: 11).

¹¹ However, Jakobson’s much-quoted statement that “poetry by definition is untranslatable” is followed by the statement that “creative transposition is possible.” This transposition, according to Jakobson, can be intralingual, intersemiotic but also interlinguistic (2000: 118).

syntactical peculiarities, not to mention culturally specific phenomena and intertextual references, are intrinsically non-translatable. Prosody also hardly eases a translator's work: the wish to adjust the text to a metric structure or to recreate a rhyme pattern may end up governing the process of semantic selection. There are two major approaches to the solution of these problems. One is the "word-for-word" or "literal" translation, also known as the "prose" or the "faithful" rendering:

"Literals" or "prose renderings" recreate source semantics but delete source poetic features. These often aim to help readers understand source poems published alongside them, or give raw material for co-translators to reshape into receptor-language poems. (Jones 2011: 117)

This methodology reveals the translator's acknowledgment of the non-translatability of some poetic features of the source text and roughly corresponds to the choice of not adapting the foreign text to the target audience. By sacrificing the aesthetic aspect of the text and giving up the intention to re-create an actual poem in the target language, this method usually offers support for an attempt to experience the source text despite the different linguistic material out of which it has been built.

Such translations address a target audience that may be at least familiar with the source language but is not proficient enough in the source language to read the source poem autonomously. They may also serve academic purposes and be used as a tool to teach poetry in classes on foreign literature. For the latter purpose, they may come with a commentary that explains not only the intrinsically poetic features of the source text, many of which are absent from the translation as a consequence of deliberate choices, but also the poem's cultural and literary background. In terms of culturally specific elements or intertextual references, this approach to translation usually preserves the foreignness of a text and helps the reader discover and understand the foreign elements through a set of explanatory comments. A classic example of this approach is Nabokov's controversial translation of Alexander Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*.

1.1.5.3 Poetry Translation as Re-Creation – The Translator as Actor

The approach that attempts to convey both form and meaning of the source text has been variously defined as “adaptation,” “version,” “imitation,” “recreative,” or “free” translation, most likely because such an attempt requires at least some changes in the target text. Despite its generally freer and more creative nature, scholars and translators often advocate this method of poetry translation. Interestingly, the very possibility of literal translation was questioned by some scholars: for example, according to Raffel Burton, literal translation is impossible because “exact linguistic equivalents are by definition nonexistent” (1988: 10). Similarly, from a semantic viewpoint, James S. Holmes notes that a word’s complex network of meanings “never matches exactly the semantic field of any one word in any other language” (1988: 9). In a poem, language and aesthetic effects meet and influence each other. Therefore, according to Burton, poetry translation is never word-for-word: “it is concepts and structures with which one must work, and words are only one of the many building blocks of which concepts and structures are composed” (1988: 11).

Hence, the “free” approach to poetry translation aims at recreating a poetic text as an integral entity that works autonomously in the target language and moves the foreign text closer to the target reader. Eugene Nida presents an argument in favor of this approach, which is akin to his theory of dynamic equivalence: he claims that if a translation gives up form for the sake of content, it will not produce an adequate intertextual equivalent and will thus fail in what Nida sees as the main task of a translator – to convey the message of the text as a whole.¹² A similar necessity was expressed by André Lefevere, who stated that

¹² This is the general tendency in Nida’s theory. However, he admits that there are exceptions, i.e. cases when plain prose actually conveys the aesthetic features of the original better than verse would have done: “the translating of some types of poetry by prose may be dictated by important cultural considerations. For example, Homer’s epic poetry reproduced in English poetic form usually seems to us antique and queer—with nothing of the liveliness and spontaneity characteristic of Homer’s style. One reason is that we are not accustomed to having stories told to us in poetic form. In our Western European tradition, such epics are related in prose. For this reason, E. V. Rieu chose prose rather than poetry as the more appropriate medium by which to render the Iliad and the Odyssey” (2000: 127).

poetry translations are often “unsatisfactory renderings of the source text” precisely because they fail to grasp the text in its totality (1975: 99).

Holmes identified three main methods of rendering a poem’s metrical structure in the target text: mimetic, i.e. replicating the original form; analogical, which uses a different form that is charged with a similar function in the target culture; and organic, i.e. a form that suits the translator’s “authenticity” of response to the source text (1988: 25–26). He claims that it is virtually impossible to find exact “equivalents” for all of a poem’s features, and therefore in his view most re-creative translators end up seeking “counterparts” and “analogues” (1988: 53–54).

Ironically, the main argument in favor of “free” translation seems to endorse it for being able to render the source poem more fully: if form and meaning are inseparably joined in a unified structure, the translator must recreate both sides of the source text.

Whereas literal translation is usually rhymeless, not all “free” translations are rhymed. The choice to maintain or abandon rhyme varies according to different cases and language pairs. Examples of rhymeless translations can often be found when English is in the position of target language. This can be explained by the limited rhyming possibilities in English (for an account on rhyming groups in English see Levý 2011: 235) and by its rich history of poetry in free verse. Hence, some see the use of metre and rhyme as potentially generating negative associations (old-fashioned style which does not match the style of the source; trite rhymes due to limited possibilities). French poet Yves Bonnefoy criticized Brodsky’s insistence on mimetic translation of Russian poets and stated that free verse can indeed be a good option for a recreative translation even when the source text is rhymed:

Yes, it cannot be doubted that poetry is form as well as meaning [...]. I also know that the laws of reading, understanding, translating a poem are not simple and that perhaps we must lose in the beginning in order to be able later to recover more fully. (1979: 375)

In sustaining his argument, Bonnefoy observes that we cannot analyze the features of a poem as isolated entities; instead “we must think in terms of structure” because “no part

of a poem, not even its form, has a detached or constant meaning” (ibid.). His approach reminds one of Riffaterre’s assertion that in poetry the unit of significance is the text.

Hence, a “free” translation need not necessarily be a rhymed one, but it does seek aesthetic merit. This is the main reason why Boris Pasternak also advocated re-creative translation against literal renderings: in stressing the effect of the translation on the target audience, Pasternak claimed that “like the original, the translation must produce an impression of life, not literariness” (1976: 99). In Levý’s view, a translator strives to “achieve above all beauty” in order to create something that resembles a “work of art in the target language” (2011: 60).

It does not come as a surprise, then, that translators of poetry are often poets themselves. In a seminal essay on translation written as an introduction to his translation of Charles Baudelaire’s *Tableaux parisiens* (1923), Walter Benjamin¹³ suggested that in order to capture and convey the poetic function of a message, a translator too must be a poet:

But what there is besides communication in a literary work — and even the bad translator admits that this is the essential: is it not the illimitable, the inapprehensible, the “poetic”? Which the translator can only render if he too is a poet? (2006: 298)

Not only do poets translate poetry, but they also actively reflect on the process itself — as in the famous cases of Matthew Arnold, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ezra Pound, Boris Pasternak, Joseph Brodsky, and Vladimir Nabokov, who produced many “free” translations of Russian classic poets before turning to uncompromising literalism.

¹³ According to Benjamin, translation is capable of capturing a “pure” universal language because all human languages complement each other: meaning “emerges as universal language. Until then, it remains hidden in the individual languages. But if these continue to grow in this way till the messianic end of their history, then it is translation which takes fire in the eternal continuing life of the works and in their ceaseless renewal” (2006: 302). Though the idea of a pure universal language is suffused with German Romantic approach to history, Benjamin’s essay has been widely influential. George Steiner, for example, claimed that a translation from language A into language B will make tangible the implication of a third, active presence: “it will show the lineaments of that ‘pure speech’ which precedes and underlies both languages” (1998: 67).

Brodsky criticized William Merwin's translation of Mandelstam's poetry for being "a translation of Mandelstam into Merwin" (1974: 13). In Brodsky's view, we often read bad poetry translations because the "translators are themselves poets and their own individuality is dearest of all to them. Their conception of individuality precludes the possibility of sacrifice" (14). The sacrifice that is demanded in this apparently more ambitious and "creative" methodology of free translation is twofold: not only should the poet-translator be aware of the impossibility of total poetic translation, which leads to giving up or replacing some elements of the source text, but he is also asked to sacrifice his own poetic ego while rewriting a poem.¹⁴

According to Efim Etkind a translation becomes a poem when two forces are joined: "precise knowledge and high inspiration" (1963: 429). An excellent knowledge of the author's works and life is of course a fundamental requirement for the translator: he or she needs this competence during the phases of reading and understanding of the source text; but precise knowledge is also needed in the translation phase.

In his book on translation, Korney Chukovsky argued that "every artist's creation is, in essence, his self-portrait, because, willingly or inadvertently, the artist reflects himself in his style" (2012: 21). Hence, in Chukovsky's view, good poetry translators "become doubles" (ibid.) of the poets whom they translate. In practice, this means that the translator ought to imagine in what manner the original author would have expressed himself were he writing in the target language.

If writing can be regarded as a process of translation of the poet's self into words, and a poem can be seen as the poet's tacit thoughts and aesthetic concepts materialized in the form of a written text, it is precisely the sense of the author's artistic personality that must be captured and re-enacted by the translator. Chukovsky states that a poet's style is the

¹⁴ Unless he intends to use someone else's poem or idea as a source of inspiration for his own new work of art, which is no longer a matter of interlingual translation.

portrait of his artistic individuality – by modifying the author’s style we change the subject of the portrait:

The reflection of the writer’s personality in the language of his works is his individual style, inherent to him alone. This is why I argue that by distorting his style, we distort his face. If by means of our translation we impose on him our own style, we will turn his self-portrait into the translator’s self-portrait. (2012: 21)

An author’s personal style is a consequence of recurrent choices made in favor of certain words, structures, or prosodic elements. Hence, the study of a poem’s style is necessary for its recreation in another language; this is also dealt with in translation studies.¹⁵

The translator’s task, then, is homologous to that of the actor. Whereas an obvious difference is that with acting a written text undergoes a process of intersemiotic interdemial translation as it becomes a performance or a film, Jiří Levý compares translation to performing arts, with the Stanislavskian theatre training and its method of acting as an analogy to the practice of translators (2011: 58). George Steiner also pointed out a similarity between actors and translators in stressing that the French word *interprète* can be used to indicate an actor who would “interpret” Racine or a pianist who gives “an interpretation” of a Beethoven sonata. Consequently, Steiner observes, interpretation, both as the actor’s and as the translator’s work, is what “gives language life beyond the moment and place of immediate utterance or transcription” (1998: 28). Thus, by thoroughly studying and re-enacting an artist’s work for a new audience, both actors and translators introduce a text to a new environment or perpetuate its existence there. The free translation methodology implies sacrifice but also re-creation through translation.

¹⁵ For an account of this approach to the analysis of translations, see Jean Boase-Beier. In particular, she claims that style “is always closely linked to the idea of choice because, though grammar places constraints on deviation, there is still always a choice between several possible structures which only differ stylistically. If the reasons for the choices made by the original author are understood, it is possible to judge to what degree similar choices have been or can be made by the translator” (Boase-Beier 2011: 153).

1.1.6 The Target Text

In view of the communicative and textual features of poetry discussed in section 1.1.2, a poem's target audience remains elusive. There exist poetic traditions in which the presence of a specific addressee is one of the genre's *topoi* (such are lyric poems addressed to the poet's beloved, the apostrophe that recurs in odes, or elegies addressed to a deceased friend); however, these addressees are not to be identified with the actual readers of the text; nor are they its only audience. The poet is usually well aware of that. In his essay "On the addressee" (1913) Osip Mandelstam compares a poet to a seafarer who tosses a bottled message into the ocean: the addressee of the poem is whoever will find this bottle. The moment and the place of reception are not to be known. Describing his own experience as a poet, Mandelstam states:

when I address someone, I do not know whom I am addressing; furthermore, I do not care to know, nor can I want to know, him. [...] Our taste for communication is in inverse proportion to our real knowledge of the addressee and in direct proportion to our active attempt to interest him in himself. [...] And so, although separate poems [...] may be addressed to concrete persons, poetry as a whole is always addressed to a more or less distant, unknown addressee, but in whose existence the poet does not doubt, not doubting in himself. (1976: 58-9)

A translated text, however, addresses a more specific target audience. As seen above, the choice between different translation strategies often implies a choice between different groups of addressees. Not only is the translator more aware of what reader he is addressing in his text, but the readers themselves approach a translated poem with the awareness that what they are about to read is not an "original" but a rewritten text. Therefore, "translators may be less free than original poets to ignore their readers' needs and abilities, and readers may read translated poems more critically than non-translated poems" (Jones 2011: 172). In terms of authority, the translated text is commonly perceived as somewhat inferior to the original. Translations are evaluated, discussed, criticized for being too "free" or too "literal," or acclaimed for having succeeded in conveying the "spirit" of the original. There

is even an element of challenge for poet-translators in translating and retranslating influential or classical poets such as Shakespeare or Pushkin.

Translations of classical texts are periodically “updated” because they lack the authority of the original, and because the target language changes constantly, along with the tastes of the target audience.

If language changes, so do our reading and our understanding of a literary text. Translation is a fluid process that flows along the evolution of languages. When a new translation is published, it allows the source text to re-emerge from its state of potentiality, to be re-read by a new audience, thus ultimately preventing its departure from a literary system: a translation, like an original poem, “becomes functional in the society only when it is read” (Levý 2011: 30).

In their 1971 article “O semioticheskom mekhanizme kultury,” Lotman and Uspensky claim that all human activity consists in translating a certain aspect of reality into one of the languages of cultures, i.e. in transforming reality into a text, an encoded information which enters human collective memory. As far as literary activity is concerned, language enables a community to produce culture and to interpret it: language can be seen as an encyclopedia of a society and its literature (Segre 1985: 134).

Translation can therefore be studied as part of the afterlife of a literary text. It extends the text’s active existence and perpetuates its author’s literary dialogue with other poets. According to Susan Bassnett, all translation is rewriting and “all writing is in some way a rewriting or retelling of other writing.” In other words it can be argued that whatever a writer writes is to some extent a kind of translation, because that work will be the product that has emerged “out of readings of other people’s writing” (2011: 164). A poem is always intertextually connected with previous literary works.

The view of translation as rewriting is one of the major innovations of the Cultural Turn in Translation Studies. While it encouraged scholars to expand their field of investigation beyond the linguistic approach and to study the evolution of cultural

products across different literary systems, it is especially valuable for the present study because it supports an intertextual approach to the study of translation that allows one to overcome the traditional dichotomy of original vs copy.

Poetic language is intertextual in its very nature. Every poem echoes words, images, rhythms, and rhetorical devices used by previous poets, and can therefore be seen as a part of an intertextual dialogue with previous and future poets in its language (as Segre argues in his reflection on intertextuality, 1985: 89).

A translation can therefore be seen as a literary product of its time, endowed with its own cultural significance and influence in the target literary system, and yet closely related to the source text that generated it. In an attempt to define translation through the metaphor of family relations, Jean Paris claimed that a successful translation

should rather be the brother than the son of the original, for both should proceed from the same transcendental idea which is the real but invisible father of the work. And finally, a book is but the endless series of its own metamorphoses, and through its various epiphanies tends to become universal, to coincide with its archetype, as a mathematical series approaches the infinite without ever reaching it. (1961: 63)

Thus, every poetic text can generate multiple readings and multiple translations, which can be studied as a part of the meta-literature (to use Holmes's term) that develops after a poem's publications. Translations have also inspired interesting studies devoted to the afterlife of a text in a different literary system and cultural milieu. However, the metaphor of the brother descending from an invisible father is perhaps more suitable for self-translation, as it is only in the case of self-translation that the translator – who happens to coincide with the author – has access to what Paris called the “transcendental idea” from which a literary work originates.

1.2 Self-Translation of Poetry

According to Ranier Grutman's now standard definition of self-translation, published in the *Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*, the term can refer both to “the act of translating

one's own writings into another language and the result of such an undertaking" (2009: 257). Thus the term "self-translation" indicates both the process of translating and the result of the process, the self-translated text.

The phenomenon of self-translation is associated with many other concepts that involve doubling, twinning, pairing. Double is the nature of the self-translator: he is both the author of an "original" work, to quote Anton Popovich's 1976 definition of self-translation,¹⁶ and the translator, the mediator between two literary systems. Furthermore, as a writer or a poet, the self-translator's existence is spent between two languages and two literatures: Nabokov, for instance, is often defined as a Russian-American writer. Double is also the nature of the self-translated text. Whereas with standard translation there are clear hierarchies concerning the original and its translation, in self-translation the new text often escapes primacy relations with its precursor.

Blurred boundaries and double-things often puzzle and confuse us. They are difficult to categorize, and we tend to mistrust them, as they can hide an unpredictable or unfamiliar side. It is no surprise, then, that self-translation and self-translators are now objects of numerous debates among scholars.

Interest in self-translation has arisen relatively recently. In the regularly updated bibliography on self-translation,¹⁷ curated by Eva Gentes, with the exception of a few pioneering publications from the 1970's and 1980's (such as Leonard Forster's 1977 work on multilingual poets, Brian Fitch's 1988 book devoted to Samuel Beckett and Elizabeth Beaujour's 1989 *Alien Tongues* focused on Russian bilingual writers of the first wave of emigration), the majority of studies of self-translation belong to the third millennium. However, the existence of bilingual writers and the phenomenon of self-translation is not

¹⁶ Self-translation is "the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself" (Popovich 1976: 19).

¹⁷ See Eva Gentes' blog self-translation.blogspot.com and the regularly updated link with the self-translation bibliography <https://app.box.com/s/grya8u5aw4fzy3y7n56pt7hh5futk9xi> (last update: 01/05/2019, accessed on 19/06/2019)

new: as shown in Hokenson and Munson's 2007 *The Bilingual Text*, one of the cornerstone works of contemporary self-translation studies, self-translators have existed for centuries. Hokenson and Munson's book contains an overview on the multilingual situations from medieval and early modern Europe, where bilingual self-translators were not unusual: before monolingualism became the dominant paradigm starting from the Romantics, multilingual situations were widespread and played a key role during the establishment of many civilizations. In Europe, the transition from the medieval to modern times was also a time of a shift in the concept of language – and, in turn, of translation and authorship – which preceded changes in the fields of economics, politics, and philosophy:

changing concepts of the vernacular reflect both increasingly secular theories of the word as well as increasingly political disputes about literacy and class, during the difficult and often violent extension of the democratic franchise. The political functions of the vernacular became an indelible part of their use in literature no less than in other domains. (Hokenson and Munson 2007: 82)

Eventually, the German Romantic paradigm, in particular, was responsible for attributing to the writer the role of the genius of his national language, associated with the self-awareness of a national identity. Hokenson and Munson show that self-translation “diminished during the consolidation of the nation-states, in the long era of nationalistic monolingualism, only to resurge in the postcolonial era” (2007: 1). Hence, from this politically charged concept of language and literature, linked to an idea of competition between nations, stems the fact that during and even after the rise of linguistic nationalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the idea of the bilingual writer as a “citizen of no language or perhaps traitor to two, has continued to contaminate the critical reception of the bilingual texts” (Hokenson and Munson 2007: 3). The mother-tongue thus became a mark of national identification, but also, especially in colonial contexts, a means of resistance to social oppression. In the post World War II period, however, a gradual shift of focus could be observed. The end of colonial empires and an increased international mobility contributed to creating a more fluid perception of languages and national identities. In the second half of the twentieth century the emergence of Translation Studies

as a discipline reflected a gradually changing situation on a larger scale, when in such socio-political contexts as post-colonial environments, indigenous communities, exiled groups of authors, diaspora or relocation situations of bilingualism or multilingualism became natural and widespread.

Today two directions in self-translation studies can be observed: on the one hand, many writings about self-translation are devoted to the most famous cases of Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, Joseph Brodsky, and Vladimir Nabokov. On the other, a growing number of publications dealing with post-colonial literature. The corpora of case-studies are therefore becoming increasingly differentiated. In Chiara Lusetti's view, expressed in her recent panorama of self-translation studies (2018: 165), scholars interested in this phenomenon will continue to devote more attention to minority languages in post-colonial and non-European cultural contexts.

While self-translation is a specific kind of translation, poetry self-translation is its even more special case. Relatively few studies are devoted to poet self-translators, but they deal with poets as diverse as Joseph Brodsky, Wilson McLeod, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Sekiguchi Ryōko, and Joan Margarit among others. The interest that these studies present for this work is unquestionable, but in the current section I mainly seek orientation between some fundamental concepts required in order to understand the activity of literary self-translation *per se*, and in order to do so by applying the findings of self-translation studies in the field of prose writing.¹⁸ I will also present some reflections on the particular situation of poetry self-translation, to prepare the ground for the analysis of Nabokov's self-translated poetry.

Below, the communication model presented in section 1.1 is adapted to represent the situation of self-translation. The main divergence from the previous model is the disappearance of one of the actors, namely the translator, whereas the translation in the

¹⁸ I focus on literary translation, though bearing in mind that there are also studies related to self-translation in other fields, for example self-translation of philosophical writings.

target language is now directly connected to the authorial intention that generated the first version of the text.

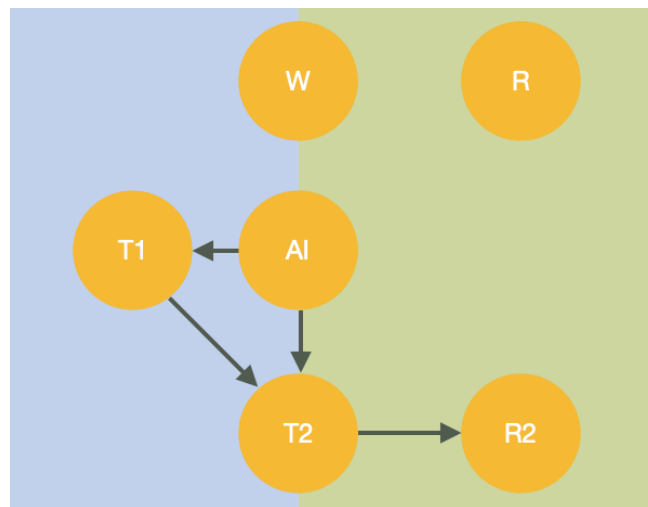


Fig. 2.

W = writer (and self-translator); R = reader; AI = authorial intent; T1 = Text 1 (in language 2); T2 = Text 2 (self-translation in language 2); R2 = reading in language 2 (reception by the target reader).

The chain now involves two actors: an author-translator (W) and a target reader (T) in another literary system. The self-translator and the authorial intention that generates his texts are placed in the liminal area, because, as we shall see, his literary identity can hardly be attributed to a single language and cultural tradition. The actions involved in this communication model are also fewer: a message is first coded into a written text, which is its first version (T1), and then it is coded again by the self-translator in another language (T2) and decoded by the target reader in the second version created by the bilingual author (R2).

1.2.1 The Self-Translator

1.2.1.1 Bilingualism and Biculturalism

Self-translators have been known in different historical periods and literary traditions. However, there is one important feature they all share, which makes them, in the eyes of

many academics and despite all their differences, a sort of “a group.” This feature is bilingualism. A bilingual person is one who, “in addition to speaking and writing one language idiomatically, has acquired a high degree of control over the spoken and written forms of a second language” (Hokenson and Munson 2007: 12). To define this notion of control over a language, Hokenson and Munson make use of Suzanne Romaine’s point that bilingualism occurs when a person can make an “alternate” use of two languages (1995: 12). Bilingualism usually coexists with biculturalism: according to Grutman, “self-translators are bilingual in a wider sense, i.e. they belong to two linguistic communities at the same time” and have “reference points in both the cultural universes” (2013: 49). As seen in section 1.1, a standard translator is also a bicultural and bilingual subject. However, if all translators are intrinsically bilingual, not all writers are so. In her 2013 article on self-translation, Barbara Ivancic distinguished between biographic bilingualism, in which an author writes in his or her second language but does not experiment with both languages available at his or her disposal (Joseph Conrad is one famous example), and literary bilingualism, which characterizes writers who, like Beckett and Nabokov, choose to experience writing in two or more languages. Ivancic adds that the latter type of bilingualism commonly involves self-translation, which can therefore be regarded as a particular manifestation of literary bilingualism.

In many scholars’ view, bilingualism is such an influential condition of a person’s life that bilingual writers who work with both their languages share many important traits despite belonging to different literary and cultural traditions. In her article on Nabokov’s bilingualism, published in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* (1995), Elizabeth K. Beaujour claims that bilingualism differentiates these authors and poets from other writers *as a group*, characterized by special mental patterns used during linguistic activities. In her study of bilingual authors and poets of the first wave of Russian emigration, Beaujour argues that brains can be organized for linguistic activities in different ways. Bilinguals, in particular, showcase “a significant variation of hemispheric

representation of language functions” (1989: 9). Reporting results of neuroscientific research, Beaujour asserts that “cortical organization for language in the adult brain is to some degree flexible,” but certain areas in the “dominant-language hemisphere will remain committed to language only if the individual is a bilingual or polyglot” (1989: 13-14). Therefore, brains of bilingual subjects are characterized by a slightly different organization, and bilingual children are “less inclined to rely on fixed or rigid strategies for a number of cognitive tasks” (14). Beaujour concludes by stating that there is a link between multilingualism and higher indices of cognitive flexibility, providing a person with a “comparative three-dimensional insight into language, a type of stereo-linguistic optic on communication that monolinguals rarely experience” (ibid.). This conclusion is in tune with Galina Denissova’s more recent investigation on Nabokov’s bilingualism, where the author claims that “compared with monolinguals, bilingual individuals have a completely different cognitive system and in many ways display a more creative attitude to their speech activity” (Denissova 2014: 100).

Perhaps especially important for a literary study is the fact that bilinguals process language at a cognitive level in a distinct way, a fact that may influence their perception of language and ultimately impact their literary production from a stylistic and artistic viewpoint. Hokenson and Munson also identify bilingual writers “as a group” by stating that they are “intensely interested in language and its role in sociality or communication” (2007: 15).

In his study of Beckett’s self-translation, Brian T. Fitch observes that a bilingual writer’s work is affected by the “continual presence” of the *awareness* of a multiplicity of tongues (1988: 158), a kind of multiplicity that reminds one of what Bakhtin called heteroglossia [raznorechie]. In Bakhtin’s view, heteroglossia “is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre” and implies not only a “social” diversity of linguistic registers, but also “distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages” and “movement of the theme through different languages and speech types”

(Bakhtin 1981: 263). If we take Nabokov's case, his English novels are indeed famous for their multilingual play, whereas the effort he devoted to translation, re-translation, self-translation and other language-related operations was so massive that George Steiner had "no hesitation in arguing that this polylinguistic matrix is the determining fact of Nabokov's life and art" (1976: 7).

An important feature of poetic language that has not yet been discussed here is its intrinsic intertextuality (the term was coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s) its allusive character. According to Kristeva, every literary text can be seen as a "mosaic" of quotations, an assimilation and transformation of another, previous text. Her approach was taken up by Roland Barthes, who claimed that "every text is an intertext [...], a texture of old quotations" (1998: 235). Though structuralist and post-structuralist theories may overemphasize the intertextual approach in literary analysis, with the risk of erasing literary individuality in authors and their texts, the special role of intertextuality in poetry is undeniable. When a poet writes, he uses the language that he has learned as a child and the language of previous poets whose texts – often read multiple times and known by heart – have affected his artistic development. Even if allusions and other intertextual elements can abound in prose works as well (Nabokov's novels prominently so), a poem with its complex system of rhyme and meter is especially prone to a dialogue with previous traditions.¹⁹

A bilingual author-translator, however, exists between two languages and two literatures. Hence, as an artist, he has direct access to the original texts of two literary systems, which can result – as in Nabokov's case – in a special interest in poetry translation, but also in the creation of self-translated and original poems in both of his languages. These texts can reveal the direct influence of two poetic traditions on his style

¹⁹ "The language and style of each poetic composition are, as a whole, the result of a dense intertextuality," and therefore "every poet dialogues with the host of other poets whom he somehow follows" (Segre 1985: 89).

or on the way he handles certain themes or tropes. In this sense, a poet's bilingualism and biculturalism may result in the creation of a bilingual oeuvre, where poems in different languages written by the same person can carry intertextual references to separate literary traditions and, while belonging to both of them, may create their own "extraterritorial" literary space marked by linguistic and cultural crossings.

1.2.1.2 Identity

Self-translation studies have repeatedly turned their attention to the issue of a bilingual author's identity. The idea that a bilingual writer's life spent between two literatures prevents him from fully belonging to either of them is not new. In his study on translation Schleiermacher notes that "one can create original work only in the maternal tongue, which is indelibly alloyed with the egoic essence of genius, or else one writes in defiance of nature and morality" (1997: 236). Hence, from Schleiermacher's perspective, influenced by the German Romantic philosophy, an author should work with the language of his nation; otherwise he will linger in an "unpleasant" middle. As mentioned above, nationalistic ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contaminated the reception of bilingual texts and paved the way for a suspicion about the bilingual authors' literary identities, a suspicion felt even in relatively recent studies. Mary Besemeres' 2002 work *Translating One's Self*, for instance, presents bilingualism as a source of inner conflict in a writer: in Besemeres' view, an author's second language can be seen as "an upstart" with a desire to take over, to contest the first language (2002: 26). The writer's native language is thus described as the true home of his or her identity,²⁰ whereas self-translation can become a threat to this identity. In this perspective, a bilingual person's life may be marked

²⁰ Elin-Maria Evangelista, who studies the dimension of loss in relation to bilingualism, presents a reflection on self-translation which is partly reminiscent of Besemeres' claims. She argues that bilingualism can be a threat to the literary identity of a writer because the self is normally formed in one native language and it is on this language that a writer should rely "for a true expression of self" (Evangelista 2013: 177-78).

by a conflict between two (or more) identities until a choice between two languages is made.

The opposite attitude to bilingualism is represented by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur regards translation of self as a necessary prerequisite for the search of a true sense of identity: as Richard Kearney explains in his introduction to Ricoeur's collection of essays *On Translation*, the process of translation can replace "the idealist romantic self" with a new, engaged self which "only finds itself after it has traversed the field of foreignness and returned to itself again, this time altered and enlarged, 'othered'" (Kearney 2006: xix). Bilingualism may allow a person to find his or her identity thanks to the liberating and altering properties of translation.

These are just two examples of contrasting views on the possible effects of bilingualism on a person's identity. Be these opinions positive or negative, the self-translators' own accounts of their experience show that the coexistence of different languages and cultures in a single mind is not only an enriching condition but also a potential source of contradictory feelings, and even pain. During his exile in Europe, Nabokov consciously avoided an in-depth study of German to preserve his Russian language from contamination. He depicted self-translation as "sorting through one's own innards, and then trying them on for size like a pair of gloves" (qtd. in Beaujour 1989: 90), whereas Beckett famously described self-translation as "wastes and wilds" (qtd. in Grutman 2009: 257).

In her article on Nabokov's bilingualism, Beaujour highlights a dimension of pain that is often related to the experience of self-translation:

Many writers who are bilinguals or polyglots find self-translation to be exquisitely painful [...]. Choosing to write directly in one's second language, or even in an ambient third language, therefore seems preferable to the prospect of decades of the self-imposed torture of self-translation. (Beaujour 1995: 719)

Nabokov lamented in a 1942 letter to Edmund Wilson that the translation of his Russian books was "in itself a nightmare" (*NWL*, 62). Nevertheless, reports of self-

translators' personal experience also manifest that translation can have healing effects: in her 2013 article devoted to self-translation, Susan Bassnett discusses Nancy Huston's experience of the effects of self-translation on her writing activity. During an initial phase, self-translation is described as a challenging and painful process because it "appears at first to expose gaps between languages, to raise the spectre of a divided mind and of a divided world" (Bassnett 2013: 16). However, when the translation is completed, these gaps seem to close and the process acquires healing properties for the bilingual author: the self-translator no longer feels "caught between languages, but able to exist fully in both. Huston acknowledges that, somehow, the split between her two language selves has been healed through translation" (ibid.). Therefore, in a first moment self-translation can be related to that negative dimension of bilingualism which triggers a sense of "schizophrenia" (Huston's term). However, in a second phase self-translation can become a positive source of firmness, which Aurelia Klimkiewicz aptly likens to an "anchor" that is "able to ground the self in the middle of instability" (2013: 191).

Klimkiewicz proposes to view self-translation as "a strategy to overcome loss, trauma or nostalgia" (2013: 199), which can be especially relevant in the case of émigré bilingual authors. In her study of writers in exile, Beaujour explores the role played by self-translation in the establishment of a bilingual writer's literary career within a new environment. She asserts that self-translation can become a decisive step in the career of exiled authors because it helps them overcome the problematic phase known as "the language switch":

most modern bilingual writers, after passing through a phase of obsession about maintaining the linguistic purity of their first language (and attaining linguistic purity in their second language), will ultimately choose not to prevent the mutually complexifying and enriching interference of their languages. By the end of their careers, the greatest part of them will accept the fact that polylinguistic matrix is basic to their life and art, but also that their languages function in a kind of creative tension [...]. (Beaujour 1989: 27)

Such reflections suggest a sort of Hegelian cycle, where the author's bilingualism operates as a thesis, the negative dimension of pain, denial or "schizophrenia" as an

antithesis, and ultimate acceptance reached through self-translation as synthesis. Self-translation may thus be seen as allowing the bilingual author-translator to come to terms with his or her hyphenated identity, acknowledging both its gifts and pitfalls, and turning a predicament into an advantage.

1.2.2 Self-Translation, the Process

1.2.2.1 Why Self-translate?

If self-translation is often a painful and psychologically demanding process, why do some bilingual writers choose to self-translate? In his entry on self-translation, Ranier Grutman stresses the fact that self-translation is an option, not a necessity: “self-translators do not just master, they choose to create in more than one language. Their conscious awareness of this option cannot be overstated” (2009: 257).

In his more recent article, “A Sociological Glance at Self-translation and Self-translators” (2013), Grutman classifies self-translators according to the linguistic direction of their translational activity. This classification can also be seen as an explanation of the reasons why different groups of bilingual writers choose to self-translate. Its basis is the pairs of languages in question: symmetrical, that is, a pair of “widely distributed languages that occupy comparable positions on the world stage,” or asymmetrical, where one language “is symbolically and/or socially dominating” and is the other “symbolically and/or socially dominated” (2013: 200). Furthermore, bilingualism can be exogenous, i.e. originating in external factors (historical, cultural, personal) or endogenous, a condition that characterizes diglossic national contexts. As for the asymmetrical group, motivations that cause self-translation may vary according to the changes in the status of the languages (from a minor to a powerful language or from a less influential to a major one). Asymmetrically bilingual self-translators can be members of émigré communities, where bilingual children may self-translate as a consequence of their interest in family roots.

However, in most cases asymmetrical language pairings move from minor to major languages and are bound to situations in which self-translation is motivated by relationships of power or market-related reasons. Speakers of minority languages can feel compelled to translate their work into the dominant language: as shown by research in Translation Studies, such self-translations tend to appear in post-colonial contexts, such as the republics of the former Soviet Union or countries situated on the African continent. Asymmetrical self-translators are often aware of “not really having two equally *recognized* tools at their disposal and do not cherish too many illusions” about the use of their minor language (Grutman 2013: 73).

An example of asymmetrical bilingualism can also be found in contemporary Scotland, where there is a thriving bilingual poetic scene with poets who self-translate from Gaelic into English and publish bilingual editions of their poetry. What moves these self-translations is an attempt to expand the potential audience of their books. However, as argued by Corinna Krause, who provides examples from Wilson McLeod’s experience, this kind of asymmetrical bilingual publications question the “independence of Gaelic poetry” and “pose a threat to the very willingness on the part of the Gaelic readership to make sense of the text in Gaelic” (2013: 138). Hence, especially in the case of domesticated translations with a movement from minor to major languages, there is a risk of cultural appropriation or of an increased affirmation of dominant cultural paradigms.

Emigration and exile frequently trigger self-translation. Hokenson and Munson’s historical account presents major instances of exiled or émigré authors who practiced self-translation – such as Charles d’Orléans, who was imprisoned by the English for twenty-five years and began self-translating during his captivity in Britain (2007: 51); another famous case is that of Carlo Goldoni, the Venetian playwright who wrote *Le Bourru bienfaisant* (1771) during his emigration in France and subsequently self-translated it into his native Italian (2007: 115-16). Emigration or exile as major practical reasons can imply various subsidiary reasons to self-translate: these can include, as in Beckett’s case, economic

motivation, an attempt to reach a wider or different audience, the practical need to find a publisher. Nevertheless, such crucial biographical events as emigration can be combined with strictly artistic motivations to self-translate. For example, Nabokov's efforts in self-translation were also a way to safeguard his oeuvre from external translators, whose "clumsy attentions" the writer feared (Beaujour 1989: 114). Nabokov even retranslated one of his Russian novels, *Kamera Obskura* (1933) because of his disapproval of a previous English translation's stylistic features and its numerous omissions.

Emigration to a new country, as in Nabokov's case, can be a life-saving experience, but it always implies a dimension of loss of a time and a space. The native language, however, is not something one can leave behind while sailing towards a new continent: it is both part of the future life in a new place and a memory of the past. When an exiled writer chooses to self-translate during the phase of the language switch, self-translation can become a healing factor in a bilingual writer's sometimes uneasy relationship with his languages. Like his character Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, Nabokov managed to overcome the difficulties of emigration by living the present moment. He was not stuck in the past of the Russian language and its literary heritage, and in this sense the English self-translations of his Russian novels can be seen not only as a way to protect his works from bad translators but also as a bridge between the past and the present.

1.2.2.2 The Self-Translator as Reader

The translator as reader is an addressee, he is both the *other* person at whom the communication was directed and the intermediary, the creator of an adapted version of the same text for a new audience. In self-translation, however, the translator is also the addresser who started the chain of communication by writing the source text. This alters significantly not only the process of translation *per se* but also the process of preparation for it, including reading. In standard translation, many skills are required from the translator during this phase, crucial for the outcome of the work: linguistic and cultural

competency must be combined with an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the author's literary production, his biography, his historical and socio-cultural environment.

In this respect, the case of poetry self-translation may at first seem ideal: who better than the author possesses the "precise knowledge" that Efim Etkind wished for in a good translator of poetry? The self-translator does not need the skills of a good reader and is aware of the subtexts of his poem, of the artists or movements that influenced a given text, of the reasons behind the choices made in terms of style and metrics. The self-translator can also have access to the sources and manuscripts of his text, while his memory can help him retrace the writing process, the inner form of translation where non-verbal material undergoes a transformation and becomes a unique combination of words. Hence, when the author re-reads his or her own text before translating it, it is highly unlikely that misinterpretations of allusions, intertextual references or hidden layers of meanings will occur.

Nevertheless, time is an important factor that can influence the outcome of a self-translation. One must distinguish between two types of self-translation, "solitary," performed by the self-translator him- or herself, or "collaborative," i.e. made with the help of other translators who usually prepare a draft and let the author review it.²¹ The latter methodology was widely used by Nabokov in order to translate his Russian prose works, but his poems were always translated by himself. Within the framework of this analysis, the solitary type of self-translation shall therefore be discussed. This kind of self-translation can, in turn, fall into two types according to the *moment* when the translation was made: it can be delayed or simultaneous. The former is "prepared only after completion or even publication of the original" (Grutman 2009: 259); the latter occurs in

²¹ Verena Jung calls this "aided" self-translation. Some scholars question whether this should be regarded as self-translation at all. In Jung's view, however, it is self-translation, because a collaboratively translated text will always be closer "to the self-translator's intention than an unaided version" (2002: 24-25). This reaffirms the importance of the direct connection between the authorial intention and the self-translated target text.

situations where the target text is “produced even while the first version is still in progress”²² (ibid.). Such self-translations are rare. Examples can be found in Samuel Beckett’s work.

Nabokov’s methodology in self-translation belongs to the former group. However, the “delay” in his self-translations can vary and can be counted in months, years, and even decades. This is why time becomes a key factor both for the outcome of the self-translation process and, in particular, for the moment when the author-translator (re)reads his source text. As Umberto Eco states in his essay on self-translation, the time span that separates the first version of the text from its self-translation can account for the differences between them, because “in the period that separates the first version from its self-translation the author has matured, perhaps has been criticized, or may have changed his ideas: if the new book is different, the changes are often motivated by reasons of a theoretical rather than linguistic kind” (2013: 27).

Over time, the author-translator’s approach to writing and translating poetry may also change, as may change his views on the concepts and ideas explored in a text. All these factors can affect the reading process, the translation methodology and even its outcome: the new text may be quite different from the one we would have read had it been translated with less delay (yet this does not necessarily mean that the longer the delay, the more an author will be tempted to change a juvenile text).

Hence, if in “standard” poetry translation a translator is required to set his poetic ego aside in order to capture and re-enact the author’s implicit self-portrait, in the process of self-translation a poet’s memory and imagination may return to a precise moment of his past and retrace the authorial intention that generated a given text. Therefore, self-translation can imply a meta-reflection on an author’s literary and bilingual identity,

²² Olga Anokhina, however, regards simultaneous self-translation as simultaneous writing: “which gives rise to the birth of two works at the same time” (2019: 108). On the difference between writing and translation see section 1.2.3.1.

because the author returns to his own old literary production and because he adapts a poetic text to a different language and culture, which are also part of his identity.

The source of information about a self-translation is to be found not outside the text (as a standard translator may look for information in books about the poet he translates) but inside it. A self-translation's source is a physical object, the text, which was concluded but is now about to be reopened, to come alive again thanks to the recollection of the authorial intention that has generated the work. According to the self-translator's will, this memory may now materialize in a modified form, as a result of a different view on this authorial intention and on the translator's task.

1.2.2.3 The Self-Translator's Freedom and Authority

In his essay "On Poetic Language," Jan Mukařovský argues that, like marble in sculpture or pigment in painting, language "enters the work of art from outside as a sensorily perceptible phenomenon, in order to become a vehicle of the non-material structure of the work" (1977: 9). Unlike marble or pigment, however, language is less dependent on the senses because of its intrinsic semiotic qualities. At the same time, as a poetic material, language "limits the literary work to the members of a given linguistic community" as it is inevitably "rooted in the system of a particular national language" (1977: 10-11). Since the Romantics, our perception of the poet as an incarnation of Genius has connected national languages with the historic, cultural and artistic heritage of a given nation. This is what the many political implications of translation studies stem from. And this is what endows a text with the status of an original and factual work of art: the artist molds words into a poem, a unique combination of linguistic units that indirectly appeals to human senses.

When a poem is translated, however, this feeling of originality of the work of art tends to be lost. Despite new tendencies in Translation Studies, such as the recent Creative Turn which "emphasizes aspects of translational creativity and subjectivity" (Anselmi 2018: 4), translators do not yet possess the status of authorship and are still perceived largely as

“copyists” or “actors” (Venuti 2008: 6). This is what Lawrence Venuti’s notions of the translator’s invisibility and domestication partly derive from. The self-translator, on the other hand, is far from being an invisible figure; the authority that is granted a self-translation allows him a freedom that standard translators are often denied or judged for.²³ Hence, the self-translator can choose among different methodologies of translation with a greater degree of freedom, according to his own priorities and goals.

It must be said, however, that in terms of poetry self-translation the problem of the partial untranslability of poetic texts remains, and is independent of the agent of the translation: a poem’s perfect replica in terms of style and content can be a happy coincidence, an exception that confirms a rule. In terms of methodology, and according to the intention that moves the translation activity in each specific case, a poet self-translator can either recreate a new “version” of his poem, a text endowed with poetic features in a foreign language, or produce a literal rendering of the source text.

For instance, when he self-translated his poem “L’Isola” (1925) into French (“L’Île”), Giuseppe Ungaretti actively modified its metrics, its syntax and – albeit to a lesser degree – its content, with the plausible intention to convey a general feeling of the whole text in terms of sound (alliterations) and overall atmosphere rendered by vocabulary and register. We can therefore deduce that the goal of his self-translation may have been to create a new poetic text in French, which is both related to the Italian text and works as a poem in the target culture. Other cases attest that a different motivation to self-translate may result in a different translation methodology. For example, the South-African exiled poet Mazisi Kunene writes poetry in Zulu and for political reasons does not authorize other translators to transpose his works into English. However, he does so himself, by creating overtly non-

²³ According to Anthony Cordingley (2013: 2), “the special status accorded to, and assumed by, the translator who is also the author of the original means that the self-translator is unique in not being sanctioned for overtly exercising creativity in translation.” Also, in Menakhem Perry’s words, “Since the writer himself is the translator, he can allow himself bold shifts from the source text which, had it been done by another translator, probably would not have passed as an adequate translation” (1981: 181).

poetic self-translations that are basically glosses aimed at conveying only the content of the original texts. If a reader is willing to experience Kunene's poetry, he thus needs to be able to access the Zulu text directly.²⁴ Therefore, in this case self-translation becomes a tool that the poet can use to manifest and maintain control over his text, not only from an artistic point of view, i.e. avoiding bad translators, but also in terms of power relations in asymmetric couples of languages.

Hence, the methodology applied in self-translation can vary according to the self-translator's needs and the reasons that impel self-translation. Simona Anselmi (2018) argues that it is also useful to compare a self-translator's methodology with his views on standard translation: the approach one applies to poetry self-translation can be influenced by the author-translator's practice in the field of general poetry translation, a practice that frequently involves bilingual and bicultural authors. Such are the cases of Brodsky, who usually translated his own poems by recreating rhyme and meter in the target text, or Nabokov, who often produced literal self-translations, thus trying to be consistent with his late-life theory of poetry translation.

1.2.3 Self-Translation, the Result

1.2.3.1 Translation, Original, or Neither?

Scholars have offered contrasting views on the nature of the self-translated text. Back in 1976 Anton Popovich claimed that “[d]ue to its modeling relation to the original text, the autotranslation cannot be regarded as a variant of the original text, but as a true translation” (1976: 19), thus separating the source from the target text as with standard translation. Interestingly, an antithetical opinion was expressed in 1993 by Miguel Sàenz,

²⁴ For this observation, I am indebted to Dr. Karin Berkman's paper “Translation and Untranslatability in the Poetry of Exilic South African Poets” presented at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on 16/06/2019.

who also interpreted the self-translated text as a separate entity, separate from the initial text: Sàenz highlighted the distinction between standard translation and self-translation by claiming that the latter is, indeed, “a new work, different from the original, a translation which no independent translator would have ever dared to make, [...] but which has two versions – in the case of Beckett, in French and in English – without anyone being sometimes able to tell which is the original” (1993: 113, trans. Santoyo 2013: 28).

The authors of *The Bilingual Text* analyzed the experience of many self-translators and came to the conclusion that bilingual authors “do indeed see themselves as re-creators producing a new original on the model of the old” (Hokenson and Munson 2007: 199). On the opposite side of the communication chain, it is the illusion of reading an original text that is conveyed to target reader through the process of self-translation. Thanks to the authority accorded to the author-translator, the reader perceives the dimension of originality in the self-translated text and may even be unaware of that it is a translation.²⁵

Nevertheless, many scholars complicate the notion of the target text as another original. For instance, Michael Oustinoff acknowledged the importance of the numerous modifications that self-translated texts sometimes undergo in translation, thus appearing as “authentic re-creation [véritable recreation]” of the original text (2001: 24). However, Oustinoff warns that self-translation is more than “just” original writing and “ought not be reduced to just writing (thus being attributed to the field of re-creation) as it too often happens” (57). He thus proposes to define self-translation as “authorial translation [traduction auctoriale],” a term that would reflect the double nature of this phenomenon, expressing both the work of translation from one language to another *and* the authorial dimension.

Hence, studying self-translation separately from the first version of the same text

²⁵ Brian Fitch acknowledges the fact that the reader of a self-translated text perceives it as an original and not as a translation, mainly because the second version “also comes from the pen of the author of the first version” (1988:19).

may be misleading. In 1954 William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley argued that, once written, the text does not belong to its author as it is "detached from the author at birth" (1954: 5). This means that a standard translation, while directly deriving from the source text, is also something *else*: it is part of the afterlife of a text, the flow of cultural activities performed by other professionals, which include translations, screen or stage adaptations, rewritings, reworkings. All these activities adapt the work to a new audience, a new medium or a different cultural climate, often moving the text towards new social, literary or linguistic environments. Furthermore, translations are often "updated" and their existence can be limited in time. Self-translations, on the other hand, often cause what Alexandra Berlina called "the translator's block" (2014: 23). Unlike standard translations, self-translations tend to block retranslations for the years to come. This phenomenon is one of the consequences of the self-translator's authority, which modifies the self-translation's perception in the target language environment. On the literary market a self-translation is therefore perceived almost as an "original" text, but, at the same time, it represents a meta-text that derives from a previous work published by the same author.

Since the traditional hierarchy of original vs translated text collapses, both texts can be seen as components of a single albeit bilingual work of art, made up of two parts authored by the same person. In Brian Fitch's view, the existence of one or several self-translations charges the text with a new "temporal" character and paves the way to a more flexible terminology, in which both texts can be referred to as "variants" or "versions" of comparable status (1988: 131–32).

In her 2013 article "Self-Translation as Rewriting" translation theorist Susan Bassnett presented an interpretation of self-translation that makes use of the temporal character of this phenomenon to clarify its nature. Starting from the findings of the Cultural Turn in Translation Studies, she claims that André Lefevere's idea of translation as rewriting is especially useful in defining the essence of the self-translated text. By extending his or her own work across languages and literary systems, the author-translator gives birth to a *fluid*

rather than a static text, in which finding the actual original becomes “virtually impossible” (Bassnett 2013: 19-20). Therefore, self-translation is perhaps neither another original nor just a translation, but rather something in the middle, or even something entirely different. In what reminds us of Gachechiladze’s mirror metaphor used for standard translation, Julio-César Santoyo (2013) attempts to clarify the essence of a self-translated text through the idea of a specular image. Unlike Gachechiladze’s mirror, however, the self-translated reflection can be as distorted as the author-translator pleases:

in self-translations both original and translated text are brought forth by one and the same hand, and therefore the hoped-for faithful, specular image may appear as deformed and distorted as the author may fancy. Because the relationship between a self-translation and its original, [...] is a dynamic relationship, [...] that makes an original look at itself in the mirror of its self-translation and adopt or incorporate the textual changes the author may have brought into the translated text. (2013: 118)

Hence, Santoyo proposes to read the bilingual text as a whole made up of two parts, in which the original and the translation complement each other.

Taking a step further in this reflection on the self-translated text, it becomes possible to situate self-translation in a sort of *third space*, where linguistic boundaries are transcended, and fluidity, cultural hybridity, and dynamicity become dominant.²⁶ It is within this third space, or what Emily Apter calls “the translation zone” (2006: 2), perhaps, that one should look for information about the artistic identity of a bilingual author. And meaning, in terms of Walter Benjamin’s universal language, may emerge exactly from the process of reading a self-translated bilingual text.

1.2.3.2 Reception of the Self-Translated Text

The target audience of a self-translated text can vary according to the context in which a given self-translation was made and to the reasons that moved the self-translator’s work.

²⁶ A similar idea is expressed by Sherry Simon: “The translated text can be understood as a contact zone, a third space, which is an overlapping of cultures” (2011: 50).

In many cases, as with standard translation, the target audience is a community that belongs to a certain linguistic and literary system. For instance, self-translations produced by exiled writers can often be directed to the members of the linguistic community that welcomed them: according to Jamie Olson, “Brodsky repeatedly presents his work in one guise to his first, Russian, audience and then revises it as he translates it for American readers” (2017: 48). However, not unlike “normally” translated poems, self-translated poetry can also be published in bilingual editions.²⁷ In standard translation, this appears as an assertion of both the authority of the original text and the impossibility to render a poem in another language without loss or changes. The bilingual edition allows the readers of the translation to at least glance at the original text and perhaps, according to the reader’s linguistic skills, try to read parts of the original with the support of the translation.

While self-translation is no solution to the inevitability of partial loss or modification in poetry translation, bilingual editions of self-translated poems remind their reader of the strong connection between each bilingual poem’s versions. Eva Gentes (2013) noted that a bilingual edition can appear in different formats, including *en face* editions (with corresponding or non-corresponding facing pages), split-page editions (sometimes divided vertically or horizontally²⁸), successive versions and reversible editions. The order in which the versions of a text appear in bilingual editions can sometimes point at a hierarchy between them, established deliberately according to the authorial intention. For example, in the 1989 Gascon–French poetry edition of *L’enterrament à Sabres* by Bernard Manciet, the original Gascon versions are printed on the right-hand page, whereas the French translations are placed on the facing page on the left, in what results as a reversal of the habitual order. The readers should interpret this as indicative of the source-target text’s

²⁷ Prose works can also be published in bilingual editions for various reasons – personal, literary, pragmatic, political (see Gentes 2013: 268), but this practice is more common for poetry.

²⁸ Gentes provides an example of a split-page edition: *My Dear Mariana* (1989) by David G. Maillu is a horizontally split edition: “Thus the English version of his 32-page long epistolary romance, *My Dear Mariana*, occupies the upper part of the page while its Kikamba version, *Kumya Ivu*, is printed in a run-on-fashion on the corresponding lower part of the page” (Gentes 2013: 276).

status in the bilingual text. Gentes argues that in this case the author “might have been aiming to draw the reader’s attention to the minority-language version by not complying with reader expectations” (2013: 273–74).

The bilingual edition has the advantage of being able to address an increased number of monolingual readers even within the same geographical and national context, in cases when the bilingual author belongs to a diglossic region. However, the bilingual edition also addresses a bilingual audience that is able to read and appreciate both versions of the text. As a matter of fact, many scholars agree that the appearance of a self-translation alters the nature of a literary text as it begins to address a new group of people, namely a bilingual audience. According to Santoyo, these readers will find themselves “immersed in a simultaneous, complementary play of two mirrors” and will be able “to estimate the quality of the reflected image,” but also to appreciate the work in its totality (2013: 31). The reader of a bilingual poem is therefore offered a different reading experience, which should be located somewhere outside of or in-between standard linguistic spaces. The bilingual reader can move back and forth from one text to another, comparing the poem’s versions, enjoying the expression of an idea or a concept in two different (or corresponding) ways, ultimately appreciating the artist’s ability to convey his or her idea through the unique means of expression that characterize each language. Hence, the reading experience of self-translated texts, like their authors and the text themselves, can be located in a “third zone,” a multilingual or extra-lingual space.

Gentes sees bilingual publications as a good strategy to overcome “the dominance of the majority language” in asymmetrical language pairings, a way to “give a true reflection of the bilingual character of the author’s writing” (2013: 275). However, there are also other opinions about this: as mentioned in section 1.2.2.1, in asymmetrical language pairings, bilingual publications have also been interpreted as a threat to the poem that was

written in a minor or endangered language.²⁹

An important possibility provided by the bilingual publication of a self-translated text is the exposure of the very process of self-translation. If we are offered a bilingual version of a collection of poems, a study of the process of self-translation can help us shed a light on new nuances of the texts, as well as on the work of self-translation itself, which is also a significant activity carried out by the poet and, as such, deserves the reader's attention. Some scholars already suggested the possibility of using translation studies as a tool to study texts through close reading.³⁰ This methodology appears especially suitable for self-translated texts, since both their emanations derive from the same author. Alexandra Berlina's study of Brodsky's bilingual poetry follows this approach (2014): in her view, it allows us to notice details about texts, languages and cultures that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Besides, this methodology goes hand in hand with Bruno Osimo's view of self-translation (1999), according to which self-translation can and should be used as a tool for stylistic, semantic and cultural disambiguation. Osimo provides the example of *Lolita* to show how a bilingual text can be used by standard translators working with a third target language in order to achieve a better understanding of the authorial intention and avoid semantic ambiguities.

One may recollect that contemporary poetry is sometimes experienced through oral performances. In many countries, this is far from being an uncommon practice, and bilingual poetry can also be heard in poetry readings. An interesting case is described by Emanuela Costa in her article devoted to Sekiguchi Ryōko's bilingual poetry. Ryōko writes Japanese-French bilingual texts, but when it comes to oral performances she selects from a

²⁹ See Krause's article, entitled "Why bother with the original? Self-translation and Scottish Gaelic poetry": she states that if Gaelic poetry "continues to be published alongside the author's English translation, there will be no independence for Gaelic poetry [...]. If bilingual publication continues, one will still be left with the question, 'Why bother with the poem in Gaelic?', which inevitably implies, 'Why bother with Gaelic at all?'" (2013: 138-39).

³⁰ Paolo Leonardi, in particular, states that "to confront a text with its translations [...] is a way to analyze and better understand a text, to look at it from different perspective and better understand the original text's message, including what it only mentions" (2013: 136).

variety of options according to the atmosphere she intends to create: sometimes she reads texts in sequence, but at other times bilingual reading is performed simultaneously:

When the texts are read one after the other, most of the audience will likely understand just one of the two versions and will listen to the mere sound of the other version. In the case of readings where the versions are read simultaneously, [...] the overlapping languages create sound interferences that will make it difficult for the readers to understand any one of the two languages. (Costa 2015: 124)

The poet defines this effect as “a noise” and claims that “when you listen to them [the poems] simultaneously, you get the feeling of standing in the middle of the translation process” (Sekiguchi and Yoshimasu 2006: 32–35, qtd in Costa 2015: 124) Hence, the poet uses the oral performance as an attempt to focus the audience’s attention on her work as a self-translator, increasing her listeners’ awareness of her living between two languages and two poetic traditions and reasserting her own awareness of her bilingual identity.

As far as Nabokov is concerned, it is possible to claim that each version of his self-translated works addresses a different audience, but if we take the bilingual text as a new entity, its perfect reader will be, as shown by self-translation studies, a bilingual person. Indeed, Alexander Dolinin argues that Nabokov self-translated the novel as a “gift for himself and the ideal *bilingual* reader” (1995: 324). More recently, Dolinin claimed that “the ideal reader of Nabokov's English prose must speak at least two [...] languages, otherwise he will be unable to understand many keywords, and many motives will appear vague to him”³¹; hence, Nabokov’s “extraterritorial” prose is so rich in multilingual wordplay that it addresses an equally multilingual audience, or at least an audience that is aware of the text’s interliminal nature.

Below I read Nabokov’s self-translated poems as bilingual texts, and carry out a comparative analysis of each poem’s versions with a twofold aim: seeking insights into the texts as well as insights into the process of self-translation.

³¹ Online lecture published on 18/08/2019 <https://arzamas.academy/courses/66/5> (retrieved 27/06/2019).

Vladimir Nabokov and Poetry: A Bio-Bibliographical Overview

Two facts are generally associated with Nabokov's work as a poet. One is that Nabokov famously started his writing career with poetry and never ceased composing verse in Russian throughout his life, even when he was also writing poems English. There are divergent opinions on the quality and quantity of his poetry, but one thing is certain: Nabokov wrote hundreds of poems, and his poetic output was especially prolific in Russian.³² On the other hand, despite the efforts invested by Nabokov in the preparation of his poetic heritage for future research, academic studies and literary criticism tend to place his poetry in a rather secondary position. Publications devoted to Nabokov's poetry are relatively few, especially if compared to the number of studies devoted to the author's prose; criticism is usually restrained and often has negative innuendo, seemingly unable to escape a disadvantageous comparison with Nabokov's prose, which, in turn, is often perceived as more experimental and personal.

In the present section I shall first present a brief outline of Nabokov's career as a poet and a translator of poetry, then turn to a survey of the main academic publications devoted to Nabokov's poetry.

³² As Barry Scherr points out, "[w]ell over 500 poems in Russian are known, along with some twenty or so in English" (1995: 609). Brian Boyd claims that in 1918 young Nabokov had already "selected 224 poems (out of over 300) for an unrealized collection" and mentions the existence of "a mass" of juvenilia, still unpublished. Andrew Field stated that by 1928 Nabokov had already "written 'nearly a thousand poems' (1986: 127). In her introduction to the most complete Russian collection of Nabokov's poems so far, Maria Malikova (2002: 6) reminds us that a fully exhaustive collection of his verse is yet to appear.

2.1 Nabokov's Work as a Poet and Translator of Poetry

The aim of this bio-bibliographical overview of Nabokov's poetry-related work is to provide an orientation framework for text analysis. The section's main source is Brian Boyd's "Chronology of Nabokov's Life and Works" (xxix) (1995) and its expanded version on "The Nabokovian" website.³³

Nabokov composed his first poem in July 1914, in his family's Vyra estate. He will later describe this moment in a stylized recollection of his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1966), albeit anchoring his first experience of versification in "Дождь пролетел," a poem written three years later. The early period is the most prolific in Nabokov's career as a poet in terms of quantity. His first publication ever was also a poem, dated November 1915. That year Nabokov co-edited the school journal *Yunaia mysl'*, in which he published his poem "Osen'." A more important publication, however, came in the spring of 1916, when the prestigious literary review *Vestnik Evropy* accepted one of Nabokov's poems for its July issue.

In June of the same year Nabokov's first collection of sixty-eight "passionate but uninspiring effusions" (Boyd 1995: xxix) was privately published in Petrograd. The volume was simply entitled *Stikhi*, like Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's collection of poems on childhood in *The Gift* and like Nabokov's own last book of collected poems (1979, published posthumously). Some scholars see a Nabokovian circular structure in this history (Malikova 2002: 5; Morris 2010: 29), but if one really wants to represent Nabokov's poetic career in geometrical terms, it will perhaps appear more similar to a spiral with several arms departing from its center in the form of verse-writing characters who inhabit Nabokov's prose. In addition to Fyodor, scattered throughout Nabokov's novels and stories are the poet as Vasili Shishkov of the eponymous 1939 short story,

³³ <https://thenabokovian.org/life/chronology> (accessed 08/07/2019).

Konstantin Perov of the 1944 story “A Forgotten Poet” and, of course, John Shade of *Pale Fire* (1962). Even Nabokov’s most famous male character, Humbert Humbert, occasionally indulges in versification. Moreover, both Nabokov’s younger self in *Speak, Memory* and his parodic doppelgänger Vadim Vadimovich in *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) compose verse.

The reception of the 1916 *Stikhi* was not a positive one. It caused Nabokov public humiliation at school — Vladimir Gippius, Nabokov’s teacher, made fun of the poems in class (*SM* 238), as reported by Brian Boyd, the collection sparked a generally negative feedback within the literary circles of the time:

Given a copy of the book by V. D. Nabokov, Korney Chukovsky wrote the young poet a polite letter of praise but enclosed in the envelope, as if by mistake, a rough draft outlining a franker judgment. Zinaida Gippius [...] told V. D. Nabokov at a session of the Literary Fund to tell his son, please, that he would never, never be a writer. (Boyd 1990: 121)

Not one of these poems made it to Nabokov’s last collections of poems published in the 1970s: the bilingual collection with chess problems entitled *Poems and Problems* (1970) and the very last Russian *Stikhi*. Nabokov’s earliest poem to be included in both these books is the above-mentioned “Дождь пролетел,” written in 1917 and stylized as the author’s first poetic experience in *Speak, Memory* (but not in its Russian version, we shall see why).

In 1918 the collection *Dva puti* was published in collaboration with Nabokov’s Tenishchev schoolmate, Andrey Balashov. In the same year, when his family had already moved to Crimea, Nabokov met the poet and painter Maximilian Voloshin. Their friendship had a deep impact not only on Nabokov’s poetry of that period but also on his views on prosody: it was Voloshin who introduced Nabokov to Andrey Bely’s system of metrical scansion, published in Bely’s 1910 collection of essays *Simvolizm*. This system overwhelmed the young poet: even in 1957, when he was writing his “Notes on Prosody,” Nabokov was still under the influence of Bely’s findings.

In April 1919 Nabokov’s family left Sevastopol by ship, and in October of the same

year he was already a student in Cambridge, writing poems both in Russian and English, reading the Dal' dictionary, and the poetry of Alfred Housman, Rupert Brooke, and Walter de la Mare. In 1920 Nabokov published a poem in the daily *Rul'* under the pseudonym Cantab; next year he first signed a poem with the pen name Vladimir Sirin. In 1922, the year of Nabokov's father's assassination, the publishing house Gamayun printed a short collection of his poems entitled *Grozd'*. An overall positive review by Gleb Struve (1923) praised Nabokov's "tremendous sense of poetic discipline and technical ability" despite his youth and susceptibility to the influence by other poets such as Bunin and Maikov.

The year 1923 was marked by the publication of another collection of poems, entitled *Gornyy put'*, selected with Nabokov's friend and poet Sasha Chornyi. In the same year Nabokov also began to write short stories more regularly, as if anticipating his first novel *Mashen'ka*, written in 1925. He was also writing plays, some of them in verse, and in 1926 he composed the Pushkinian "Universitetskaia poema." The year 1929 saw the collection *Vozvrashchenie Chorba*, containing both short stories and poems. Six of these poems were later included in *Poems and Problems* ("От счастья влюбленному не спится," "Тихий шум," "Расстрел," "La Bonne Lorraine," "Сновиденье," "Мать," and "В раю"). It is precisely this productive decade that Nabokov mentions in the foreword to *Poems and Problems* when he speaks of a period "during which I set myself to illustrate the principle of making a short poem contain a plot and tell a story" (*PP*, 14). Indeed, it was Nabokov's belief that a poem, not unlike a short story or a novel, should always be interesting.

In 1935, Nabokov started writing what would later become the second chapter of *Dar*; in the same year he translated into English his 1934 Russian novel *Otchaianie*. This was his first experience with self-translation, motivated, in all likelihood, of a further move: in the mid-1930s, when it became clear that staying in Hitler's Germany was no longer an option for his family, Nabokov wished to find an academic job in the United Kingdom. Next year, 1936, he wrote the poems attributed to the pen of the young Russian émigré poet Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, the protagonist of *Dar*. The poem "L'Inconnue de la

Seine” in *Vozvrashchenie Chorba* was published with the subtitle “from F.G.Ch.” [“iz F. G. Ch.”], attributing it, as it were, to Fyodor’s poetic production. In *Poems and Problems*, however, the poem lost its subtitle: Nabokov himself took full responsibility for it.

In 1939 another poem later included in *Poems and Problems* was written: “Poety” was published under the pseudonym Vasily Shishkov as a trick on the “distinguished critic” Georgy Adamovich, who fell into the trap and praised a “new” emerging talent (see Nabokov’s note added to the English self-translation of the text, *PP*, 95).

In 1940 Nabokov fled with his wife and son to the United States, shortly before Paris surrendered to the Nazi troops. In the new country, Nabokov’s realization of the inevitability of the switch to English was confirmed. While in France he had already written *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in English; his first novel written in the USA, *Bend Sinister*, saw the light in 1947. The linguistic violence of this language switch was described by the author as an extremely painful experience, “like learning anew to handle things after losing seven or eight fingers in an explosion” (*SO*, 54). Nabokov, however, never ceased writing poetry in Russian. His next collection of poems, *Stikhotvoreniia 1929–1951*, came out in 1952; it contained fifteen poems, composed in Germany, France, and America between the years 1929 and 1951. All these texts were included by Nabokov in the selection he made for *Poems and Problems*, a fact that may perhaps be symptomatic of Nabokov’s increased satisfaction with this period of his poetic production.

In 1959 Nabokov released his first collection of fourteen English poems: its title *Poems* echoed the author’s first Russian collection of verse. Previous experiments with English versification included two poems written in Cambridge, published in 1920: “Remembrance” and “Home,” in addition to a 1923 poem published in Berlin, “The Russian Song.” In 1941 Nabokov wrote the English poem “Softest of Tongues,” which was basically a farewell to Europe and a “proshchai” to Russian language and the Russian phase of his career as a prose writer, deliberately left behind after this second experience of emigration. The next year Nabokov published his first poem in *The New Yorker*, “The

Refrigerator Awakes” (included in *Poems and Problems*). Overall, a difference has been observed between Nabokov’s Russian and English approach to versification: as summarized by Morris, his English poems are “characterized by a combination of multi-layered thematic density and verbal precision,” which suggests that Nabokov’s relationship with the English “muse” is somewhat more “disciplined than impetuous and passionate” (Morris 2010: 26-27).

Before he attempted self-translation of his poems, not only had Nabokov already experienced self-translation of prose, but he had also cultivated a deep interest in poetry translation. He had translated both from English and French into Russian (Shakespeare, Tennyson, Byron, Keats, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Musset, Rimbaud) and later from Russian into English. His 1922 Russian translation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* contains brilliant translations of Carroll’s playful verses and parodies. In the 1940’s Nabokov started translating such Russian classics as Gogol, Pushkin, Lermontov and Tiutchev for teaching. In 1941 he published a manifesto of his “non-literal” approach to translation, “The Art of Translation,” where he puts the power of creative genius above all the knowledge and technical skills that a good translator can acquire. His collection of poetry translations entitled *Three Russian Poets* was published in 1945, followed in 1947 by a British expanded version entitled *Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev*. These translations of the pre-literalist era aimed to convey both meter and meaning to the target text (they were therefore closer to “free” re-creative strategy) and, according to Nabokov’s own expression, attempted to “mimic” the sounds of the original poems (NWL 45). Some of these translations were, indeed, successful and, as Galya Diment acknowledged in her 1995 article devoted to this volume, Nabokov’s translation of Tiutchev’s “Silentium” may still be its best English version (Diment 1995: 712).

At the end of the 1940’s Nabokov’s approach to poetry translation underwent a radical transformation. In 1948 he had to translate the medieval Russian heroic tale *Slovo o polku Igoreve* for his teaching activity, and in January 1949 he began to contemplate a

literal translation with commentary of Pushkin's novel in verse *Evgenii Onegin*. Nabokov finished this monumental work only in 1957 (in 1975 a revised edition will be published) and its publication was followed by controversy and criticism because of its literalism and the length of its explanatory notes. By choosing this strategy and giving up translation as re-creation for the sake of translation as commentary, mature Nabokov seems to acknowledge the impossibility of conveying Pushkin's verse across the linguistic boundary.

In 1959, following *Lolita's* success, Dmitri Nabokov started translating the first Chapter of his father's novel *Dar*. The strategy of collaborative translation with either Dmitri or another translator (it was Michael Scammell in the case of the remaining chapters of *Dar*) would continue for many years. However, Fyodor's verses enclosed in the text of *Dar* were translated by Nabokov himself. In 1964 the essay "Notes on Prosody" is published, where the author discusses the nuances of the Russian syllabotonic system and the implications of its peculiar features on the translation of Russian poetry in English.

In December 1968 Nabokov started selecting and translating his Russian poems for the bilingual collection *Poems and Problems*. He will complete this work in January 1970 and the book will be published by McGraw-Hill. It was curiously anticipated in 1918 by a poetic workbook entitled *Poems and Schemes [Stikhi i skhemy]*, containing Belyan prosodic schemes and diagrams for a number of chess problems (Boyd 1990: 152). In Autumn 1976, Nabokov started selecting poems for the Russian collection *Stikhi*, which was published posthumously, edited by Véra Nabokov.

Thus, Nabokov devoted considerable time and creative energy to the practice and theory of poetry. He reflected on versification and poetry translation, and painted fictional portraits of poets. His last two collections of verse, both published in the 1970's, can be seen as the sum of his poetic heritage, which, as Maria Malikova points out (2002: 5), seems to reveal not only the author's intention to prepare this material for future academic studies but also the special attention and utmost care he invested in his poetry. The role of poetry in Nabokov's life and work remains, however, underappreciated.

	Collected poetry	Poetry translation	Prose self-translation	Poetry self-translation
1910-1920's	Stikhi (1916) Dva puti (1918) Grozd' (1923) Gorny put' (1923) Vozvrashchenie Chorba (1929)	Ania v strane chudes (1923) EN-RU (includes translation of poetry)		
1930's	Poems for Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's collection Stikhi (1936)		Despair (1937) RU-EN Laughter in the Dark (1938) RU-EN	
1940's		Three Russian Poets (1945) RU-EN Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev (1947) RU-EN		
1950's	Stikhotvoreniia 1929–1951 (1952) Poems (1959)	Starts working on Eugene Onegin (1953)	Drugie berega (1954) EN-RU	
1960's		The Song of Igor's Campaign (1960) RU-EN Eugene Onegin (1964) RU-EN	Despair (II) (1966) RU-EN Russian Lolita (1967) EN-RU (started in January 1963) Speak, Memory (1967) RU-EN	The Gift (1963) RU-EN Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's poetry for the collaborative translation of <i>Dar</i> Humbert Humbert's verses in Russian Lolita EN-RU (started in January 1963)
1970's	Poems and Problems (1971) Stikhi (1979)	Eugene Onegin (1975 revised version)		Poems and Problems RU-EN (started in 1968, published 1970)

Table 1. Summary of Nabokov's major poetry-related publications and self-translations published during his lifetime.

2.2 Critical Reception and Academic Studies

As Paul Morris notes in the introduction to his analysis of Nabokov's poetry, many critical responses to Nabokov's poetry "are united in their varying degrees of negativity or, at best, hesitant, uncertain praise" (2010: 33). Nabokov's European collections of poems were addressed to the Russian émigré community, and this phase of reception may be regarded as ending with the publication of Gleb Struve's *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii* (1956), a seminal overview of Russian émigré literature that discusses some aspects of Nabokov's poetry. Nabokov was often criticized by his contemporaries for "excessive identification with an astounding assortment of masters of Russian poetry": as Morris sums up in his survey of émigré reviews, he was said to have been heavily influenced by, among others, Bunin, Maikov, Pushkin, Tiutchev, Fet, and Blok (Morris 2010: 43).

In his 1956 remarks on Nabokov's poetry, Struve stressed the positive evolution between Nabokov's early and mature poetic achievements (1956: 165). However, he subscribes to the near-consensus that despite an obvious maturation in the art of versification, Nabokov's talent truly blossomed in his works in prose. Struve's claim is that Nabokov's poetry can be seen as a preparatory phase for his main body of work, namely his novels and short stories: Struve defines Nabokov's poetry as the poetry of a prose writer, by contrast to the cases of Mandelstam or Pasternak, who were strong poets who sometimes turned to prose (1956: 170). Barry Scherr believes that "Struve's original judgment still holds" and there is a "near-unanimous agreement that Nabokov's poetry does not stand comparison with his prose in terms of artistic accomplishment" (1995: 623).

Whereas at its publication the collection *Poems and Problems* was largely ignored by both critics and scholars, the posthumous publication of *Stikhi* drew more academic attention. In 1985 Laurent Rabaté published an article entitled "La poésie de la tradition: Étude du recueil *Stixi* de V. Nabokov" which presents an alternative and thought-

provoking view on the prose/poetry dichotomy in Nabokov's oeuvre. Rabaté proposes to go beyond Struve's interpretation and grant Nabokov's poetry a more dignified status of independence within the author's bibliography as "an integral part of his literary work," at least because of its constant presence between Nabokov's other work (Rabaté 1985: 401). The conservative tendency in Nabokov's poetry is quite rightly interpreted by Rabaté not as poetic imitation but as a deliberate and partly ideological move against futurist and post-futurist movements, in favor of the Russian lyric poetry, as a sign of respect for its tradition.

Another key moment in Nabokov's poetry studies is the publication of the final issue of *Russian Literature Triquarterly* (1991), entirely devoted to Nabokov and containing four articles addressing questions related to Nabokov's Russian poetry. These include Donald B. Johnson's computer study of thematic keywords, "Preliminary Notes on Nabokov's Russian Poetry: A Chronological and Thematic Sketch" (in 1992 Johnson also published an article on Nabokov's poem "L'Inconnue de la Seine"), Julian Connolly's "The Otherworldly in Nabokov's Poetry," devoted to the "two-world" theme in Nabokov's verse and to its relation to the author's prose, John Rampton's commentary on the use of apostrophe in Nabokov's early poetry, where invocation becomes a sign of the poet's engagement with the surrounding world, and Gerald Smith's descriptive analysis of the meter, rhythm, rhyme, and stanza forms adopted by Nabokov. Interestingly, Smith draws a conclusion that reminds one of Rabaté's reflections on Nabokov's views concerning formal innovations, which he probably associated with poets of the left who either supported the 1917 revolution or chose to return to Soviet Russia from exile.

In the same year (1991), Galya Diment's article "Nabokov and Joyce: Portraits of Innovative Writers as Conservative Poets" came out. Diment compares Joyce and Nabokov, two innovative prose writers who both composed "traditional" verse and, especially as far as the latter is concerned, borrowed from the great poets who influenced their artistic vision and work in general (in Nabokov's case, Pushkin, Fet, Tiutchev among

others) and their poetry in particular. In Diment's view this explains why Nabokov's poetry has often been perceived as less individual and more "indebted" to previous poets, a fact that Nabokov himself was ready to acknowledge, especially with regard to his earliest verses.

In 1995 two surveys of Nabokov's poetic works were published: one was Scherr's entry on poetry in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, the other Thomas Eekman's article "Vladimir Nabokov's Poetry" published in *The Language and Verse of Russia* (1995), a mostly descriptive overview of Nabokov's poetic publications.

Russian Nabokov studies also sporadically turned their attention to Nabokov's poetry, mainly as a part of the wave of interest in his work that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. The collection of the *Pro et Contra* series devoted to Nabokov contains several articles that explore different aspects of Nabokov's poetry, including, two articles by Mikhail Lotman on Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's poetry, Maria Malikova's commentary to her translation of Nabokov's short story "First Poem," and Alexander Dolinin's "Zametki" about *Dar*, where the intertextual dimension of Fyodor's poems is analyzed in detail. Malikova and Dolinin also discussed Nabokov's poetry in their introductions to Nabokov's 2002 Russian collection *Stikhotvoreniia* and to his Russian *Sobranie sochineny*, respectively. Malikova's article is primarily an invitation to devote further studies to Nabokov's poetry. She runs through his career as a poet, lingering on several texts, and concluding that Nabokov "may not have been a great poet, but he certainly is a forgotten one" (2002: 44). Dolinin delves into Nabokov's connection with the previous Russian poetic tradition and asserts that his poetry and prose share common stylistic features and themes, of which several are a direct consequence of Nabokov's interest in symbolist poetry. Nevertheless, in resolving the prose/poetry dichotomy, Dolinin suggests that it is in his prose works that Nabokov managed to express a synthesis of these influences in a most personal way.

In the third millennium there have been new articles about Nabokov's poetry. For

example, the 2002 publication *Nabokov's World* edited by Jane Grayson, Arnold McMillian, and Priscilla Meyer contains Michael Meylac's study on Nabokov's "Seven Poems" and their intertextual dimension. In more recent years, Paul Morris consistently turned his attention to Nabokov's poetry. Some of his publications include the 2000 article "Nabokov's Poetic Gift: The Poetry in and of *Dar*," the 2005 article "Vladimir Nabokov and the Surprise of Poetry," and the already mentioned monograph *Vladimir Nabokov: Poetry and the Lyric Voice* (2010). In this work, Morris analyzes five recurring themes in Nabokov's poetry (cosmic synchronization, inspiration, love poetry, the otherworld and the poetry of trifles), but also grants attention to Nabokov's plays and some poetry contained in prose and *Pale Fire*. Morris's aim is to assert the centrality of poetry within Nabokov's career as a writer by claiming that "a lyric voice informed the expression of virtually all that Nabokov wrote" (2010: xxiv).

A valuable resource for this study comes from the corpus of research on Nabokov's self-translated novels and his bilingualism. Among these, Jane Grayson's pioneering 1977 book *Nabokov Translated: A Comparison of Nabokov's Russian and English Prose* still remains a cornerstone for any study devoted to the author's bilingual texts. Elizabeth K. Beaujour's 1989 *Alien Tongues* and the 1995 article on bilingualism represent an important contribution to the analysis of Nabokov's bilingual identity.

To stress once again the importance of both poetry and bilingualism for Nabokov's literary career would be superfluous at this point. Scholars are, moreover, beginning to show awareness that translation of poetry is not a secondary subject for Nabokov studies. 2019 saw a monograph and a doctoral thesis about Nabokov as a translator and self-translator of poetry. Shvabrin's book (2019) devoted to Nabokov's practice as a translator of French, Russian, and English literature contains precious insights into the evolution of his translation methodology. As noted above, it also underscores the relationship between Nabokov's translations and his original work.

With my research, I hope to deepen our understanding of Nabokov's approach to

poetry translation, turning however to *self*-translation of poetry. At the same time, I also intend to examine the link between the practice of self-translation, standard translation, and Nabokov's writings in prose and poetry.

Cornettone's doctoral dissertation (Cornettone 2019), which presents a textual analysis of a selection of self-translated texts from *Poems and Problems*, provides valuable and stimulating insights into these poems yet does not dwell on poems published within Nabokov's prose works. In contrast to Cornettone's research, moreover, the present study offers, among other things, a systematic investigation of the methodology that Nabokov worked out for translating his own poetry .

The present research intends to promote this new direction of Nabokov studies by providing a comprehensive overview of Nabokov's self-translated poetry and analyzing texts published in novels, short stories, and independent collections. Moreover, while performing textual analysis, I also intend to examine Nabokov's methodology of translating his own poems by isolating the tendencies of his method, and by tracing changes in these methods. It is my hope that this analysis also yields new insights into Nabokov's texts, in the original and in self-translation.

3

Poetry in Nabokov's Prose and Its Self-Translation

Poetry in Nabokov's prose works is usually fictionally attributed to characters of novels and short stories. The author designs a poetic style for them, which reflects their taste and provides the reader with material for understanding their artistic persona. Such is the case of the realistic verse of Konstantin Perov, imbued with "social sense," or John Shade's poems "The Sacred Tree" and "The Swing" that complement the 999-line title poem, or the sequence of Fyodor's poems from his collection *Stikhi*.

Moreover, Nabokov's prose often contains reflections on poetry, prosody, and translation of poetry. He also – strikingly – hides scattered verses and even entire poems amid regular prose passages, a prose that itself abundant with typically poetic techniques such as alliterations and inner rhymes. The present chapter is devoted to the analysis of those poems embedded in Nabokov's prose that underwent a process of self-translation. These include Fyodor's poems in *Dar*, self-translated by the author for *The Gift*, Humbert Humbert's verses in *Lolita*, self-translated from English to Russian, and Vadim Vadimovich's Russian poem "Vliublyonnost'" in *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) translated into English by, as it were, the protagonist directly within the text of the novel.

3.1 Poetic Genesis within a Prose Text

Dar is suffused with poetry at many levels: its protagonist is a poet whose verses are

introduced within the text and whose evolving opinions on prosody and Russian poets are reported by the narrator. The reader is also granted an exclusive peek inside the very process of poetic genesis before encountering one of the key poems contained in the novel, “Благодарю тебя, отчизна” (“Thank You, My Land”). Chapter 11 of Nabokov’s autobiography, *Speak, Memory* also describes in detail the genesis of a poetic text, “Дождь пролетел” (“The Rain has Flown”), recalling in a stylized and fictionalized way the young author’s first experience in versification. The texts of the poems and their self-translations will be analyzed below. The goal of this section is to see how, in his prose, Nabokov depicted the process of translating thoughts, images, and information coming from the outside world into a poetic text.

The passages in question are not records of Nabokov’s own actual experience of poetic creation: Nabokov *represented* this experience in a fictional framework, with the protagonist as its subject. The protagonist of *Dar* shares some traits with his creator but is a fictional character. The would-be autobiographical short story entitled “First Poem” actually describes a text that was not Nabokov’s first poem.

Dar was translated by Dmitri Nabokov (first chapter) and Michael Scammell, and then the translation was massively revised by the author. The author’s revision and authorization of the whole text, in addition to the self-translation of the poems, draws a parallel between this case of collaborative translation and an instance of “pure” self-translation: according to Andrea Ceccherelli, Nabokov’s “assisted” translations produced a “second original,” an equally authoritative rewriting of the first version of the novel (2013: 13). Hence, in commenting on the stylistic aspects of the passages analyzed below, I shall keep in mind that any choice made in the translation was either approved by the author or comes directly from the author’s hand.

In the first chapter of *Dar*, the genesis of Fyodor’s poem is described in two phases. An outburst of inspiration overwhelms the young poet soon after he has finished re-reading his own freshly published collection *Stikhi*. He finds himself in a thrilled state of

mind, expecting to read a positive review of his book, which, however, will soon turn out to have been a hoax devised by his elder friend Chernyshevsky. In the pages that follow, the narrator reports Fyodor's flow of consciousness in the first person, tracing the spontaneous emergence of the poem's first rhymes out of an unrestrained flow of thoughts:

Мне еще далеко до тридцати, и вот сегодня – признан. Признан! Благодарю тебя, отчизна, за чистый... Это, пропев совсем близко, мелькнула лирическая возможность. Благодарю тебя, отчизна, за чистый и какой-то дар. Ты, как безумие... Звук «признан» мне собственно теперь и ненужен: от рифмы вспыхнула жизнь, но рифма сама отпала. Благодарю тебя, Россия, за чистый и... второе прилагательное я не успел разглядеть при вспышке – а жаль. Счастливый? Бессонный? Крылатый? За чистый и крылатый дар. Икры. Латы. Откуда этот римлянин? Нет, нет, все улетело, я не успел удержать. (*SSoch, IV: 216*)

And yet ... I am still a long way from thirty, and here today I am already noticed. Noticed! Thank you, my land, for this remotest ... A lyric possibility flitted past, singing quite close to his ear. Thank you, my land, for your most precious ... I no longer need the sound “noticed”: the rhyme has kindled life, but the rhyme itself is abandoned. And maddest gift my thanks are due ... I suppose “meshes” waits in the wings. Did not have time to make out my third line in that burst of light. Pity. All gone now, missed my cue. (*G, 41-42*)

In order to convey through prose the process of poetic genesis, Nabokov employs verbs and nouns that belong to the semantic fields of auditory and visual perceptions, supplemented here with a sense of speed. For example, the sentence “*пропев... мелькнула лирическая возможность*” (having sang, a lyric possibility flashed) is even more explicitly related to the sense of hearing in English: “a lyric possibility flitted past, *singing* quite close to his *ear*”; furthermore, Fyodor laments not to have been able to “разглядеть” (“make out”) the rest of the poem “при вспышке” (“in that burst of light”). The instant of poetic inspiration is here very brief.

Another feature, one that will recur later in a more explicit way, is the sense of a twofold presence within the poet's mind: one Fyodor is busy living his everyday life, walking the streets of Berlin, talking to people, while the other part of his consciousness is an attentive listener and observer who never misses a potentially usable combination of sounds or images. He either elaborates this input immediately and almost unconsciously, as happens in this episode (where Fyodor's inner poet interrupts his regular flow of

thoughts to notice a consonance) or archives it for future artistic use.

The Russian version contains a pun with “и крылатый” (and winged), which is discarded by Fyodor because it reminds him of a Roman soldier’s equipment. The English version of the text replaces the pun with a somewhat obscure sentence containing some “meshes” that “wait in the wings.” In Nassim Winnie Berdjis’s view, by alluding to a “winged butterfly” caught between the meshes of a net, the English text foreshadows Fyodor’s disappointment at the discovery of Chernyshevsky’s hoax about the fake review (1995: 139). Moreover, the word “wings” echoes the Russian adjective “крылатый.” Seen from this perspective, if one returns to the Russian text with Berdjis’s interpretation in mind, the quick transformation of the solemn phrase “и крылатый дар” into an anatomically earthly “икры латы” (calves armor) may also anticipate Fyodor’s upcoming switch of mood from elevated to disenchanted. And indeed, the moment of inspiration stops here. The poem will be finished later, on Fyodor’s way home after a boring social evening.

First in the street, a swinging lamp’s to and fro movement, its “sonorous tambourine-like sound” (“звонящим тамбуринным звуком,” *SSoch*, IV: 240) evokes, “no longer with the former distant call but reverberating loudly” (*G*, 58), the verses Fyodor started composing a few hours earlier:

Он сам с собою говорил,
шагая по несуществующей панели;
ногами управляло местное сознание,
а главный, и в сущности единственно
важный, Федор Константинович уже
заглядывал во вторую качавшуюся, за
несколько сажений, строфу, которая
должна была разрешиться еще
неизвестной, но вместе с тем в
точности обещанной гармонией.
(*SSoch*, IV: 240)

He was somnambulistically talking to himself as he paced a nonexistent sidewalk; his feet were guided by local consciousness, while the principal Fyodor Konstantinovich, and in fact the only Fyodor Konstantinovich that mattered, was already peering into the next shadowy strophe, which was swinging some yards away and which was destined to resolve itself in a yet-unknown but specifically promised harmony. (*G*, 67)

In this passage Fyodor, completely absorbed by the prospect of his future poem, is

“somnambulistically”³⁴ talking to himself (“сам с собою говорил”), walking but not really seeing the surroundings, like Vladislav Khodasevich’s blind man in the 1923 poem with the same title (“Бродит наугад слепой / Осторожно ставит ногу / И бормочет сам с собой,”³⁵ II, 1983: 6) like Gogol’s Akakiy Akakievich, who used to walk through the streets of St. Petersburg as if they were meticulously handwritten lines of a text.

The act of poetic genesis is described in prophetic terms. Fyodor’s poetic experience is both similar and opposite to Plato’s theory of ideas: the poem exists in one timeless, perfect and absolute version, while millions of its alternatives are fakes and must be rejected; but instead of anamnastically rediscovering it, Fyodor’s work is more akin to that of a prophet who fights human limitations and “peers” (“заглядывал”) into the future strophe, with an absolute faith in its perfect harmony. This passage bears an affinity to Nabokov’s own on-record statement on literary work:

I am afraid to get mixed up with Plato, whom I do not care for, but I do think that in my case it is true that the entire book, before it is written, seems to be ready ideally in some other, now transparent, now dimming, dimension, and my job is to take down as much of it as I can make out and as precisely as I am humanly able to. (*SO*, 69)

Such a conception of artistic creation was in all probability influenced by philosophical theories that Nabokov does not directly mention here: Leona Toker traces down the roots of this assertion to Bergson, who in turn was influenced by Théodule-Armand Ribot’s *L’Imagination créatrice* (1900) in likening creative imagination to the solution which ideally exists somewhere ahead of us, while we “present to our mind a certain effect as already obtained, and then we seek to discover by what composition of elements we can obtain it” (Bergson 2007: 170). Bergson thus interprets the artist’s task as that of converting a “whole” scheme into an image, a movement “from the abstract to the

³⁴ This word was added to the English text, perhaps because it recalls the English translation of the future poem (“and in these talks between somnambules”), just as “сам с собою говорил” anticipates a verse of the poem.

³⁵ “The blind man guesses as he goes / puts his foot down gingerly / and mumbles to himself” (trans. David Bethea, 1983: 114).

concrete” (Toker 2013: 207), which is similar to Fyodor’s “peering” into a poem’s “shadowy” strophe and its subsequent transcription.

Fyodor stays awake all night to finalize the text of his poem, but now the process of poetic creation is described through the metaphor of a conversation with “a thousand interlocutors, only one of whom was genuine” (*G*, 59). Hence, the visual semantic field is now replaced with words associated with auditory perceptions: the Russian text uses the word “вслушивание,” which describes an act of arduous listening (as if tuning into one specific speaker) of which the English translation has maintained only the “arduous” part:

Это был разговор с тысячью
собеседников, из которых лишь один
настоящий, и этого настоящего надо
было ловить и не упускать из слуха.
Как мне трудно, и как хорошо... И в
разговоре татой ночи сама душа
нетататот... безу безумие безочит, тому
тамзыка татот...
Спустя три часа опасного для жизни
воодушевления и вслушивания, он
наконец выяснил все, до последнего
слова, завтра можно будет записать.
На прощание попробовал вполголоса
эти хорошие, теплые, парные стихи.
(*SSoch*, IV: 241)

This was a conversation with a thousand
interlocutors, only one of whom was
genuine, and this genuine one must be
caught and kept within hearing distance.
How difficult this is and how wonder-
ful ... And in these talks between
tamtarles, tamtam my spirit hardly
knows ...
After some three hours of concentration
and ardour dangerous to life, he finally
cleared up the whole thing, to the last
word, and decided that tomorrow he
would write it down. In parting with it he
tried reciting softly the good, warm,
farm-fresh lines. (*G*, 68)

Overall, in the poem’s genesis the focus on hearing dominates over seeing, although both senses are evoked in the process. The poem is mostly heard and murmured, it emerges out of a consonance, “sings” (“пропев”) close to Fyodor’s ear, fills his head “with a heavenly buzz” (*G*, 68) (“заполнили голову божественным жужжанием,” *SSoch*, IV: 241). The moment of poetic composition is a conversation with an interlocutor who must be “kept within hearing distance” (“не упускать из слуха”). When the poem is finished, Fyodor tries “reciting softly” the newborn text thus testing its sound by reading it aloud:

Благодарю тебя, отчизна,
за злую даль благодарю!
Тобою полн, тобой не признан,
и сам с собою говорю.
И в разговоре каждой ночи
сама душа не разберет,
мое ль безумие бормочет,
твоя ли музыка растет... (*SSoch*, IV: 242)

Thank you, my land; for your remotest
Most cruel mist my thanks are due.
By you possessed, by you unnoticed,
Unto myself I speak of you.
And in these talks between somnambules
My inmost being hardly knows
If it's my demency that rambles
Or your own melody that grows. (*G*, 68)

Satisfied, Fyodor gets up to turn off the light and notices his own reflection in the mirror, “not quite recognizing himself” (*G*, 69). He observes several changes that happened overnight to his face, as if the intense experience of composing a poem turned him into someone new, took him a step further in his life, with his younger self, which existed prior to this moment, left behind.

In Chapter 3, Fyodor recalls, in the first person, his earliest practice as a young poet. His very first poems were inspired by a romantic relationship, which caused an urge “to transpose into verse the murmur of love” (*G*, 162) — in the Russian text “желание как можно скорее перевести на стихи шум любви” (*SSoch*, IV: 331). Hence, the source of poetry is once again described by turning to auditory metaphoric perceptions, which drift in the poet’s mind in a chaotic state until they are translated into the harmony of a poem. Furthermore, in the third chapter of *Dar* Nabokov devotes space to Fyodor’s early steps as a poet by describing his past experiments with prosody. These included the creation of a personal vocabulary of rhymed couples of words and the discovery of Bely’s metrical system, which profoundly influenced Nabokov’s own views on prosody. Overall, the passage is shaded with autobiographical tints in two ways: Bely’s impact on the young poet and the more mature poet’s somewhat ironic retrospect on his younger, still unexperienced self.³⁶

³⁶ According to Boyd, the autobiographical dimension of this passage is perhaps a little exaggerated in its irony, as it “ignores the queer charm his misguided efforts could have had.” Nabokov’s biographer praises the poem “Bolshaia medveditsa” (“The Big Dipper”), written “less than a month after [Nabokov] encountered the Belyan method” and “constructed to yield a metrical pattern in

Несколько позже монументальное исследование Андрея Белого о ритмах загипнотизировало меня своей системой наглядного отчисления и подсчитывания полуударений [...]; и с той поры, в продолжении почти года, – скверного, грешного года, – я старался писать так, чтобы получилась как можно более сложная и богатая схема:

Задумчиво и безнадежно
распространяет аромат
и неосуществимо нежно
уж полуувядает сад, –

и так далее, в том же духе: язык спотыкался, но честь была спасена. При изображении ритмической структуры этого чудовища получалось нечто вроде той шаткой башни из кофейниц, корзин, подносов, ваз, которую балансирует на палке клоун, пока не наступает на барьер, и тогда все медленно наклоняется над истошно вопящей ложей, а при падении оказывается безопасно нанизанным на привязь. (*SSoch*, IV: 332)

A little later Andrey Bely's monumental research on "half stresses" (the "comp" and the "ble" in the line "Incomprehensible desires") hypnotized me with its system of graphically marking off and calculating these scuds [...]; whereupon for the space of almost a whole year – an evil and sinful year – I tried to write with the aim of producing the most complicated and rich scud-scheme possible:

In **miserable meditations**.
And **aromatically dark**,
Full **of interconverted patience**,
Sighs **the semidenuded park**.

and so on for half-a-dozen strophes: the tongue stumbled but one's honour was saved. When graphically expressed by joining the 'half-stresses' ('ra', 'med*', 'ar', 'cal', etc.), in the verses and from one verse to another, this monster's rhythmic structure gave rise to something in the nature of that wobbly tower of coffeepots, baskets, trays and vases which a circus clown balances on a stick, until he runs into the barrier of the arena when everything slowly leans over the nearest spectators (screaming horribly) but on falling turns out to be safely strung on a cord. (*G*, 163-4)

These verses were translated with the main goal of replicating the Russian pattern of stresses and what Nabokov calls "half-stresses," partly indicated in the English text to help the American reader (I printed them in bold, and the regularly stressed syllables in italics). Hence, this translation reflects the main function of the Russian text – to provide the reader with an example of a carefully crafted poetic structure which nevertheless should ultimately sound clumsy and artificial. Nabokov managed to perfectly recreate the complex accents' scheme in the English text. If one joins the half-stressed syllables of both poems, one will obtain a complex geometrical form made up of two trapezoids and one square.³⁷ The content of these verses was not translated literally, and only the general atmosphere of

the shape of the constellation. Despite that formidable disadvantage it is quite a readable little poem" (1990: 152).

³⁷ For a more detailed commentary on the accents of the Russian version of the poem, see M. Lotman 1997.

an autumn garden was retained in the English text.

Nabokov finished writing *Notes on Prosody* in 1957, a few years before starting to work on the translation of *Dar*. Here Nabokov claims that in his youth he was greatly fascinated by Bely's work, but the essay is *still* strongly influenced by Bely's system. As pointed out by Gerald S. Smith, Nabokov deliberately chose to ignore the research of such scholars as Bailey, Gasparov, Scherr, and Tarlinskaya and remained "faithful to the memories of his youth" (1995: 565). Smith concludes that Nabokov's theoretical views on prosody were as conservative as his practice in poetry. Nabokov's primary task in this work was to explain to an anglophone public the principles of Bely's method: he even developed a vocabulary to express technical concepts used by Bely, which, however, as Smith notes, has never attracted specialists in Russian versification and largely remains a "solipsism" (1995: 564). Brian Boyd attributes Nabokov's fascination with Bely's system to his passion for recurrent patterns and schemes, thus linking it to a personal inclination that influenced his artistic persona at a large scale:

[Nabokov] believed that reality hides its secrets, that obscure details can form patterns of unfathomed meaning. Bely's mode of analysis naturally appealed to that side of his mind, and suggested ways of incorporating subliminal design into his own work. These methods were sterile and misdirected, but in his mature prose Nabokov would search for and find ways to harmonize unobtrusive details into patterns of covert significance. (1990: 151)

Recollecting and harmonizing details of the past into meaningful patterns is one the pursuits in *Speak, Memory*. Chapter Eleven is devoted to the description of Nabokov's earliest experience in versification and some issues related to Russian prosody. Curiously, this chapter is missing from the Russian self-translation of the book, *Drugie Berega* (1954). According to the author, this chapter was omitted "[b]ecause of the psychological difficulty of replaying a theme elaborated in my *Dar*" (*SM*, 12). Chapter Eleven does indeed thematically overlap with the passages from *The Gift* analyzed above.

It was first published as a separate short story entitled "First Poem" and opens with the author's recollection of a situation that triggered his first impulse to write a poem:

Without any wind blowing, the sheer weight of a raindrop, shining in parasitic luxury on a cordate leaf, caused its tip to dip, and what looked like a globule of quicksilver performed a sudden glissando down the center vein, and then, having shed its bright load, the relieved leaf unbent. Tip, leaf, dip, relief—the instant it all took to happen seemed to me not so much a fraction of time as a fissure in it, a missed heartbeat, which was refunded at once by a patter of rhymes: “I say “patter” intentionally, for when a gust of wind did come, the trees would briskly start to drip all together in as crude an imitation of the recent downpour as the stanza I was already muttering resembled the shock of wonder I had experienced when for a moment heart and leaf had been one. (*SM*, 217)

Boyd describes this episode as a “considerable stylization of the actual event,” since in *Speak, Memory* the creation of this poem is presented as something “sudden and unprecedented” whereas in reality Nabokov had already been composing verses for several years (1990: 108). The poem evoked in this passage, “Дождь пролетел,” was written “hundreds of poems” after Nabokov’s actual first poem, composed in 1914 (*ibid.*).

The fact that the episode represents a literary stylization, however, makes it no less interesting: it is another representation by Nabokov of the genesis of a poetic text, of its very inception. As pointed out by Malikova in the commentary to her Russian translation of this chapter (1997), this situation shares some traits with the one described in *Dar*, since both poets are inspired by an apparently insignificant event (a drop on a leaf here, a swinging lamp in the novel). And in this episode, again, the poet’s senses of sight and hearing are alert: he observes the details of nature and is mesmerized by a raindrop “shining in parasitic luxury on a cordate leaf,” shortly before the rhythmic patter of water drops and the rhymes of his first poem’s stanza.

In describing this experience Nabokov is also interested in its effect on the poet’s perception of time. Creating a stylized recollection of his first conscious aesthetic experience, the author attempts to represent its consequences on his self-perception, within but actually beyond or outside the regular flow of time. He likens this moment to a “fissure” in time, to a “missed heartbeat.” Like Demon Veen, whose heart “missed a beat and never regretted the lovely loss” (*A*, 12) at the sight of Marina on stage, the young poet’s skipped heartbeat appears as a small sacrifice, made for the sake of experiencing beauty.

Chapter 11 of *Speak, Memory* continues with a description of the effects of aesthetic experience on the poet and on his perception of time and space. First, the importance of consciousness is mentioned: poetry can be seen as an attempt to “express one’s position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness,” and whereas scientists see everything that happens in one point of space, the poet “feels everything that happens in one point of time” (*SM*, 218). This is a reference to the Nabokovian concept of “cosmic synchronization,” which is also present in *The Gift*, and can be generally experienced only by Nabokov’s favorite characters either in feverish moments of sickness or through aesthetic bliss.³⁸

After some reflections on Russian prosody and the young poet’s attempt to compose his first sets of rhymes (present in *The Gift* in even a “more technical” and precise form), Nabokov switches to the effects of verse-writing on the poet’s more “physical plane” (*SM*, 221). The narrator enumerates some states and “dim” actions of his body (walking, sitting, lying) while the mind is absorbed by the process of versification. In what is defined as “the walking stage” we see the young poet “wandering one moment in the depths of the park and the next pacing the rooms of the house” (*SM*, 222). These absentminded wanderings are strikingly similar to Fyodor’s nocturnal walk along a “non-existent sidewalk.” In *Speak, Memory*, however, the process is described in greater detail: the reader follows the poet as he enters a “trancelike state” and finds himself now “on a leathern couch” in his grandfather’s study, now “prostrate on the edge of a rickety wharf” (*SM*, 222). Significantly, in both books the stage of composition is marked by loss of the track of time on the poet’s part.

³⁸ Cosmic synchronization defines brief but important moments when the poet’s (or, in Nabokov’s prose, the character’s) awareness expands and transcends the boundaries of his own consciousness. Of the five devices listed in Jonathan Sisson’s article “Nabokov’s Cosmic Synchronization and ‘Something Else’” (in early writings, catalogue of remote activity, the juxtaposition of contrasting images, and the metaphor of metamorphosis, and, in later works, such as *Pale Fire* and *Ada*, apparent contradictions of alternative realities and the incorporation of increasingly complex other worlds, 1994: 155), this 1928 poem employs the “catalogue” of remote activity.

The final lines of the chapter also evoke the episode of poetic creation in *Dar*. Indeed, in both texts the experience of composition terminates in front of a mirror, where the poet observes his own reflection without really recognizing it:

Looking into my own eyes, I had the shocking sensation of finding the mere dregs of my usual self, odds and ends of an evaporated identity which it took my reason quite an effort to gather again in the glass. (*SM*, 227)

In this passage, like in the episode of Fyodor's night spent composing a poem, the boy lingers in front of a mirror and, having returned to a regular perception of space and time, sees an unusual reflection of himself. The act of "gathering" a previous identity is actually double here: adult Nabokov, who makes an appearance in the chapter "sitting in a lawn chair, at Ithaca, N.Y." (*SM*, 218) is recollecting and observing his younger self acknowledging the impact of aesthetic experience on his identity. The presence of the adult writer within the text reminds us that Nabokov's autobiography is also an experiment with what Boris Averin called "actualized" memory [aktualizirovannaia pamyat'], in which recollection is not a static result but a dynamic process experienced by the autobiographer in order to gather his past identity and grant it an existential status comparable to the status of the present moment (2001: 497-98). It is to this kind of memory that Bergson referred as memory *par excellence*, as opposite to memory as a bodily habit, which serves merely pragmatic purposes (1919: 95-96). The former kind, defined by the philosopher as "spontaneous" memory, stores images "that appear and disappear independently of our will" (1919: 97). Since "we perceive virtually many more things than we perceive actually" (Bergson 2007: 75), the brain is constantly shutting out from our consciousness things that have no practical interest for our lives. Hence, Bergson saw the human brain not as a storehouse of memories, but rather as an *instrument* of recall, selection and blockage (Toker 2013: 195). Nabokov once made a similar point on brain in a statement on memory and autobiography as a genre, distinguishing between the bad memoirist who "retouches" his past and thus basically exploits bodily memory, and the good memoirist, capable of using its spontaneous counterpart, like a painter who manages to find exactly the right

point on a canvas for a patch of color:

The Past is a constant accumulation of images, but our brain is not an ideal organ for constant retrospection and the best we can do is to pick out and try to retain those patches of rainbow light flitting through memory. The act of retention is the act of art, artistic selection, artistic blending, artistic recombination of actual events. The bad memoirist retouches his past, and the result is a blue-tinted or pink-shaded photograph taken by a stranger to console sentimental bereavement. The good memoirist, on the other hand, does his best to preserve the utmost truth of the detail. One of the ways he achieves his intent is to find the right spot on his canvas for placing the right patch of remembered color. (*SO*, 186)

Thus, a complete cycle of the composition of a poem is described in both *Dar* and *Speak, Memory*. In his autobiography Nabokov creates a stylized depiction of his youthful experiments in versification, whereas in *Dar* two separate parts are devoted to the topic of poetic creation: one happens within the unfolding of the novel's fictional present, the other is a series of memories from Fyodor's youth, not devoid of autobiographical elements in the passage about Bely's influence on his poetry. The cycle of poetic composition can be thus roughly summarized as follows:

- Inception phase: a necessary condition for the poem to occur is the artist's attention to the details of the environment, a heightened awareness of his senses. The triggering event can be as small as a raindrop on a leaf, a swinging lamp, a rhyme in a free flow of thoughts. There is in all probability Bergson's influence behind the concept of heightened awareness of human senses, which must be educated in order to be harmonized and fill in the intervals and gaps established by basic human needs (Bergson 1919: 46-47). By allowing us to perceive what is not essential for our survival, and thus running against the brain's tendency to skim the unnecessary, the education of senses promotes aesthetic experience.

- Aesthetic experience: the very moment of aesthetic bliss is when the poet's physical boundaries seem to dissolve and he becomes one with an external object: "the shock of wonder I had experienced when for a moment heart and leaf had been one" (*SM*, 217). The movement outside and back to the self is echoed by the swinging to and fro

movement of the lamp in *Dar*. This is but a brief moment, which, however, is powerful enough to completely alter the regular flow of time and a person's perception of physical space.

- Writing phase: in both *Dar* and *Speak, Memory*, the act of translating aesthetic experience into the words of a poem occurs while the poet is in a "trancelike" state. Time flows differently in this phase, whereas the composition of the text is likened in *Dar* to a conversation with an interlocutor. As seen in section 1.1.1, a poem is a text where form and content are intimately bound together and are born that way in the poet's mind. Moreover, the poet's interlocutors are previous authors and previous traditions in the use of rhyme, meter, certain themes or tropes. In the case of a young unexperienced poet, this conversation with previous poets can, however, slip into becoming mere imitation: as Nabokov recalls in *Speak, Memory*, when he only started writing poetry his "poor words were so opaque that, in fact, they formed a wall in which all one could distinguish were the well-worn bits of the major and minor poets [he] imitated" (*SM*, 221). Hence, like Fyodor in *Dar*, in his autobiography Nabokov looks back at his earliest practice as a poet not without self-criticism and irony, directed at the beginner's enthusiastic readiness to fall into the trap of imitating his favorite poets. The product of such imitation is an "opaque" poem, as opposite to the translucency of authentic art, which can allow a glimpse in a world beyond our own.

- Conclusion: when the text is finished, the author "tests" its sound by either reciting it to another person, as in *Speak, Memory*, or murmuring it to himself. The journey is concluded with the poet's return to the present moment and place, as he observes his reflection in a mirror and acknowledges the effects of aesthetic experience on his identity.

This representation of the process of poetic genesis is important in delineating the opposition between ethically conscious art and *faux* poetry that will play an important role

in the discussion of poetry in Nabokov's prose. The affinity between Nabokov's descriptions of the birth of a poem in *Speak, Memory* and *The Gift* underscores the discrepancy between this event and Humbert Humbert's attempts to try his hand at the art of versification. Incapable of authentic aesthetic experience, the narrator of *Lolita* uses literature for pragmatic purposes and produces examples of what can be described as opaque poetry, charades rather than works of inspiration. This opposition is crucial in understanding the nature of embedded poetry in *Dar* and *Lolita* and impacts Nabokov's approach to the translation of the verses attributed to these very different fictional poets.

3.2. Fyodor's Poems in *Dar* and *The Gift*

3.2.1. The Translation of Poetry in *Dar*

Written between 1935 and 1937, *Dar* tells the story of Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, a young Russian émigré poet who lives in Berlin in the late 1920s. Poetry and reflections on prosody play an important role in the novel. Anticipating what Boris Pasternak would do in his novel *Doctor Zhivago*, *Dar* includes poems attributed to its protagonist. These poems are not products of a static artistic personality: the reader of the novel, which can be defined as a *Künstlerroman*, is allowed a glimpse into several different stages of Fyodor's development as an artist.

Nabokov translated *Dar* following a methodology of collaborative translation that he successfully practiced in his previous novels and short stories. The collaborators (or "subtranslators," Hokenson and Munson 2007: 181) were to prepare an accurate literal rendering of the Russian text, which Nabokov thoroughly revised, corrected, and, when

necessary, modified.³⁹ Dmitri Nabokov translated the first chapter of *Dar*, but a scholarship for La Scala in Milan prevented him from finishing this work. The remaining chapters were translated by Michael Scammell, who collaborated with the author by correspondence. *The Gift* was published in 1963 by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The production of a literal translation, its subsequent revision, and modification give shape to what Marina Grishakova sees as a “triangle” made of an original text, a translation, and an edited version of the translation (2000: 313). The poetry of *Dar*, however, escapes this triangle, because it was largely translated by the author himself. Already while choosing Dmitri's substitute, which implied a test translation of the fourth chapter of the novel, Nabokov asked Scammell not to bother with the verses that open and close the text (qtd. in Leving 2011: 370). This, in all likelihood, is a consequence of Nabokov's dissatisfaction with the experience of collaborative poetry translation with Dmitri: Nabokov rejected Dmitri's versions of Fyodor's poems about childhood and decided to tackle them himself.

As some scholars concluded from a metrical study of Fyodor's poems (Lotman 2001; Schlegel 2015), stylistically speaking, these texts differ from Nabokov's own poetic production, particularly in their rhythmic pattern (Lotman 2001: 213-14). There is a degree of artifice behind Fyodor's poems, which results in their twofold nature. While they can be enjoyed as autonomous poetic texts, these verses are also the manifestation of a specific authorial intention. Fyodor's poems represent the evolution of his literary path, a continuous process that takes place as a result of his everyday experience and his reflections on poetry.

³⁹ During the revision of the literal translations, Nabokov often worked on the formal aspect of the text, amplifying the collaborators' versions “either through minute lexical changes [...] or through larger arabesques changing image and rhythm” (Hokenson and Munson 2007: 181). For more on collaborative translation see the 2017 volume *Collaborative Translation* edited by Anthony Cordingley and Céline F. Manning, in particular Olga Anokhina's contribution (2017: 111-30).

The poems attributed to Fyodor were composed in 1936, after Nabokov had already published several collections of poetry. Hence, as quite an experienced poet, he was aware of the initial difficulties a poet encounters on his journey of artistic maturation. Examples of Fyodor's work, with all their possible imperfections and faults, are therefore an important part of the character's dynamic portrait and are used by Nabokov to treat one of the central themes of the novel, namely the maturation of an artistic gift.

These verses' duality is reflected in the existence of two different forms of their publication: in 1938 they were first embedded in *Dar*, and, in 1979 they came out independently, as a sequence of poetic texts "from the novel *Dar*" in the collection of Nabokov's Russian poems published by Ardis.⁴⁰ Since the English translations were only published as a part of the American edition of the novel, the present study shall focus on the former type of publication, but will bear in mind the possibility of presenting Fyodor's poems as texts in their own right.

From the viewpoint of pragmatics,⁴¹ the status of Fyodor's verses in *Dar* is different from that of a "regular" poem. Poems that are published in collections of translated poetry, amid a sequence of other poetic texts, are often accompanied by other paratextual elements such as introductions or appendices with explanatory notes or first-publication data. Translations can be presented alongside the source texts, in an invitation to engage with the original versions of the poems. The poems of *Dar*, however, are so woven within a prose text that some of them even lack the traditional lineation. Furthermore, there is a greater distance between the source and target text of the poems in the American edition of the novel: these translations are not meant to be an invitation to the reader acquainted with the source language to use the translation as help in approaching the original Russian

⁴⁰ The collection was published posthumously, but, as reported by Véra Nabokov, the selection of texts was carefully prepared by the author himself (*Stikhi*, 3).

⁴¹ The reference here is to the semiological triad of Semantics, Syntactics and Pragmatics. This model encompasses a text's relationship with referents outside of it (semantics), scans for connections within the text itself (syntactics), and signs of its relationship with the "interpretive community," the target readership to which the self-translated poems are addressed (pragmatics).

versions. Quite the contrary: the translation must work autonomously in the target language and interact coherently with the rest of the novel.

Given the twofold nature of these poems, their translation must have been a challenge within the general challenge represented by the complexity of *Dar*. If in regular poems rhyme, meter, and register communicate the poet's cultural, sociological, and political affiliation, in addition to his literary interests, in *The Gift* these formal features can be seen as a part of the novel's plot, with the affiliation fictionalized.

The first part of the present section analyzes the poems from Fyodor's collection "*Stikhi*"; its second half is a study of the remaining poetry embedded *Dar* (with the exception of the sample of Fyodor's very early imitative poem). Such a division follows the chronology of Fyodor's poetic development, but also reflects a marked difference in the formal aspect of these two clusters of self-translations. The poems included in "*Stikhi*" were translated without the use of rhyme and can hardly fit into a rigid metrical scheme, as opposite to the remaining poems in the novel, all characterized by rhyme and meter. The translations that belong to the former group may appear quite faithful, while the poems from the second section could be attributed to the "free" approach to poetry translation.

Observed within the context of Nabokov's activity as a translator of poetry, this contradiction may seem puzzling: an unrhymed poetic translation from the early 1960s does not surprise, but why would the author switch back to the non-literal methodology for the remaining poems of *Dar*? The present chapter looks for an answer to this question by performing a comparative reading of Fyodor's bilingual poetry in order to see which aspects of the texts were privileged and which were sacrificed by the translator. By analyzing the role of Fyodor's poems within the framework of the novel, I argue that the self-translator's passage from free verse to rhymed poetry was not a switch in translation methodology but a deliberate stylistic choice.

3.2.2 The Collection “*Stikhi*”

3.2.2.1 Poetic Rhythm in “*Stikhi*” and “*Poems*”

The first chapter of *Dar* contains a would-be selection of texts from “*Stikhi*” (“*Poems*” in *The Gift*), Fyodor’s first published collection of verses. The Russian poems are supposed to be made up of twelve iambic-tetrameter lines without division into stanzas (unlike Nabokov’s own poetry, which usually displays a more traditional division). However, Nabokov plays with the length of the poetic extracts. The poems are embedded in Fyodor’s thoughts and some of them are reproduced in, as it were, a fragmentary way while their author is imagining a positive review of his booklet: sometimes as little as a couple of lines are “quoted.”⁴² Moreover, these pages include a poem which, though introduced as the author’s own favorite, was not included in “*Stikhi*.” It is a poem about butterflies, which Fyodor decided to keep for future use due to its relation with the memories of his father.

The poems attributed to “*Stikhi*” constitute a group that is separate from the remaining poems in the novel. This is both a thematic separation – all the poems share the core theme of childhood – and a biographic one. The poems from *Stikhi* usually depict a small episode or a common childhood situation that most readers can relate to, such as the loss of a favorite toy, the first bicycle ride, or high fever in winter. However, by evoking personal details with sharp precision, the poet transforms generic phases of a person’s childhood into something individual, concrete, and moving.

The author allows us to locate this fictional collection on a precise point of the timeline of Fyodor’s biography. These poems were written after Fyodor’s early experimentation inspired by the discovery of Bely’s system, but some time before such compositions as “Благодарю тебя, отчизна” (*SSoch*, IV: 242) or “Ласточка” (*SSoch*, IV:

⁴² The Ardis collection, where the very same fragments are published, confirms that Nabokov wrote only a few lines for some of the poems from “*Stikhi*.”

277). In Chapter 3 we read about the awakening of Fyodor’s talent, which occurred prior to the novel’s plot events. Here, having remembered, not without a dose of irony, the “workshop” of ready-made rhymes and imitative semantic pairings that filled his early poems, Fyodor realizes that the “first feeling of liberation stirred in him when he was working on the little volume *Poems*, published two years ago now” (*G*, 167). The poems on childhood thus mark an important moment of transition for Fyodor’s poetic career, from imitative to more original and personal poetry.

Since Nabokov attributed to Fyodor a profound fascination with Bely’s studies on Russian poetry, an application of Bely’s system to the analysis of the prosodic features of the poems collected in “*Stikhi*” may be helpful in understanding their rhythmic construction. Scholars have already tried to unravel the design of these poems starting from their rhythmic structure.⁴³ Bely’s studies were focused on the rhythmic variation in Russian verse, which arises from the possibility of not stressing syllables within a given metrical scheme in order to personalize the rhythm of a poem. For instance, in the case of iambic tetrameters, the meter of Fyodor’s poems, there can be seven possible “types” or “forms”:

Form	Accented syllables	Example
I	2,4,6,8	Туда, сюда, — но нет мяча. (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 197)
II	4,6,8	По четвергам старик приходит (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 202)
III	2,6,8	И снова заряжаешь ствол (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 201)
IV	2,4,8	Какая радость расцвела! (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 214)

⁴³ At least two articles have been published on this subject — Mikhail Lotman’s study included in the collection of essays *Nabokov: Pro et Contra*, and Joseph Schlegel’s 2015 article on Bely’s poetics in *The Gift*, where the role of these poems is analyzed through the application of Bely’s system. Lotman too applies that system in his overview of Fyodor’s poetic achievements, but the essays arrive at slightly diverging conclusions: according to Schlegel, the last poem of the collection is later approved by Fyodor because of its rich rhythm; by contrast, Lotman claims that the poem about the found ball has a different rhythmic profile, less modernist and more Pushkinian, thus anticipating Fyodor’s subsequent turn to the great Russian poet and his prose. Schlegel, however, supports his observation with the English text of *Dar*, which praises the rhythm of the English poem, not of the Russian one (the original text praised a rhyme, absent from *The Gift*).

V	2,8	В трепещущую темноту (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 197)
VI	4,8	Он обнаружился в углу (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 215)
VII	6,8	И велосипедист летит (Bely 2010: 221) И неосуществимо нежно (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 332)

The seventh form is complemented with Bely's artificially constructed example, because it is difficult to find in real poetry. It is followed by the line from Fyodor's youthful poem which only confirms that the use of the seventh form spawns artificial experimentation rather than actual poetry.

Bely's study of the history of Russian poetry revealed that each poet had his own tendency. For instance, mature Pushkin's rhythm was usually a rich one, as compared to Aleksey K. Tolstoy's patterns, whose diagram often shows a simple straight line running through the third feet of the text. Indeed, Bely noticed that half-accented syllables can be joined into a pattern, a geometrical figure, a diagram. He thus concluded that "poor" rhythms are usually characterized by simple, scattered figures such as lines or isolated dots. By contrast, rich rhythm has accelerations and decelerations that enliven the reading process and, ideally, support the meaning of the poem, enhancing the text's expressive power. In such poems, half-accented⁴⁴ syllables can be joined into actual geometric figures such as triangles, rhombs, crosses, roofs, squares, trapezoids, or stairs.

If one scans Fyodor's poems and draws their patterns according to Bely's system, one will notice their significant diversity. Three visual types of patterns emerge. The most frequent is a rich pattern with complex clusters of figures (usually triangles, trapeziums, and rectangles) joined by a line. This is the case with the opening poem of the collection: in

⁴⁴ Half-accented, or what Nabokov termed "half-stresses" in *The Gift* (146), arise from some intrinsic characteristics of the Russian language. For instance, monosyllabic words (such as pronouns, prepositions...) can have a weak stress that will be skipped when read within a sequence of other words. Moreover, Russian words can only have one stress, so when longer words are used in an iambic line (or any other binary meter) the syllables that should be stressed according to the meter do not receive a full stress but will be slightly accented by the reader who unconsciously expects the meter to be realized.

the diagram below (and the subsequent ones), squares indicate metrical feet; half-accented words are underlined in the text of the poem and correspond to dots in the diagram:

	Rhythm pattern	Russian text
1		Мяч <u>зак</u> атился <u>мой</u> под нянин
2		комод, и <u>на</u> полу свеча
3		тень <u>за</u> концы берет и тянет
4		туда, сюда, – но нет мяча.
5		Потом там <u>коч</u> ерга кривая
6		гуляет и <u>гро</u> хочет зря –
7		и пуговицу <u>вы</u> бивает,
8		а <u>по</u> года пол <u>су</u> харя.
9		Но вот выскакивает сам он
10		в трепещущую <u>тем</u> ноту, –
11		через <u>вс</u> ю комна <u>ту</u> , и прямо
12		под <u>не</u> приступную <u>тах</u> ту. (D,197)

In this text, which opens not only the booklet but also a circle that will close in the last poem, where the ball is found, there is every natural form of iamb, spanning from the first to the sixth. One of the poem's main interests lies indeed in its exploration of movement: thanks to a combination of rhythm, syntax, and vocabulary, the text's protagonist – the ball – comes alive and moves around the room, as if of its own will. Given the high degree of variation, the pattern of the poem results in a rather complex “rich” structure, made up of different geometrical figures separated by the only line with four realized stresses (l. 4). In his analysis of this poem, Schlegel rightly concludes that form and content work together to create, through a series of rhythmic accelerations and decelerations, the effect of the ball's escape (2015: 574). Especially interesting is the last part, where there is a gradual acceleration of the rhythm, represented graphically by a complex structure made up of triangles, two trapezoids, and a rectangle. This acceleration accumulates tension that, however, remains unresolved, as if suspended. The poker and

the candle were the boy’s helpers, to use Propp’s term, in the task of facing the darkness of the corners, but the happy ending is postponed: for now, the ball remains imprisoned in the unassailable fortress of the mighty sofa.

This example shows that, despite their apparent simplicity, the poems on childhood represent complex constructions in terms of prosody. In his translation, Dmitri tried to replicate their level of form and meaning but failed to convey the richness of the interplay between rhythm and message. Compare Dmitri’s version of the first poem with Nabokov’s self-translation:

Dmitri’s translation	Nabokov’s translation
<p>My ball has rolled in back of Nurse’s Commode; the candle’s lowered flame Tugs at the shadow’s ends, traversing. This way and that — the ball remains. And, afterwards, the crooked poker. Explores and clatters, all in vain —. It yields a button with its stroke, and Later half a toast obtains. But look — the ball darts out, unaided, Into the palpitating night, Spans the whole room, and stops blockaded. For good beneath the sofa’s might. (<i>Gift</i> typescript, 13)</p>	<p>My ball has rolled under Nurse’s commode. On the floor a candle Tugs at the ends of the shadows This way and that, but the ball is gone. Then comes the crooked poker. It potters and clatters in vain, Knocks out a button And then half a zwieback. Suddenly out darts the ball Into the quivering darkness, Crosses the whole room and promptly goes under The impregnable sofa. (<i>G</i>, 22)</p>

Since the translation was made in the early 1960s, it may be reasonable to suppose, as Yuri Leving does in his *Keys to The Gift* (2011), that in rejecting his son’s rhymed version, Nabokov was following his literalist dogma for the sake of semantic precision. In the comparison of these two translations, Leving argues that “[i]t is not difficult to guess what Nabokov did not like in the first translation, especially in the light of his own theory of literal translation” (Leving 2011: 400) and concludes that in his poetic translations Nabokov “does not care about the beauty and eliminates most of the rhymes in favor of semantic accuracy” (Leving 2011: 401).

Yet while Nabokov’s version of this poem is indeed more faithful than Dmitri’s rhymed rendition, Leving’s hypothesis clashes with the fact that the rest of the poems in *The Gift* are translated with rhyme and meter. Moreover, in the typescript of *The Gift*

Nabokov did not reject Dmitri's version of "Thank You My Land," the poem that follows the episode devoted to "*Stikhi*," and, as we shall see more in detail below, presents a simple rhythmic pattern. In the typescript, Dmitri translated only the first ten poems and fragments from "*Stikhi*." Nabokov crossed them out and rewrote them completely, while the remaining poems on childhood were handwritten in English directly by the author. However, when the narration switches back to the present moment and depicts the genesis of "Благодарю тебя, Отчизна," Dmitri's translation – also with rhyme and meter – reappears in the typescript and is largely accepted by Nabokov.

Both the typescript of *The Gift* and the stylistic features of the Russian poems on childhood encourage a different interpretation of Nabokov's self-translation methodology. The decision to translate the poems from "*Stikhi*" without rigid meter and rhyme was a stylistic one, and was not solely prompted by Nabokov's striving for semantic precision and fidelity.

This assumption can be tested against the poem about the found ball: Dmitri's translation is characterized by a substantial presence of regular iambs; half of the poem's lines contain four realized stresses out of four, while ll. 3 and 11 display a small variation (they begin with a trochee instead of an iamb), and ll. 5, 7 and 10 contain skipped accents. As Leving notes (2011: 400), while Dmitri's translation preserves the syntactic constructions of the poem, it modifies some words in order to fit the text into a regular metric and rhyme structure. For example, the phrase "the ball remains" translates the Russian for "there is no ball," which becomes in Nabokov's own version, more precise here, "the ball is gone" (Leving 2011: 400). By contrast, Nabokov's translation is rhymeless, written in free verse and devoid of a regular rhythmic structure. Nevertheless, its formal level is not devoid of aesthetic features. This is suggested by the translation's handling of the length of lines, syntactic and semantic changes, alternation of regular and irregular meter, sound repetitions and internal rhymes.

Dmitri's translation mirrors the harmonic structure of the Russian poem, three sentences each occupying four lines. The self-translation, however, shortens the sentences and increases their number to five: evidently, fidelity to the syntactic pattern was not Nabokov's priority. No stable repetition of homogeneous feet can be detected. There is however, a noteworthy presence of anapaestic feet which alternate with iambs and occasionally trochees (e. g., in l. 1: My ball has rolled under Nurse's commode; l. 6: it potters and clatters in vain; l. 4: this way and that, but the ball is gone, l. 9: Suddenly out darts the ball). The translation is thus characterized by the interplay of anapaest and departures from anapaest, which, in principle, could yield diagrams of their own.

The length of the lines in Nabokov's translation is variable, spanning from five to eleven syllables per line. This allows the translator to play with rhythm and to achieve other local effects. In the Russian poem, it is meter that defines the lines' length and establishes a rhythmic predictability that engages in a dialogue with the pattern of skipped accents. In free verse, to which these self-translation are akin, the length of lines varies according to the poet's expressive agenda. In particular, this poem starts with a long line: the enjambment between the first and second lines, maintained by Dmitri, is removed by Nabokov. As a result of this change, the text introduces the situation in a linear and quite prosaic way. The second line, a new sentence, mirrors the Russian syntax and is significantly shorter, in contrast with the first line. The last quatrain of the poem gradually increases the number of syllables from seven to eight and eleven, only to drastically decrease it back to seven in the last line, "the impregnable sofa," thus resolving the rhythmic tension created in the much longer previous line.

Nabokov's translation is mostly literal, while semantic choices that differ from Dmitri's version are often made in favor of accuracy: "on the floor a candle" is closer to the Russian text than "the candle's lowered flame"; "but the ball is gone" is also more accurate than "the ball remains." The choice of "zwieback" over "toast" does indeed sound less neutral and less American (as pointed out by Leving 2011: 400), while better fitting the

German setting of the novel. The “impregnable” sofa is more precise than Dmitri’s “sofa’s might,” but also contributes to recreating the same alliteration as the one featured in the original text: **п**рямо / не**п**риступную; **p**romptly / **i**mpregnable.

The self-translation is rich in sound effects such as alliteration and onomatopoeia, e.g. ball / rolled / floor / candle; potters / clatters / button; suddenly (which replaces Dmitri’s “but,” semantically closer to the original) /out darts (Nabokov inverts Dmitri’s “darts out” thus conveying suddenness and surprise) /darkness / under. Sound repetition often occurs in a marked position in a line – at its beginning or its end (see for instance darkness / crosses, button / zwieback / ball). These consonances, throughout the poem, create patterns of sounds that hold the rhymeless structure together and enter an interplay with speed variations.

While indeed more faithful to the source text’s content (I speak of semantic fidelity below), Nabokov’s free-verse lines establish their own rhythm and euphony, characterized, unlike Dmitri’s quite regular iambs, by variability and instability. A simplified syntax is in tune with this rhythm: the poem sounds more intermittent, and yet somehow more melancholy, with its simple short sentences that attempt to capture a childhood memory from a world that vanished.

Other poems in Russian present a similar pattern of rhythmic variation with a high diversity of iambic forms, but are self-translated with a more regular rhythm than the one featured in the first poem. Such is the case of the poem about illness. In this text, also rich in movement, high fever takes the young protagonist on a visionary journey on a sled from a St. Petersburg park to an exotic garden. The movement thus follows opposite and yet simultaneous directions: the sled’s increasingly rapid descent from a slope and the fever rising so high that the real world blends with an imagined place, as hot as the boy’s forehead.

In Russian this poem is characterized by a pattern of half-accented words with a long vertical line joining several figures:

	Russian rhythm pattern	Russian text	Self-translation
1		Влезть на помост, облитый блеском,	One climbed a sparkle-splashed platform,
2		упасть с размаху животом	One dashingly fell belly first
3		на санки плоские — и с треском	On the sled, and it rattled
4		по голубому... А потом,	Down the blueness; and then
5		когда меняется картина,	When the scene underwent a grim change,
6		и в детской сумрачно горит	And there somberly burned in the nursery
7		рождественская скарлатина	Scarlet fever on Christmas,
8		или пасхальный дифтерит,	Or, on Easter, diphtheria,
9		съезжать по блестящему ломко,	One rocketed down the bright, brittle,
10		преувеличенному льду,	Exaggerated ice hill
11		в полутропическом каком-то,	In a kind of half-tropical,
12		полутаврическом саду... (D, 207)	Half-Tavrisheski park. (G, 32)

The first part of the pattern contains two triangles with a shared base, a figure that recurs in Fyodor’s poems, as well as in Pushkin’s oeuvre, including *Eugene Onegin*.⁴⁵ Its second part (ll. 7-12), however, contains a complex cluster of figures that is strikingly similar to the one that closes the first poem. The difference between them is that the second trapezium becomes in l. 10 a rectangle and gives life to the figure Bely termed “lestnica” (staircase) and considered a harmonious pattern.⁴⁶ In Fyodor’s text, the staircase creates an acceleration that mirrors the content of the poem, where the last two lines efficiently synthesize the rapid descent into hallucinatory visions through an unexpected and alliterative juxtaposition of the snow-covered Tavrisheski park with a tropical garden. Thus, the rhythm is rich, but unlike Fyodor’s youthful poem, this text does not suggest experimentation at the expense of poetic quality.

Does the self-translation’s rhythm support the poem’s content as efficiently as it happens in source text? The translation showcases a more insistent undersong of

⁴⁵ Nabokov studied Pushkin’s half-accent schemes. He drew patterns on some pages of his copy of *Sochineniia Alexandra Pushkina*, including passages of *Eugene Onegin*, thereby applying Bely’s method: <http://pucl.princeton.edu/viewer.php?obj=st74ct10s#page/598/mode/2up> (the book is available on the website of the Princeton University Library).

⁴⁶ Bely found it in the form of a complex staircase in Fyodor Sologub’s work and in the form of a simple square in Blok’s poetry, but also in Pushkin and Lermontov.

anapaests and iambs than the one observed in the previous example. The recurrence of anapaestic feet becomes predominant: the first line contains two iambic feet (One climbed a sparkle-splashed platform), but the following lines are predominantly anapaestic (“one dashingly fell belly first/on the sled and it rattled/down the blueness; and then/when the scene underwent a grim change”). Again, an alternation of longer and shorter lines helps to experiment with the poem’s rhythm. The structure of the poem shifts between lines with three accented syllables (ll. 1-2; 5-6; l. 9) and lines where the number of accented syllables is reduced to two (ll. 3-4; 7-8; 10-12). The last quatrain opens with a long line with three accented syllables out of nine, and moves to lines of only two accented syllables, with the last one consisting of just two anapaestic feet. Ultimately, the target text’s rhythm does not result in a monotonous, limerick-like melody despite an increased presence of anapaests. In part, this is due to the absence of rhyme or of complete regularity, but the poem has rhythmic dynamicity also thanks to this pattern of variation in the length of the lines.

Two semantic changes affect the rhythm of the self-translation rather than its semantics. One is an omission, the loss of the epithet “плоские” that follows “санки” in the Russian text (Dmitri’s rhymed translation is more faithful here – it mentions the “flatness of the sled,” *The Gift* typescript, 29). The other, by contrast, is an addition to the poem’s fifth line, where the self-translator describes the “change” as “grim,” a detail that was absent from the Russian version. The new word contributes to establishing the anapaestic undersong by turning l. 5 into an anapaestic trimeter. Punctuation is also slightly different. Instead of the aposiopesis, the first sentence takes a break thanks to a semicolon, only to quickly restart and accumulate tension at the end of the poem, where another aposiopesis is replaced by a more decisive full stop.

The euphonic aspects of both texts support the content of the poem and create echoes between and within lines. Attention to sound effects is especially evident when the narrator introduces the poem and points to the an alliteration to enhance the image of sparkling ice, made of splashed and frozen water: “взнашивая ведра, чтобы скат обливает, воду

расплескивали, так что ступени обросли корою блестящего льда, но все это не успела объяснить благонамеренная аллитерация” (*SSoch*, IV: 207). The poem starts with a repetition of the liquid “l” consonant combined with “b” or “v” (“Влезть,” “облитый,” “блеском”). Similar sounds can be observed in the introductory comment, especially in the words “обливать,” “обросли,” “блестящего льда,” “объяснить благонамеренная аллитерация.” As a result, there is a sense of continuity between prose and poetry.

The Russian poem goes on to develop a pattern of consonances that combine into recurrent combinations such as “st” or “sk.” The first rhyme (“блеском” / “треском”) contains the repetition of the “sk” consonant pair, also present in “плоские,” and recurring throughout the poem (“детской,” “рождественская скарлатина,” “полутропическом,” “полутаврическом”). To these sounds, one may add the “st” pair that recurs in such words as “влезть,” “помост,” “упасть.” The final lines of the poem return to the liquid “l” in “блещущему ломко преувеличенному льду” and in the anaphoric prefix “полу-”(*SSoch*, IV: 207).

An even stronger insistence on liquid consonant characterizes the first lines of the English translation: “One climbed a sparkle splashed platform,” “dashingly fell belly,” “sled,” “rattled,” “blueness” (*G*, 32). The alliteration contained in the metaphor that marks the first line, anticipated by the narrator’s voice, works even better in the English poem: the repetition of “sp” in “sparkle-splashed” gradually moves on towards the repetition of “pl” in “-splashed platform,” but there is also a connection with the following line’s word “dashingly” through the /ʃ/ sound. Similarly to what occurred in the Russian text, prose and poetry become chained through these links of sound repetitions thanks to the sentence that introduces the poem: “Water carried up in buckets to **p**our on the **s**lide had **splashed** over the wooden **s**teps so that they were coated with **s**parkling ice” (*G*, 32). The translation also contains onomatopoeic words (“rattled,” “rocketed down the bright brittle”) that enhance the poem’s expressive power by creating a sense of rapid movement. From a

viewpoint of rhythm and euphony, however, the closing lines of the Russian text are more intense: the medial rhyme and several consonances carried by two long words are lost in the English poem, which only maintains the anaphoric repetition of “half-” and the “t” alliteration.

In the poems analyzed so far, rhythmic complexity peaks in the second sestet. In the poem devoted to the clock man, however, rhythmic variations are concentrated in the text’s first half:

	Russian rhythm pattern	Russian text	Self-translation
1		По четвергам старик приходит	On Thursdays there comes from the clock shop
2		учтивый, от часовщика,	A courteous old man who proceeds
3		и в доме все часы заводит	To wind with a leisurely hand
4		неторопливая рука.	All the clocks in the house.
5		Он на свои украдкой взглянет	He steals at his own watch a glance
6		и переставит у стенных.	And sets the clock on the wall.
7		На стуле стоя, ждать он станет,	He stands on a chair, and he waits
8		чтоб вышел полностью из них	For the clock to discharge its noon
9		весь полдень. И благополучно	Completely. Then, having done well
10		окончив свой приятный труд,	His agreeable task,
11		на место ставит стул беззвучно,	He soundlessly puts back the chair,
12		и, чуть ворча, часы идут. (D, 202)	And with a slight whirl the clock ticks. (G, 27)

The rhythmic profile of this poem is rich, showcasing all the existent forms of iambs, from the first to the sixth, but visually different from the previous examples in being made of three distinct and separate figures separated by the fully realized iambic ll. 7 and 11. A similar structure is also found in the poem about the bicycle ride (*SSoch*, IV: 213), where a complex cluster of figures emerges from the central lines, while two simple independent figures close and open the poem.

Here, too, rhythm supports the poem’s content. The most complex structure with a greater variation of rhythm is located in ll. 1-6 (two clusters joined by a “roof”), and indeed this part corresponds to the arrival of the clockman, and to the process of winding the clocks in the house. L. 7 separates this section from a less dynamic part, containing a

parallelogram and, after another fully realized line (l. 11), a simple horizontal straight line. Hence, the rhythm follows a decreasing tendency and becomes significantly more regular at the end of the poem, as if reflecting the outcome of the clock man's work — a ticking clock, — and supporting the generally calm atmosphere of this domestic scene.

The translation's rhythm maintains the anapaestic undersong observed in the previous examples. Many lines are anapaestic trimeters with iambic substitutions (such as ll. 2, 5, 7, 8, 11), and their length is less diverse than in the previous examples. The number of syllables per line is distributed more evenly, spanning from nine to six, but revolving around eight syllables. Three accented syllables are present in most lines, except for two shorter lines with two accented syllables (ll. 4 and 10). A distinguishing feature of this text is the presence of numerous monosyllabic words, such as "old," "man," "wind," "hand," "clocks," "house," "steals," "own," "watch," "sets," "wall," "stands," "chair," "waits." Some lines contain exclusively such short, everyday domestic words; as a result, the rhythm of the poem is that of brief, regular fragments reminiscent of a clock's tick-tock sound. The use of short words becomes an especially efficient poetic device in the closing line of the poem ("and with a slight whir the clock ticks"), where rhythm and content dovetail with each other. The syntax is in tune with the semantic field of familiar everyday vocabulary: it is so simple that it may appear slightly awkward. The central part of the translation is a sequence of simple clauses based on actions performed by the same subject ("he") linked, in most cases, by a coordinating conjunction.

The Russian melodic rhythm is supported by a distinctly elaborate pattern of sound repetitions, framed within a specific structure: the first lines emphasize the "ch" consonant within such words as "четвергам," "учтивый," "часовщика," "часы"; a rich consonance between "рука" and "украдкой"; an insistence on the "st" consonant pair: "старик," "переставит," "стенных," "стуле," "стоя," "станет," "полностью," which quickly moves on to the repetition of the syllable "pol" in "полностью," "полдень," "благополучно," before returning to "st" in "место," "ставит" and "стул" and the initial "che" — announced by

“благополучно” and “окончив” — in the final sequence of words “беззвучно” and “чуть ворча часы” (ibid.). As if reflecting the circularity of time measured by clocks, the sound play in this poem has a symmetric structure, starting and ending on the same sounds.

The prose passage that introduces the English version of this poem contains a new and slightly ironic alliteration: shortly before reciting this poem in his mind, Fyodor states that these miniature verses “with charms and chimes” (*G*, 27; in Russian “с брелоками и репетицией,” *SSoch*, IV: 202), will one day be replaced by “very different, manly words about his famous father” (*G*, 27). Here Fyodor already begins to manifest his awareness that this collection, while still cherished at the moment of its publication, is a phase of his art that is bound to be transcended. Nevertheless, within the self-translation itself the sound play is considerably poorer. There is some consonance in the diphthongs of “old,” “wind,” “hand” in the first three lines; a recurrence of “s” and “t” sounds in the next three lines: “steals,” “sets,” “stands,” “waits,” “its,” but, overall, the sound of the Russian text is substantially richer. In the translation, evocative consonance takes priority over other sound effects.

Fewer poems from “*Stikhi*” display what Bely would in all probability have labelled a poor rhythm. Such is the poem about watercolors (“Фарфоровые соты синий...,” *SSoch*, IV: 214), which contains the fourth form of iamb in half of its lines, and, when represented graphically, results in a long broken line with a small triangle and a solitary dot (the dot is a symptom of poor rhythm in Bely’s system). The English version of this poem features a fairly irregular rhythm, which, again, plays with the length of lines and words.

Quite different is the translation of another composition with a “poorer” rhythm, a fragment, actually, that is introduced following the poem about the lost ball and is devoted to a depiction of “sweaty games” (*G*, 26) with a toy gun. If the opening text of “*Stikhi*” evokes a series of brusque unpredictable movements with a ball, this poem is less about actions as about a pause of reflection amid the chaos that accompanied a children’s game. In this fragment, a regular alternation of the third and fourth iambic forms is interrupted

by an iambic tetrameter of the sixth form that closes the poem. If one joins the half-accent, as Bely suggested, one will obtain a vertical line that oscillates from left to right and stands firmly on a triangle at the bottom of the text:

	Russian rhythm pattern	Russian text	Self-translation
6	●	И снова заряжаешь ствол	...You reload to the bottom the barrel,
7	●	до дна, со скрежетом пружинным	With a creaking of springs
8	●	в упругий вдавливая пол,	Resiliently pressing it down on the floor,
9	●	и видишь, притаясь за дверью,	And you see, half concealed by the door,
10	●	как в зеркале стоит другой —	That your double has stopped in the mirror,
11	●	и дыбом радужные перья	Rainbow feathers in head band
12	●	из-за повязки головной. (D, 201)	Standing on end. (G, 26)

The English poem is not framed within a rigid metrical scheme, and yet is even more insistent in the use of anapaestic feet than the examples analyzed so far. The line “Resiliently pressing it down on the floor” (G, 26) is an anapaestic tetrameter with an iambic substitution; it is followed by two shorter anapaestic trimeters (And you see, half concealed by the door / That your double has stopped in the mirror). The opening lines are also written in anapaests (three and two feet, respectively: You reload to the bottom the barrel, / With a creaking of springs), while ll. 11-12 gradually decrease in length, accelerating the poem’s pace: the closing line is but a brief choriamb (Rainbow feathers in head band / Standing on end). This acceleration of the text’s initial regularly galloping anapaestic rhythm recalls the ending of the Russian text, where two skipped accents speed up the line. Neither version of the poem contains action verbs in ll. 11-12, as they represent a break, a static moment. In the translation, however, the closing line’s shortness marks especially well this final moment of stasis, prepared by longer and regular lines, contrasting with the motion and fuss of the children’s game (a motion/stasis opposition is a frequent feature of Nabokov’s prose as well).

The translation contains a rhyme (“floor” / “door”, echoed in “mirror”) and some assonant diphthongs in the final words of ll. 11-12 (“head band” / “end”) that enhance its

rhythmic regularity. The Russian text experiments with onomatopoeia and, again, interweaves prose and poetry when Fyodor's introductory comment anticipates a repetition of the consonants "z," "zh," "sh," "p," and "r":

Как удивительно такие слова, как «сражение» и «ружейный», передают звук нажима при вдвигании в ружье крашеной палочки (лишенной, для пущей язвительности, гутаперчевой присоски), которая затем, с треском попадая в золотую жесть кирасы (следует представить себе помесь кирасира и краснокосого), производила почетную выбоинку. (*SSoch*, IV: 201)

The same consonants will characterize the poem itself, onomatopoeic in its imitation of the actions performed by the boy to load his toy gun (in "заряжаешь," "скрежетом," "пружинным," "упругий," "видишь" etc). To replicate the onomatopoeia contained in this passage, the translation makes use of a transliteration of the Russian word for "battle" as if to preserve the sound of the original.⁴⁷ Moreover, it employs English onomatopoeic words with recurrent consonants "s," "r," and "p": "How remarkably the word 'battle' (*srazhenie*) suggests the sound of springy compression when one rammed into the toy gun its projectile" (*G*, 26). Similar sounds are found within the poetic composition, where, especially in the text's second and third lines one finds such words as "creaking of springs" and "pressing." The consonance is poorer than in the original, and yet it is there. Furthermore, as in the first poem, this translation recreates some recurrent pairs of strong consonants contained in the original poem: **скрежет** – **creaking**; **пружинный** / **упругий** – **springs** / **pressing**.

The alternation of regular and irregular meter can become an efficient expressive tool in the self-translator's hands. For instance, lines made of anapaests and iambs are used to conclude an otherwise irregular rhythm in the translation of the poem about the stove-heater. Following the poem about the clock man, this text — a fragment of eight lines —

⁴⁷ Transliterated Russian words would become an increasingly constant presence in Nabokov's mature English prose.

introduces another positive figure who works for Fyodor's family and brings warmth to the boy's room on winter days:

Пожалуйста вставать. Гуляет
по зеркалам печным ладонь
истопника: определяет,
дорос ли доверху огонь.
Дорос. И жаркому гуденью
день отвечает тишиной,
лазурью с розовой тенью
и совершенной белизной.
(*SSoch*, IV: 204)

Time to get up. The stove-heater pats
The glistening facings
Of the stove to determine
If the fire has grown to the top.
It has. And to its hot hum
The morning responds with the silence of snow,
Pink-shaded azure,
And immaculate whiteness.
(*G*, 29)

The poem is centered around the contrast between the stove's heat and "hum" and the silent beauty of the winter morning outside. In Russian, this fragment presents much rhythmic variation with iambs of the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth form, while in neither of these lines is there a complete realization of the metrical scheme. The first three lines are marked by two strong enjambments, which immediately create tension ("Пожалуйста вставать. Гуляет / по зеркалам печным ладонь / истопника: определяет," *SSoch*, IV: 204). By contrast, the second part — a description of an early morning — is characterized by a lyrical atmosphere and a more regular rhythm, which alternates the sixth and fourth iamb forms.

This effect is mirrored and even enhanced in the translation: the first three lines are also enjambed in English and written with an irregular, almost prosaic rhythm, that switches to a more melodic flow in the closing lines. A rhythmic shift occurs in l. 6, which describes the morning outside the boy's room. It is indeed an anapaestic tetrameter with an iambic substitution ("The morning responds with the silence of snow"). The same feet are present in the next lines, although with some variations (Pink-shaded azure,/And immaculate whiteness). Hence, the two versions of this poem use different poetic devices to express a contrast between opposite environments and emphasize the lyrical quality of the second, captured in English through a more regular rhythm in the passage devoted to an early winter morning in St. Petersburg.

Fyodor's Russian poems on childhood are characterized by rhythmic diversity and moderate experimentation with iambic forms and half-accents. This diversity is unlikely to be accidental; its function is to depict a phase of research in Fyodor's poetry. By writing in iambic tetrameters, Fyodor is consciously entering a classical tradition of Russian poetry: his imaginary enthusiastic reviewer wonders "есть ли еще кровь в жилах нашего славного четырехстопника"⁴⁸ (*SSoch*, IV: 213) but ends up congratulating the author on the virtuoso use of this traditional meter enhanced by all the possible subtleties of rhythmic variety: "его ямб, пользуясь всеми тонкостями ритмического отступничества, ни в чем однако не изменяет себе"⁴⁹ (*ibid.*). Iambic tetrameter is a traditional meter in Russian poetry, but in "*Stikhi*" Fyodor actively explores its rhythmic possibilities to try to support and accentuate the poems' level of meaning.

The translations proposed by Dmitri may have proven faulty in several ways, including semantic precision, but they also fail to fit in the novel's framework, where the difference between "*Stikhi*" and Fyodor's more mature poetry is important. The absence of meter in Nabokov's translations, on the other hand, underscores the boundaries between this collection and Fyodor's later verse. Nabokov's translations give up a probably unrealistic attempt to reproduce Fyodor's rhythmic experimentation with iambic tetrameters while achieving a good degree of fidelity to the content of the poems.

When studying poetry translation, one should bear in mind the tradition of the target language: the absence of a stable rhyme scheme is a far more common characteristic in modernist English-language poetry than in Russian. Free rhymeless verses, combined with

⁴⁸ "Is there still blood in the veins of our glorious tetrameter."

⁴⁹ "His iambs, taking advantage of all the subtleties of rhythmic variety, do not however subvert themselves in any way." The corresponding passage of *The Gift* displays many omissions for reasons of coherence, since the English verses are not written in iambic tetrameters: "One can argue whether it is worth while to revive album-type poetry, but one certainly cannot deny that within the limits he has set himself Godunov-Cherdyntsev has solved his prosodic problem correctly. Each of his poems iridizes with harlequin colors" (*G*, 39).

the simplicity of some poems, their short syntactic constructions, fragmentary rhythm, everyday domestic vocabulary, and absence of excessive ornamentation, may reverberate in the American reader's mind with the work of some modernist and imagist poets such as William Carlos Williams. In particular, the presence of a rhythmic undersong from which the poem's lines keep departing is an expressive device that is characteristic of English-language modernist poetry.

The undersong of these poems is predominantly anapaestic. In the English poetic tradition it is not unusual to introduce iambic, trochaic, or spondaic substitutions in anapaestic lines, but Fyodor's texts are more irregular and modernist in their rhythm.⁵⁰ Deviations from the anapaestic undersong diversify the rhythm of single poems, as well as of Fyodor's collection as a whole, defining its formal style. Sometimes, as it happened in the closing three lines of the poem about the stove-heater, the contrast between lines written in free verse and regular anapaestic feet occurs in lines that in the Russian text are also characterized by a rhythmic shift. More often than not, however, the self-translations do not mirror the rhythmic variations of the Russian originals but rather establish their rhythm by combining the expressive power of a whole set of different means of poetic expression, some of which only become available after the rigidity of a traditional metric pattern is left behind. These include different length of lines, as well as consonance, occasionally rhyming lines, changes in punctuation, interaction between shorter and longer words or syntactic constructions, as well as omission and addition of words to serve rhythm.

Thus, in terms of prosody, each translation represents a new text with its own expressive poetic features. These can sometimes reflect the meaning of the poem in a way

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Robert Browning's "How We Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix": "I sprang to the stirrup, and Jordis, and he; I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three" (1896: 250) or the numerous substitutions in the chorus in Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*: "Before the beginning of years/There came to the making of man/Time, with a gift of tears;/Grief, with a glass that ran;/Pleasure, with pain for leaven;/Summer, with flowers that fell;/Remembrance, fallen from heaven;/And madness risen from hell" (1904: 258).

that is reminiscent of the Russian version, as it happens in the experiments with rhythm in poems about movement (the texts about the lost ball and the sled). But the English poems can also establish a new relationship between form and content, as it happens, for instance, in the clock-man poem, which displays a simpler and more segmented rhythm than its Russian counterpart. One may thus conclude that the rhythm of the self-translations does not reveal an attempt to imitate each and every single Russian poem but rather speaks for the need to recreate Fyodor's fictional collection as a whole, a collection that continues to perform its function coherently within the novel's frame while addressing the literary competence of the new audience.

3.2.2.2 Semantic and Syntactic Changes

In the complex fabric of a poem's texture, semantic choices can depend on a variety of factors. In the examples analyzed so far, the choices seem to have been geared to a quest for lexical precision but also to the relation between rhythm, words' length, and euphony. As a result of the self-translator's attention to poetic sound, a preference for a synonym over its alternative may create such alliterative couples as "wavers and weavers" ("Oh that first bicycle!...", *G*, 38), "bright brittle" ("One climbed a sparkle-splashed platform...", *G*, 32), "flattened flowers" ("A writing case with my note paper...", *G*, 34), "Battered brimstones" ("The snow, gone from the slopes, lurks in ravines...", *G*, 36). Elsewhere, sound repetitions generate entire sequences of alliterative words such as "twirl tight the tip," ("Cells of white porcelain...", *G*, 40) and create echoes between lines thanks to such pairings as "blazed" and "bloomed" (*ibid.*) or "moth" and "mottled" (*G*, 36).

The present section, however, is devoted to the semantic changes that affect the meaning of the translations and generate divergences from their Russian counterparts. If one reads the Russian and English poems as bilingual texts, comparing them line by line, one will notice a tendency to preserve the syntactic structure of the originals and transpose vocabulary with a high degree of precision. Omission of semantic units is rare. Yet, as

anticipated in the study of prosody, precision and literalism do not emerge as an absolute priority, and some alterations are worthy of attention.

The poem about the games with a toy gun (“И снова заряжаешь ствол...,” *SSoch*, IV: 201; see p. 109 above), for instance, contains several lexical departures from the original. The syntax of the translation mirrors the Russian version of the text: the fragment recalled by Fyodor is made up of a single sentence with numerous verbs in the Present (or Present Continuous) tense linked by coordinating conjunctions. In terms of semantic precision, the self-translation (*G*, 26) is close to the original but not slavishly literal: “притаясь за дверью” becomes “half concealed by the door,” and “другой” who stands in the mirror becomes “your double.” This alteration produces a subtle yet not unimportant change in the perception of a key passage of the text. The poem ends in an almost cliffhanging way on the static image of the boy, spellbound in front of the mirror, staring at his own reflection. An oxymoron is present between the eerie “double” who stops in the mirror, as if of his own will, and the colorful cheerfulness of the rainbow feathers that decorate his head. Nevertheless, despite this costume of a “redskin,” the boy knows that the “double” in the mirror is his own reflection and lingers in this moment of self-awareness: in the self-translation the double is preceded by the determiner “your,” which somewhat clarifies the situation and creates a connection between the boy and the reflected image; in the Russian text, on the other hand, the boy sees an “other” in the mirror (as proposed in Dmitri’s version, which renders the Russian “другой” more faithfully), someone else, whose identity is not specified and who appears, for the moment, more mysterious, more alien. The rainbow feathers are thus not a disguise: on the contrary, they may be of help for the boy in recognizing the reflection staring back at him as his own.

The poem about the stove-heater (see p. 111 above) too contains minor syntactic and semantic modifications. Read within the narrative frame of *Dar*, the opening words of the poem abruptly awake Fyodor from his dreams. But the poem itself seems to start *in medias res* (“Пожалуйста вставать. Гуляет / по зеркалам печным ладонь,” *SSoch*, IV: 204),

which makes sense, since poem's opening lines were omitted by Fyodor. The Russian version of the text quickly suggests that the opening words are uttered by a servant: "пожалуйста" ("please") is a register characteristic of domestic employees. By contrast, the self-translation is more ambiguous, since "Time to get up" (G, 29) is a more neutral utterance and could be attributed to any other person in the house. Alternatively, it could be interpreted by the reader of *The Gift* as a part of the boy's early morning thoughts, as though in Free Indirect Speech. Dmitri's version was disambiguated by an addition: his translation started with the words "Time to get up, good sir," and was therefore less ambivalent than Nabokov's version (*The Gift* typescript, 23). The movement of the hand on the stove is also altered in the translation: while a "patting" hand describes a series of repeated touches with the palm of one's hand, "гуляет ладонь" evokes a continuous movement of a hand gliding over a surface. The English poem contains a minor syntactic change: in Russian the hand of the stove-heater is the subject, while in English it is the stove-heater who performs the action.

The second line of the Russian text contains the word "зеркала." When used to indicate the part of a stove, it stands not for the traditional mirror but for the sides of the stove that are shared with an adjacent room (see Dal's definition of "зеркало"⁵¹). By rendering this word as "glistening facings," the self-translation reveals that the stove was covered in a shiny material, most likely "израсцы," ceramic tiles that covered and decorated Dutch stoves, commonly used in Russian homes. At the same time, the self-translation discloses the polysemantic value of the word "зеркало" in the Russian text, used both in the most common sense of a shiny surface that reflects light and in the more technical use as a stove's side.

The last quatrain moves on to describe what is outside the room. It evokes visual and auditory perceptions, highlighting the opposition between the cold silence of a winter

⁵¹ Mirror of the stove, one side, edge, plain surface, that reaches through the walls to another room.

morning outside and the stove’s “жаркое гуденье,” translated in English as “hot hum,” an assonant couple of monosyllabic words that compensates for the loss of the Russian medial rhyme between “гуденье” and “день” in the next line. The English version of the poem, overall quite a close rendering of the source, specifies for the American reader that it is the silence of the snow that responds to the stove’s hum. This silence is associated with the pink and azure shades of early morning, generated by the beams of the rising sun entering the room through the (usually double-glassed) window.

Some transformations can trigger a slightly different interpretation of the target text altogether, disclosing or underscoring an important aspect of the source text. Compare, for instance, the two versions of the poem about Fyodor’s trip to the dentist:

Как буду в этой же карете
 чрез полчаса опять сидеть?
 Как буду на снежинки эти
 и ветви черные глядеть?
 Как тумбу эту в шапке ватной
 глазами провожу опять?
 Как буду на пути обратном
 мой путь туда припоминать?
 (Нащупывая поминутно
 с брезгливой нежностью платок,
 в который бережно закутан
 как будто костяной брелок.)
 (*SSoch*, IV: 205)

What will it be like to be sitting
 Half an hour from now in this brougham?
 With what eyes shall I look at these snowflakes
 And black branches of trees?
 How shall I follow again with my gaze
 That conical curbstone
 In its cotton wool cap? How recall
 On my way back my way there?
 (While with revulsion and tenderness
 Constantly feeling the handkerchief
 Where in carefully folded is something
 Like an Ivory watch charm.)
 (*G*, 30)

The syntactic structure of the poem involves a series of questions that describe the ride of Fyodor’s carriage across the snow-covered streets of St. Petersburg. The word selected by Nabokov to translate the term “капера” provides more information about the means of transportation than the general but exact noun “carriage” chosen by Dmitri (*The Gift* typescript, 25). A “brougham” is a light carriage with four wheels and a roof, and has British cultural associations, since it was named after Lord Brougham, a British statesman. The dentist’s appointment is so terrifying that Fyodor imagines how — within the relatively short time-lapse of thirty minutes — a new version of himself will be riding these very same streets. A different self will experience the same journey in a new, yet unknown way: this is what the anaphoric question “как буду” refers to.

The self-translation contains four questions and an affirmative sentence placed in brackets. The word order in the second line is unusual, as normally, the expression of time would have followed the place. By inverting the expected word order, the poet lays emphasis on the indication of time, fomenting the reader's curiosity about the events that are about to unfold. Indeed, if one takes the poem out of its frame and imagines being a reader of Fyodor's collection, the text may seem obscure: the solution to the mystery comes at the end, and yet is given in a somewhat indirect way that relies on the reader's sagacity and attention. The sentence in brackets, the only one to end in a full stop instead of a question mark, answers these questions and pictures the boy holding the tangible proof of his experience, a part of him now removed forever — hence the tenderness mixed with revulsion.

Dmitri's translation maintained the repetitive structure of the first two quatrains, rhythmically scanned in Russian by the recurrence of the question “как буду,” or, in his version by the anaphoric repetition of “how,” reiterated five times throughout the text: “How shall I feel, a half-hour hence? / How will my eyes these snowflakes greet, and / How at those black branches glance?” (*The Gift* typescript, 25). Nabokov's version, on the other hand, departs from the original: the questions the boy asks himself vary from “What will it be like to be sitting” to “With what eyes shall I look at these snowflakes?” (*G*, 30). These changes affect the formal level of the poem, diversifying its sound and rhythm, while also involving the levels of content and meaning. If in the Russian text the boy simply wondered about the way (“как,” how) he would look at the streets of St. Petersburg after the experience at the dentist's office, in the English text a new focus on a body part emerges. In wondering “with what eyes” he will look at the snow and the trees, Fyodor implies that his eyes will indeed be different. The painful moments, bravely faced by the boy, will alter his spirit and his body — different eyes gazing at the world, the old tooth in his hands. Ultimately, the self-translation emphasizes the core concept of the poem: the things Fyodor sees — the snow, the leafless black branches of trees, the curbstones, as well

as the carriage and the journey itself — are immanent entities, opposite to the observer’s dynamicity, symbolized by his ride across the city but actually involving an inner change.

Similarly, the translation of the poem that closes the collection (and completes the circle: the ball is now found) displays some rather significant syntactic and semantic changes:

Одни картины да киоты
в тот год остались на местах,
когда мы выросли, и что-то
случилось с домом: второпях
все комнаты между собою
менялись мебелью своей,
шкалами, ширмами, толпою
неповоротливых вещей.
И вот тогда-то, под тахтою,
на обнажившемся полу,
живой, невероятно милый,
он обнаружился в углу. (*SSoch*, IV: 215)

Only pictures and ikons remained
In their places that year
When childhood was ended, and something
Happened to the old house: in a hurry
All the rooms with each other
Were exchanging their furniture,
Cupboards and screens, and a host
Of unwieldy big things:
And it was then that from under a sofa,
On the suddenly unmasked parquet,
Alive, and incredibly dear,
It was revealed in a corner. (*G*, 40-41)

The division into two sentences is gone from the English text. Made up of a single long syntactic structure with several coordinate phrases, the self-translation is more continuous. In Russian, the first line contains an alliterative pair of words (“картины да киоты”) which the English poem reveals as a synecdoche: kiots are cases for icons, not icons themselves; it would not be unreasonable to suppose, reading the Russian text, that the owners of the house took the icons and left the cases, but the self-translation (“Only pictures and ikons remained”) removes this ambiguity and identifies the rhetorical figure in the original. The draft of this translation shows that Nabokov pondered two alternatives, “pictures” and “portraits,” but ultimately opted for the less specific and more faithful semantic option (*The Gift* typescript, 40).

Interesting changes are present in the third and fourth lines, where instead of “когда мы выросли, и что-то / случилось с домом,” the self-translator writes “When childhood was ended, and something / Happened to the old house.” To grow up — “расти” — is a spontaneous, natural process, but the English text states that the boy’s childhood “was” ended, and thus points at a more abrupt and traumatic event, at some external cause for

this change — presumably, Fyodor’s father’s disappearance. Another small addition is present in these lines: the house is defined as “old” in the translation. Thanks to this change, the house appears more fragile and delicate, in line with the atmosphere of a collection devoted to the memory of a childhood spent in a country that no longer exists.

The target text contains more alterations: the “unwieldy” things are also “big” in the self-translation — a bit tautological, but perhaps useful to convey the sense of heaviness that such a multisyllabic word as “неповоротливых” alone can evoke; the floor (“пол”) is translated with a more specifying synonym, “parquet,” and the ball is “suddenly unmasked” on it. The adverb is absent from the Russian text, but constitutes an interesting addition because it creates a textual link with the first poem, where the ball “suddenly” came out from under the nurse’s commode before disappearing under the “impregnable sofa” (G, 22). The Russian poem is, however, more euphonic and expressive in these closing lines: the word “обнажившемся” is more delicate than “unmasked” and has consonances with the words “живой” and “обнаружился” in the following lines.

Semantic changes in the poems on childhood are usually minor, but they seldom remove or omit information. They can, however, slightly alter or add bits of information, increase the precision of the text, remove ambiguity. There are passages where Dmitri’s translations appear more faithful than Nabokov’s own versions. In cases like these, where the self-translator’s authority clearly stands out, self-translations become a valuable lens for scholars and translators. Since the self-translator has access to the authorial intent that generated his text, the modifications he introduces can enrich or disambiguate our understanding of this text, as well as resolve a “standard” translator’s doubts. In some cases, semantic substitutions lead to a different interpretation or shine a new light on a passage, which is probably what makes it so important to read both parts of bilingual text.

3.2.2.3 Intertextuality and Translation

In the foreword to the English translation of *Dar*, Nabokov notes that Russian literature is the actual female protagonist of his novel (*G*, x). Indeed, a great number of Russian poets and prose writers are mentioned, quoted, parodied, or discussed in the book. Among them, Pushkin stands apart, and his presence permeates the whole text, becoming increasingly influential for the development of Fyodor's "gift." After a brief discussion of several examples of the loss of optional intertextuality in translation, the present section will discuss how Pushkin's presence was maintained in *The Gift* and in the poems attributed to Fyodor.

From the perspective of a translator, intertextual elements, such as allusions or parodies, represent case limits of translatability because of their intrinsic ties with the source text's language their literary system. According to Nabokov's own admission in the foreword, "[t]he participation of so many Russian muses within the orchestration of the novel makes its translation especially hard" (*G*, x).

Michael Riffaterre regards intertextuality as "an operation of the reader's mind" (1984: 142), due to the active approach to reading it usually involves. Until a literary allusion is recognized as such, it lies dormant within the hypertext. When it is unveiled by the reader, however, intertextuality sparks associations with the hypotext and expands the meaning of the newer literary text that contains it. In particular, Nabokov had a special awareness of the text/reader relationship, and, as scholars have noticed, he constructed "the text with a reader in mind by encoding in the text a set of reader-response expectations" (Shrayer 1999: 12). Hence, intertextual touches in Nabokov's works can be seen as further invitations to an active and attentive reading.

The story of a young Russian poet's artistic growth as told in *The Gift* cannot occur in a cultural vacuum. On the contrary, Fyodor internalizes the work of previous and contemporary poets, learning to select what is beneficial for his art and to reject what

seems bleak and stale. To make this process intelligible, the intertextual layer of the novel had to be transposed to the translation, despite its attachment to the Russian language and culture. According to Lawrence Venuti, intertextuality is virtually untranslatable, because even if a text containing an allusion is translated to another language, it “will not incorporate the specific cultural significance of a foreign intertext, the significance that derives from the recognition of a connection between the foreign text and another text in the foreign cultural tradition” (2009: 159). In particular, the movement of poetry from one national tradition to another endangers its intertextual layers, because the very nature of poetic language is intertextual, and as little as a few words can trigger meaning-expanding associations with other texts from the same tradition.

The translation of *Dar* caused some loss in the intertextual layer of the novel. Numerous examples of loss of optional intertextuality can be found in Fyodor’s poems. For instance, the closing lines of the poem about winter illness (“в полу-тропическом каком-то, / полу-таврическом саду,” *SSoch*, IV: 207) contain a reminiscence of Nikolay Gumilyov’s exotic wanderings, and, in particular, his famous poem “Жираф.”⁵² This literary association does not affect the meaning of the text, but it enriches its background and enhances its expressive power by linking the boy’s feverish wanderings with Gumilyov’s actual trips to mysterious countries. In theory, the reader of the English poem who is familiar with Gumilyov’s poetry in translation could associate its closing lines with the thematic cluster of exotic places that recurs in Gumilyov’s oeuvre. But in practice, such association is quite unlikely to happen spontaneously.

When a poetic image sparks intertextual associations in combination with a poetic meter, it is even less likely to survive the transposition of the text to a foreign language. An example can be found in the poem about the writing case:

⁵² “И как я тебе расскажу про тропический сад, / Про стройные пальмы, про запах немислимых трав” ([And how I will tell you about a tropical garden / About slender palms, about the fragrance of unimaginable herbs] Gumilyov 1998: 142).

Бювар с бумагою почтовой
всего мне видится ясней,
она украшена подковой
и монограммою моею.
Уж знал я толк в инициалах,
печатках, сплюснутых цветках
от девочки из Ниццы, алых
и бронзоватых сургучах.
(*SSoch*, IV: 209)

A writing case with my note paper
Is what I most vividly see:
The leaves are adorned with a horseshoe
And my monogram. I had become
Quite an expert in twisted initials,
Intaglio seals, dry flattened flowers
(Which a little girl sent me from Nice)
And sealing wax, red and bronze-gleaming.
(*G*, 34)

This text reports a process of recovery from the illness described in the previous poem. As opposite to the “transparency” (*G*, 34) of a feverish person, this text is couched in concrete detail. It is an enumeration of visual images, of material objects the speaker sees from his bed, starting from a writing case, in Russian “бювар.” The second part of the poem alludes to the author’s first romantic friendship by mentioning a girl from Nice, the sender of some dry flowers (this detail is not devoid of autobiographical features). There is in this text a careful attention to the objects that accompany the process of writing a letter, pleasure in seeing them and in remembering them “vividly,” but also tenderness in recalling the early romantic yearnings they accompanied. Some mild and gentle humor shines through Fyodor’s recollection of his first romantic correspondence (for instance, in the line “I had become quite an expert in twisted initials”). The opening word of the Russian text could then be seen as an ironic allusion to Khodasevich’s 1915 poem “Бювар,” also composed in iambic tetrameters and devoted to adult amorous turmoil. In his poem, Khodasevich describes the epistolary content of his writing case, where he keeps happy letters separated from the bitter ones by putting the former on the right and the latter on the left side of the case. Hence, the poem’s tender irony increases if the reader of the Russian poem finds a link between these two texts, a juxtaposition of adult sentimental drama and a boy’s first romantic friendship.

Some themes are prone to intertextuality more than others for their impact on a poetic tradition. Whereas in the poem about the writing case specific thematic intertextuality works precisely due to the peculiarity of the poem’s focus, a concrete

everyday object, other themes can be so recurrent in a tradition that they can trigger a whole cluster of intertextual associations. For instance, the poem about the stove-heater (*SSoch*, IV: 204) has diverse associations with works of Russian poetry, where there is an established tradition of verses devoted to winter and winter mornings with their silence and delicate light. The second part of Fyodor’s poem⁵³ contains textual reminiscences of poetry composed in the early Twentieth century, such as Innokenty Annensky’s text about “замирание.”⁵⁴ Taking a step back in time, the Russian reader will remember that Lermontov used similar shades and terms in his famous poem composed after a carnival party to describe a woman’s eyes and smile, and compare them to the early morning light.⁵⁵ But Pushkin’s 1829 poem “Зимнее Утро” (“A winter morning”), translated for Nabokov’s *Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev* (1947), is the quintessential poetic composition that —like Fyodor’s poem — elaborates on the contrast between the cold of the winter morning outside and the warmth of a room, where a sleepy person is still enjoying the comfort of her bed, while “Веселым треском / Трещит затопленная печь” (in Nabokov’s version: “with all its might / the hot stove crackles,” *PLT*, 37).

The problem with the translation of intertextuality is not merely a linguistic one. An allusion to another poem is not untranslatable *per se*, but even when we translate the passage that contains an allusion, the textual link between a hypotext A— written in the source language — and a hypertext B — translated in a target language — is likely to be left behind. The possibility of recognition decreases due to the text’s movement towards a new cultural and literary system. In poetry, intertextuality can be manifest at many levels

⁵³ “И жаркому гуденью / день отвечает тишиной, / лазурью с розовою тенью / и совершенной белизной” (*SSoch*, IV: 204). In English: “And to its hot hum / The morning responds with the silence of snow, / Pink-shaded azure, / And immaculate whiteness” (*G*, 29).

⁵⁴ “Зимним утром люблю надо мною / Я лиловый разлив полутьмы, / И, где солнце горело весной, / Только розовый отблеск зимы” ([On a winter morning I love above me / A lilac spill of semi-darkness, / And where the sun burned in spring, / Only a pink reflection of winter] Annensky 1990: 134-35).

⁵⁵ “Люблю мечты моей созданье / С глазами, полными лазурного огня, / С улыбкой розовой, как молодого дня / За рощей первое сиянье” ([I love the creation of my dream / With eyes, full of azure fire / With a smile as pink as a young day’s / First radiance beyond the grove] Lermontov 2014: 311).

(meter, rhyme, vocabulary, topoi), but in the examples above its presence was neither explicitly highlighted nor maintained by the self-translator. A thematic or textual allusion to “Зимнее утро” can hardly be missed by a Russian reader, but it can be missed by an anglophone one. Hence, optional intertextual elements discussed above are mostly to be attributed to the category of what is “lost in translation.”

Yet Pushkin plays a special role in Fyodor’s life and, as I intend to demonstrate below, his presence is retained in the English translation of *Dar*. In his recollection of the poems on childhood, Fyodor separates a poem about butterflies from the rest of the cluster: it was not included in “*Stikhi*” due to what Fyodor termed the “economy of art” (*G*, 36). This is because the theme of butterflies reverberates in the poet’s mind with the image of his lost father, which is, in turn, associated with Pushkin.

The connection between Fyodor’s father and Pushkin is represented in the novel’s second chapter. The chapter abounds in allusions to Pushkin, helping define the role of the Russian poet in Fyodor’s life:

Пушкин входил в его кровь. С голосом Пушкина сливался голос отца. Он целовал горячую маленькую руку, принимая ее за другую, крупную руку, пахнущую утренним калачом. Он помнил, что няню к ним взяли оттуда же, откуда была Арина Родионовна, – из-за Гатчины, с Суйды: это было в часе езды от их мест – и она тоже говорила «эдак певком». (*SSoch*, IV: 280)

Pushkin entered his blood. With Pushkin’s voice merged the voice of his father. He kissed Pushkin’s hot little hand, taking it for another, large hand smelling of the breakfast *kalach* (a blond roll). He remembered that his and Tanya’s nurse hailed from the same place that Pushkin’s Arina came from—namely Suyda, just beyond Gatchina: this had been within an hour’s ride of their area—and she had also spoken “singsong like.” (*G*, 110)

In this passage, a triangle is outlined: Fyodor, Pushkin, Fyodor’s father. The bond between Pushkin and Fyodor emerges as a physical one, a connection of blood, which therefore exists not only between a son and his father, but also between Pushkin and a younger poet. Furthermore, when Arina Rodionovna’s hometown is mentioned, the link between Pushkin and Fyodor enters a biographical dimension. In order to help the Anglophone reader, the text of *The Gift* specifies that Arina Rodionovna was Pushkin’s nurse, while omitting her patronymic. Fyodor’s own nurse is also mentioned in the

opening poem of his collection on childhood: according to Sergey Davydov, this allusion can be interpreted as an attempt to stress the importance of this figure and her link with Arina Rodionovna, who played a crucial role for Pushkin (Davydov 1995: 490). The continuation of this passage, rich in Pushkinian motifs, explores the relation between Pushkin's verses and Fyodor's father's voice. The focus thus shifts towards the auditory perception of poetry, poetry read aloud, recited in the fresh air of a summer morning:

Он слышал, как свежим летним утром, когда спускались к купальне, на дощатой стенке которой золотом переливалось отражение воды, отец с классическим пафосом повторял то, что считал прекраснейшим из всех когда-либо в мире написанных стихов: «Тут Аполлон – идеал, там Ниобея – печаль», и рыжим крылом да перламутром ниобея мелькала над скабиозами прибрежной лужайки, где в первых числах июня попадался изредка маленький «черный» аполлон. (*SSoch*, IV: 281)

In this passage, a specific sound, that of father's voice, is recalled with the help of Pushkin's 1836 poem "Художнику" ("To an artist"). In Chapter 3, Fyodor will recollect how his father would recite another favorite of his, Pushkin's 1826 "Пропок" ("The prophet"). Fyodor even imagines that the text of this poem may still vibrate "to this day in some resonantly receptive Asian gully" (*G*, 160). Pushkin's poems thus become a sort of imperishable capsule that aids memory in preserving the voice of a departed loved one. To remember a line from Pushkin's poem is to remember his father's voice. As if highlighting the importance of the original sound in poetry, the translation of the passage that quotes a line from "Художнику" provides a transliteration of the Russian text, as if to preserve the rhythm and the melody of the original, followed by a literal translation in brackets, which conveys the meaning of the quotation:

He heard his father on a fresh summer morning as they walked down to the river bathhouse, on whose plank wall shimmered the golden reflection of the water, repeating with classic fervor what he considered to be the most beautiful not only of Pushkin's lines but of all the verses ever written in the world: "Tut Apollon-ideal, tam Niobeya-pechal'" (Here is Apollo-ideal, there is Niobe-grief) and the russet wing and mother-of-pearl of a Niobe fritillary flashed over the scabiosas of the riverside meadow, where, during the first days of June, there occurred sparsely the small Black Apollo." (*G*, 110)

Both Pushkin’s poems “Художнику” and “Пророк” are mentioned in relation to the theme of butterflies, thus taking us back to Chapter 1 and the poem about early spring that Fyodor decided to save for future use. In the passage analyzed above, Fyodor plays with the twofold meaning of Apollo and Niobe, which can be interpreted both as names of Greek divinities and as species of Lepidoptera (see also Dolinin 2019: 168). To the text of “Пророк” there is an allusion in Chapter 2, where a description of Fyodor’s favorite wood meadow introduces a longer passage devoted to the butterflies of Leshino, his family country estate:

Божественный смысл этой лужайки
выражался в ее бабочках. Всякий нашел
бы тут что-нибудь. Дачник бы отдохнул
на пеньке. Прищурился бы живописец.
Но несколько глубже проникала в ее
истину знанием умноженная любовь:
отверстые зеницы.
(*SSoch*, IV: 315)

The divine meaning of this wood meadow was expressed in its butterflies. Everyone might have found something here. The holidaymaker might have rested on a stump. The artist might have screwed up his eyes. But its truth would have been probed somewhat deeper by knowledge-amplified love: by its “wide-open orbs” — to paraphrase Pushkin. (*G*, 144)

The Russian text contains an allusion to the line “Отверзлись вещие зеницы” (literally: “the prophetic pupils have opened,” Pushkin 1950, II: 340). As Vladimir Alexandrov points out, Pushkin’s hypotext is here employed to develop the theme of clairvoyance through the image of the “all-seeing eye” (1991: 118). To render intertextuality in English, the translation assists the target reader by adding a short explanation (“to paraphrase Pushkin”). The plural noun “orbs” maintains the solemn archaic tone of Pushkin’s hypotext, but the title of the poem remains for the reader to discover. The translation thus points at the allusion, but does not reveal its source in full, leaving some space for the reader’s competence, as does the uncommented Russian original.

Thus, the connection between three themes — father, butterflies, and Pushkin — that Fyodor’s poem about butterflies establishes will persist in the second and third chapters of the novel. Reminiscences of Pushkin’s poetry are present within the poem itself and deepen this connection. When Fyodor introduces the poem about butterflies, he claims

that “the air in the poems has grown warmer and we are preparing to return to the country” (*G*, 36). Indeed, the poem is devoted to the description of an early spring in Russia:

В канавы скрылся снег со склонов,
и петербургская весна
волнения, и анемонов,
и первых бабочек полна.
Но мне не надо прошлогодних,
увядших за зиму ванесс,
лимонниц, никуда не годных,
летающих сквозь прозрачный лес.
Зато уж высмотрю четыре
прелестных газовых крыла
нежнейшей пяденицы в мире
среди пятен белого ствола. (SSoch, IV: 211).

The snow, gone from the slopes, lurks in ravines,
And the Petersburg spring
Is full of excitement and of anemones
And of the first butterflies.
But I don't need last year's Vanessas,
Those bleached hibernators,
Or those utterly battered Brimstones,
Through transparent woods flying.
I shall not fail, though, to detect
The four lovely gauze wings
Of the softest Geometrid moth in the world
Spread flat on a mottled pale birch trunk. (*G*, 36)

Both on a textual and thematic level, a link can be traced between this poem and the opening lines of the seventh chapter of *Eugene Onegin*. Pushkin's verses are focused on a similar situation, the metamorphosis that occurs in nature after a long winter. Moreover, here too the poet is calling on his reader to leave “the indefatigable city” with its grand parties and return to the countryside “to hear the murmur of a park above a nameless river” (*EO R*, I: 253):

Гонимы вешними лучами,
С окрестных гор уже снега
Сбежали мутными ручьями
На потопленные луга.
Улыбкой ясною природа
Сквозь сон встречает утро года;
Синея блещут небеса.
Еще прозрачные леса
Как будто пухом зеленеют.
Пчела за данью полевой
Летит из кельи восковой.⁵⁶ (Pushkin 1950, V: 140)

The opening lines of the chapter describe early spring in Russia; they are echoed by a number of images in Fyodor's poem, such as the melting snow, the lively insects, and what

⁵⁶ Translated by Nabokov: “Chased by the vernal beams, / down the surrounding hills the snows already have run in turbid streams / onto the inundated fields. / With a serene smile, nature / greets through her sleep the morning of the year. Bluing, the heavens glisten. / The yet transparent woods / as if with down are greening. / The bee after the tribute of the field” (*EO R*, 251).

is actually a textual reference — “прозрачный лес” (transparent woods). The same pair of words was used by Pushkin in “Зимнее утро.” It is unlikely that Nabokov was unaware of the recurrence of these phrases in such landmarks of Russian poetry as *Eugene Onegin* and “Зимнее утро.”⁵⁷ Its use in Fyodor’s poem deepens the text’s thematic connection with the image of his father, who passed on to his son an admiration for Pushkin.

Nabokov’s own translation of “Зимнее утро”, a non-literal rendering of the source text, slightly different from Pushkin’s original, reverberates with the closing lines of the self-translation of Fyodor’s poem about butterflies:

"Зимнее Утро"	"Winter Morning"	Fyodor’s poem
Блестя на солнце, снег лежит; Прозрачный лес один чернеет, И ель сквозь иней зеленеет. И речка подо льдом блестит. (Pushkin 1950, III: 127)	Alone the gauzy birches seem to show some black, while green occurs among the frost-bespangled firs, and blue-shot ice adorns the stream. (PLT, 37)	Through transparent woods flying I shall not fail, though, to detect The four lovely gauze wings Of the softest Geometrid moth in the world Spread flat on a mottled pale birch trunk. (G, 36)

A comparison of these passages suggests that the airy atmosphere of Pushkin’s “transparent” winter wood may have contributed to the formation of the imagery in the poem Nabokov composed for *Dar*. While thematically the passage from *Eugene Onegin* matches Fyodor’s text, the scene described in “Зимнее утро” is distant from an image of butterflies in early spring. Yet, its translation can be read as Nabokov’s own interpretation

⁵⁷ After Pushkin, other poets also used the epithet “прозрачный” (transparent) to describe a wood. As pointed out by Fyodor Dvinyatin (1996: 238-40), the words “прозрачный лес” are recurrent in the work of Osip Mandelstam, a 20th century poet Nabokov read with attention and admiration. Some examples include the 1923 poem “Грифельная ода” (“Вода их учит, точит время, / И воздуха прозрачный лес / Уже давно пресыщен всеми” [Water teaches them, sharpens time, / And the transparent forest of the air / Has long been satiated with everyone] Mandelstam 2009: 134) or “Когда Психея-жизнь спускается к теням / В полупрозрачный лес, вослед за Персефоной, / Слепая ласточка бросается к ногам” (When Psyche-life descends to the shadows / Into a semi-transparent forest, following Persephone, / The blind swallow rushes to one’s feet, 109). The “transparent wood” is immersed in an otherworldly, cold and eerie atmosphere in Mandelstam’s poetry. Moreover, in the 1916 poem “Мне холодно. Прозрачная весна / В зеленый пух Петрополь одевает, / Но, как медуза, невская волна / Мне отвращенье легкое внушает” (I’m cold. The transparent spring / dresses Petropol’ in green fluff, / But, like a jellyfish, the Neva wave / Fills me with a light disgust, 92), which describe the arrival of spring in St. Petersburg, one can find textual allusions to the opening of *Eugene Onegin*’s seventh chapter.

of Pushkin's image of a northern wood in winter, with its leafless trees. While Pushkin does not explicitly mention any birch in his poem (a tree trunk always "чернеет," i.e. looks black, on the white background of snow), Nabokov's translation displays his vision of this passage, which contains "gauzy birches" that "seem to show some black." If this is Nabokov's interpretation of Pushkin's verse, then it is possible that this image had a (perhaps even unconscious) impact on Fyodor's poem, set in a transparent wood with birches.

This example can prompt some reflections on the methodology of translation of intertextual elements in poetry. Nabokov's "Winter Morning" was published in 1947, preceding *The Gift* by almost two decades. While it is unlikely that a textual link between the two translations was deliberately created by Nabokov,⁵⁸ his translations of *Eugene Onegin* and "Winter Morning" can function as actual English-language hypotexts for the translations of Fyodor's poem. Thanks to the translator, these seminal texts by Pushkin entered the American literary carpet and the link between hypotext and hypertext could potentially be drawn by the reader of *The Gift*. In this sense, Nabokov's situation is a special one: he is both the self-translator of a novel that contains allusions to a Russian poem, and the translator of that poem into English. Basically, he is operating within his own "Nabokovian" literary system created for the American readership.

Translation of intertextuality can imply cultural transposition or the use of explanatory notes that compensate for what is lost in translation. However, neither of these strategies suited the translators of *Dar*.⁵⁹ In poetry, intertextuality is especially hard to preserve. In *Poems and Problems* Nabokov will make active use of notes to explain

⁵⁸ It is, however, known that Nabokov referred to his *Eugene Onegin* when he translated allusions to Pushkin's novel in verse in his own works. Examples of this practice can be found in *Poems and Problems*, see section 4.4.

⁵⁹ Shortly before the publication of the American version of *Dar*, Simon Karlinsky had (erroneously) foretold the use of notes for the upcoming translation of *The Gift* precisely due the richness of literary allusions: "The complexity of the literary allusions in *Dar* is evidently discouraging to some readers and the new English translation will in all probability require explanatory notes" (1963: 288).

intertextual links, but in *The Gift*, where poetry is framed in a narrative, this strategy has no ready equivalent. Instead, the prose narrative itself compensates for the absence of such paratextual elements as explanatory notes, since prose is more malleable in a translator's hands: through such exploits as brief additions or transliteration accompanied by literal translation, the text of *The Gift* maintains the intertextual layer of *Dar*. Therefore, even if part of the intertextual load is lost in translation, Fyodor's poems remain immersed in this literary-historical context.

Thus, some priorities in Nabokov's self-translation process begin to emerge. Since it is impossible to create a perfect replica of a poem in another language, something had to be sacrificed. The abandonment of rhyme and regular meter is associated with characterization of a phase of transition in Fyodor's evolution as a poet. Having forsaken rhyme and regular meter, the self-translator gained a greater degree of freedom that allowed him to juggle with the regularity and alternation of different feet (mainly, anapaests and iambs), which, combined with other expressive tools, convey a sense of poetic experimentation and research, endowed with its own moments of failure and success, awkwardness and harmony. Framed within an imaginary review, Fyodor's poems on childhood are praised, criticized, scrutinized by the poet himself, as well as by other characters of the novel. Overall, the translations show concern with the aesthetic aspect of the target text, but this aspect serves the narrative frame, as a part of the *Künstlerroman*. Hence, as a comparison between Dmitri's versions and Nabokov's self-translations confirms, literalism is not the main purpose of these translations, and, despite a high degree of faithfulness, the level of meaning can get involved in the changes generated by self-translation.

The following sections, devoted to the poems written after "Stikhi," explore how the relationship between form and meaning will be handled by Nabokov in translations where meter and rhyme are recreated in the target texts.

3.2.3 Other Poems in *Dar* and Their Translation

Some of the many ways in which poetry makes its appearance in *Dar* have already emerged from the previous pages: prose is used to describe aesthetic experience and poetic genesis; Russian poetry is present in the form of allusion or quotation of the work of other poets; poetry is a topic of conversation and meta-literary reflections; finally, original poems are framed within the novel's text.

The poems analyzed so far stand out visually from the prose text that frames them thanks to traditional lineation. However, if one quickly leafs through the remaining pages of the book, after the portion of Chapter 1 that is devoted to the collection "*Stikhi*," one will see that the presence of regular poems with lineation decreases drastically: among these, we find the poems "Благодарю тебя, Отчизна," a few fragments, of which the longest is the quatrain "Здесь все так плоско, так непрочно...," the poem "Ласточка," and the sonnet that frames Chapter 4.⁶⁰

A number of poems is framed within the narrative of *Dar* in a more concealed way. Instead of standing out visually from the surrounding text, these compositions or poetic fragments are transcribed without lineation and emerge only acoustically thanks to their rhythmic pattern. As a result, a prose passage can puzzle the reader by suddenly turning into a sequence of iambic tetrameters.

The following pages will therefore analyze the remaining poems of *Dar* by following this categorization: as opposite to regular poetry, the boundaries of poems without lineation are blurred and require special attention and interaction with the text not only on the part of the reader, but also on the part of the translator.

⁶⁰ There is also the translation of a passage from Marx, lineated like blank verse. It is yet another meta-poetic game contained in *Dar*: ironically transcribed with the lineation that distinguishes poetic texts, a form that clashes with the totally non-poetic content of this text, the poem is actually quite a faithful transcription of Steklov's 1928 translation of Marx (qtd. in Dolinin 2019: 363).

3.2.3.1 Prosody in Poems with Lineation

After the imaginary review of “*Stikhi*,” the presence of poetry with lineation gradually decreases until complete disappearance: the last chapter (Ch. 5) contains no such poems. In Chapters 1 and 2, however, there are two important poetic compositions that display lineation. These are “Благодарю тебя, Отчизна...” (*SSoch*, IV: 242) and the poem published in the 1979 Ardis collection under the title “Ласточка” (*SSoch*, IV: 277; *Stikhi*, 312).

The rhythmic profile of these poems is striking for its simplicity, especially if compared to the poems on childhood. “Благодарю тебя, Отчизна...” is eight iambic tetrameters with only two forms of iambs, i.e. the second and sixth. If one draws its pattern of half-accents, one will obtain two triangles and a “staircase” joined by a long vertical line that crosses the first foot (see pattern below). In “Ласточка” Nabokov resorts to amphibrachic trimeters, a meter that was quite popular in Russian poetry, especially in the late 19th century. This poem displays even less rhythmic variation, with an accent being skipped only in the first feet of ll. 5-6. The marked difference in meter and rhythmic variation between the “miniatures” on childhood and Fyodor’s later poetry appears even more evident in the English version of the novel, where all the poems composed after “*Poems*” accommodate a regular pattern of meter and rhyme.

“Благодарю тебя, Отчизна...” is the first poem that we read after the collection on childhood and also represents the product of Fyodor’s aesthetic experience analyzed above:

	Russian rhythm pattern	Russian text	Self-translation
1		Благодарю тебя, отчизна,	Thank you, my land; for your remotest
2		за злую даль благодарю!	Most cruel mist my thanks are due.
3		Тобою полн, тобой не признан,	By you possessed, by you unnoticed,
4		и сам с собою говорю.	Unto myself I speak of you.
5		И в разговоре каждой ночи	And in these talks between somnambules
6		сама душа не разберет,	My inmost being hardly knows
7		мое ль безумие бормочет,	If it's my demency that rambles
8		твоя ли музыка растет... (<i>SSoch</i> , IV: 242)	Or your own melody that grows. (<i>G</i> , 68)

The translation is equimetric to the Russian iambic tetrameters, except for a variation in the opening line, which starts with a trochaic foot. If we look at the accents one naturally skips when reading the English text, we notice two lines written in iambs of the second form (ll. 4-5) and two lines written in the sixth (ll. 7 and 8), in addition to four lines that have a complete metrical realization. In the Russian text, there are some internal rhymes (see ll. 3-4, “тобою” / “собою”) whose presence can also be discerned in the translation (ll. 2-3, “are due” / “by you”).

The English version of this poem represents the result of a joint work of translation: first, the Russian text was translated by Dmitri in iambic tetrameters with the same alternate rhyme scheme as in the original; subsequently, Nabokov rewrote two lines and changed several semantic choices, but, overall, accepted Dmitri’s version. The final text is, therefore, a blend of collaborative translation with self-translation:

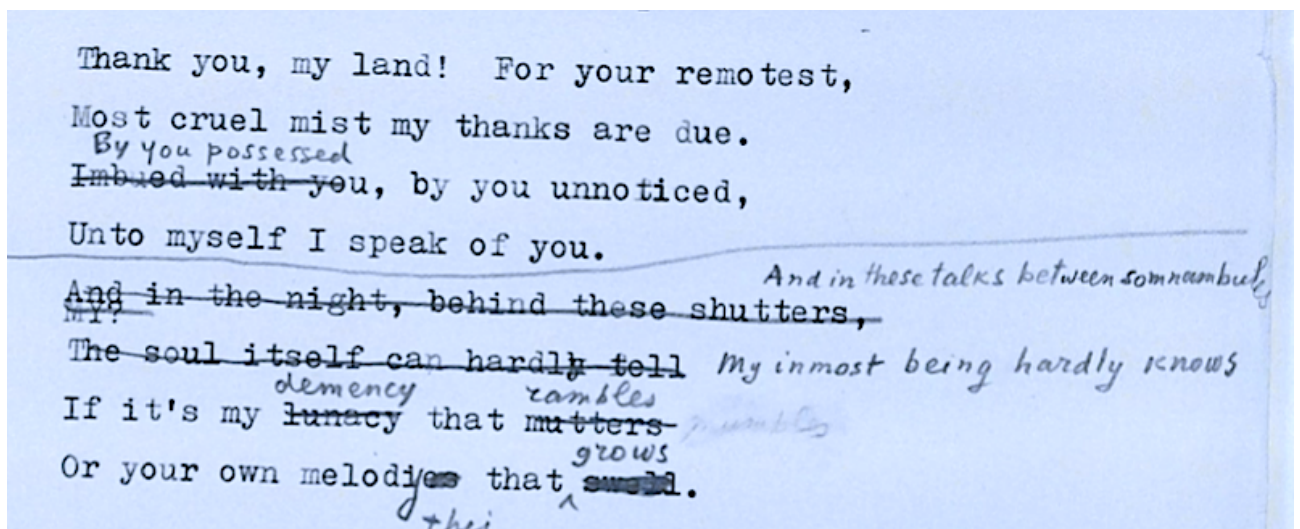


Fig. 3

*The text translated by Dmitri and revised by Nabokov.
Page 86 of the typescript of The Gift’s opening chapter.*

The poem was first conceived in a moment of inspired happiness and lifted spirits; hence its emphatic tone. But it was finalized after Fyodor uncovered the hoax of the positive review, hence its bitterness and sarcasm. In Russian, euphony reinforces these

motifs. The opening lines of the original are characterized by the repetition of the sound combination “da” (“Благодарю тебя, отчизна, за злую даль благодарю”). Present in the root of the verb “благодарить” and fleeting in “даль,” “da” is also found in the novel’s title, which points at one of its central themes, poetic gift; indeed, in Fyodor’s first flashes of inspiration, the opening line effectively used this repetition: “Благодарю тебя, отчизна, за чистый и какой-то дар.” However, after the party, “чистый дар” (pure gift) shifted to “злую даль” (cruel distance). This triple repetition of “da” recalls the first version of the novel’s title (“Да”)⁶¹ and has an impact on the poem’s tone, as the reader — perhaps unconsciously — perceives an affirmative answer concealed within these words.

This wordplay is lost in English, but the word “gift” is likewise present in the first “happy” version of the opening line (“And maddest gift my thanks are due,” *G*, 42). The final version of Fyodor’s poem expresses gratitude to Russia for its “cruel mist.”

The tone of both poems is fast-paced, emphatic and yet ironic. Since the poem evokes auditory input, both versions include onomatopoeic words: “бормочет” / “rambles,” which substituted Dmitri’s less intense “mutters.” In English, Nabokov stressed this tone by partly switching to a more archaic and solemn register with such words as “somnambules” and “demency.”

To rewrite this poem with the use of meter and rhyme also meant a better fit to the narrative frame. The moment of aesthetic experience that generates this text is born out of an alertness of Fyodor’s sense of hearing, a rhyme between the words “признан” and “отчизна” (which Dmitri recreated in “remotest” and “noticed”). More importantly, it is the rhythmic oscillation of a streetlight that aids the reemergence of the poem after the party. Indeed, the use of a disyllabic meter in the translation preserves the internal coherence of the novel, creating continuity between narrative prose and the poetic text: it

⁶¹ Dolinin quotes Nabokov’s private letters, where the writer confessed his initial intention to title the novel with the affirmative exclamation “Da! (Yes!). Later, he decided to add ‘a letter’ to the initial title, thus transforming it into something ‘blooming, pagan, even priapic!’” (letter to Zinaida Schakovskoy, qtd. in Dolinin 2019: 21-22).

is easy to imagine how a streetlight's oscillating to-and-fro movement in the wind reverberates in the poet's thoughts with iambic feet.

While "Thank You, My Land" is equimetric to the original, translations of the remaining poems with lineation resulted in a shift in the target text's meter. The poem "Ласточка" is in regular amphibrachic feet, each line making a trimeter. In Russian, an accent is skipped in the first feet of two central lines: "и ты отвечала еще бы! / и как мы заплакали оба" (*SSoch*, IV: 277). Within a long sequence of regular amphibrachs, even such a small variation has an impact on the poem's rhythm and contributes to emphasizing the poignancy of this moment. The aBaB cDcD⁶² rhyme scheme of this poem was maintained in the English text without the anaphoric repetitions.

The translation opens with an amphibrachic line ("One night between sunset and river, *G*, 106), but continues by switching to regular anapaestic trimeters (on the old bridge we stood, you and I, *ibid.*). As a bilingual poet and reader of poetry, Nabokov was aware of the different ways poetic meter can be perceived and used in different literary traditions. As he explains in his *Notes on Prosody*,

Ternary meters have thrived in Russia. Owing to the facility with which a Russian rhymester can launch a line upon a dactyl, Russian dactylic hexameters are not so repulsive as English ones, and ternary trimeters are among the most harmonious forms extant. The amphibrachic trimeter in English is generally intermixed with anapaestic lines. The purest example is probably Swinburne's, otherwise dreadful, *Dolores* (1866). (*EO*, III: 523)

Hence, the switch to anapaests may speak for the self-translator's intention to rewrite the poem in a meter that is more or less natural for the poetic tradition of the target language.

The "mediocre, but curious" (*G*, 312) sonnet that frames Chapter 4 is signed by an unknown poet, whose initial "F.," however, sounds quite familiar. Its Russian version is

⁶² Capital letters indicates a masculine rhyme, lower case letters are feminine.

made of iambic hexameters, a meter that is present in the tradition of the Russian sonnet:⁶³

Что скажет о тебе далекий правнук твой,
то слава прошлое, то запросто ругая?
Что жизнь твоя была ужасна? Что другая
могла бы счастьем быть? Что ты не ждал другой?

Что подвиг твой не зря свершался, – труд сухой
в поэзию добра попутно обращая
и белое чело кандалника венчая
одной воздушною и замкнутой чертой? (*SSoch*,
IV: 475)

Увы! Что б ни сказал потомок просвещенный,
все так же на ветру, в одежде оживленной,
к своим же Истина склоняется перстам,
с улыбкой женскою и детскою заботой
как будто в пригоршне рассматривая что-то,
из-за плеча ее невидимое нам. (*SSoch*, IV: 391)

What will it say, your far descendant's voice—
Lauding your life or blasting it outright:
That it was dreadful? That another might
Have been less bitter? That it was your choice?

That your high deed prevailed, and did ignite
Your dry work with the poetry of Good,
And crowned the white brow of chained martyrhood
With a closed circle of the real light? (*G*, 312)

Alas! In vain historians pry and probe:
The same wind blows, and in the same live robe
Truth bends her head to fingers curved cupwise;
And with a woman's smile and a child's care
Examines something she is holding there
Concealed by her own shoulder from our eyes. (*G*,
224)

A change in meter is noticeable in the translation: Nabokov rewrote the poem in iambic pentameters, the most traditional meter found in English sonnets. In both languages, the rhyme scheme — which follows not without variation the traditional form of a Petrarchan sonnet (Abba Abba ccD eeD) — undergoes a change and becomes more varied in English (ABBA BCCB DDE EEF), a modification that results in fewer echoes between the sonnet's lines.

Another important feature of this sonnet, however, is the way it is presented in the book: above, it is possible to see its final version, but the readers encounter the sestet first, and only at the end of the chapter do they get to see the opening octave. We are thus “forced” by the text to return to the chapter's beginning and recompose the entire sonnet.

⁶³ For example, Pushkin's sonnet “To a Poet” is written in iambic hexameters and reverberates with Nabokov's poem from a semantic and syntactic point of view. Pushkin's opening quatrain recalls the the sestet of Nabokov's sonnet: “Поэт! не дорожи любовью народной. / Восторженных похвал пройдет минутный шум; / Услышишь суд глупца и смех толпы холодной, / Но ты останься тверд, спокоен и угрюм” (Poet! Do not cherish your people's love. / The volatile noise of rapturous praise will fade; / You will hear the judgement of the fool and the laughter of the cold crowd / But you remain firm, calm and gloomy, Pushkin 1950, III: 155). Pushkin's poem ends on a sestet made of questions, which in turn abound in Nabokov's quatrain.

This poem is a circle within the novel's circular structure, framing a novel within a novel. With the help of meter and rhyme, the self-translator preserves this circular game with split parts: the traditional form guides the reader in identifying the poem as a sonnet and reconstructing it accordingly. This is one of the different ways in which poetry plays with the reader's attention in *Dar* and *The Gift*.

The changes in meter observed in the translations of "Ласточка" and the sonnet that frames Chapter 4 are not unusual in Nabokov's practice as a translator of poetry. For instance, he abandoned amphibrachic trimeter in translating Khodasevich's "Ballada" and rewrote it in ternary anapaests (VV, 347). Similarly, several decades later, Nabokov adapted Fyodor's poems to the English tradition.

3.2.3.2 Prosody in Poems without Lineation

In a chapter devoted to *Dar* of his book *Stikhi i proza v russkoy literature* (2002), Yuri Orlicki claims that Nabokov's experiments with rhythmic prose were inherited from Andrey Bely. But Nabokov took Bely's literary heritage a step further by enriching *Dar* with what Orlicki calls a rhythmic "трехголосие" (three-voice texture). This musical term refers here to the different ways in which Nabokov interweaves poetry and prose in the novel (Orlicki 2002: 517-18). In *Dar* poetry transcends formal experimentation and becomes an integral part of the novel's content: not only is the protagonist a poet, but it is almost as if poetry itself became another character, emerging from the novel's text, sometimes, as it were, randomly, sometimes with a manifest intention. Poems without lineation can present themselves as either finished poetic compositions or as scattered verses, bits and pieces of poems disguised as prose within narrative passages or dialogues between characters, amid Fyodor's thoughts. It is no coincidence that Bely's dactylic rhythmic prose is mentioned and even parodied in the novel:

В полдень послышался клюнувший ключ, и характерно трахнул замок: это с рынка домой Марианна пришла Николавна; шаг ее тяжкий под тошный шумок макинтоша отнес мимо двери на кухню пудовую сетку с продуктами. Муза Российския прозы, простись навсегда с капустным гекзаметром автора «Москвы». Стало как-то неуютно. (*SSoch*, IV: 338)

The passage⁶⁴ is both a homage and a dismissal of Bely's experiments with *prosimetrum*, in particular of his trilogy "Moskva," extraordinarily rich in rhythmic prose. The first two phrases are onomatopoeic and abound in sound repetitions (В полдень послышался клюнувший ключ, и характерно трахнул замок). The passage continues with a long sequence of dactyls, which, as Mikhail Lotman points out, end on the word "навсегда," before the actual end of the sentence (2001: 224). The rhythm of the passage is supplemented by sound play, and the recurrence of "sh" and "u" ("шаг," "тошный," "шумок," "макинтоша"; "кухню," "пудовую сетку с продуктами," "Муза," "капустным").

A distinguishing feature of such poems lies in the way they interact with the reader. In the description of this mechanism, M. Lotman observes that "as soon as the reader manages to notice lines written in iambic tetrameters, he feels the urge to return and read this passage in an entirely different way — as poetry" (2001: 222). Here, the return to prose is gradual, rhythm fades as if testing the attention of the reader, who will in all likelihood take a few steps back in search of the opening of this rhythmic passage and examine its metric qualities.

By maintaining rhythm and meter in the poems without lineation, the translators of *Dar* recreated this particular mechanism of text/reader interaction over rhythmic prose:

At midday the peck of a key (now we switch to the prose-rhythm of Bely) was heard, and the lock reacted in character, clacking: that was Marianna (stopgap) Nikolavna home from the market; with a ponderous step and a sickening swish of her mackintosh she carried a thirty-pound netful of shopping past his door and into the kitchen. Muse of Russian prose-rhythm! Say farewell forever to the cabbage dactyls of the author of *Moscow*. All feeling of comfort was now gone. (*G*, 169)

⁶⁴ Also published without lineation in the 1979 collection (*Stikhi*, 313).

In English, meter is less regular but displays a clearly discernible dactylic undersong, especially in the central lines of this passage (with a ponderous step and a sickening swish of her mackintosh she carried a thirty-pound netful of shopping). The onomatopoeic effects were also maintained thanks to the use of such words as “clacking” and “swish,” in addition to other sound repetitions (“lock,” “reacted,” “character,” “clacking,” “step,” “sickening,” “swish,” “mackintosh,” “she,” “shopping”).

The translation contains two additions in brackets. The shorter one, “stopgap,” is an attempt to imitate the syntactic inversion of the Russian text, impossible to replicate in English by placing the verb between a person’s name and her patronymic. The longer addition (“now we switch to the prose-rhythm of Bely”) belongs to the group of explanatory comments added to *The Gift* with the aim of clarifying references to Russian literature. In the Russian text, Bely’s surname is not directly mentioned: the reader is expected to be acquainted with the author of *Moscow* and to be able to recognize a parody of his characteristic style.

The same strategy was used in the translation of another passage written in rhythmic prose. This time it is Alexander Blok who falls “victim” of parody in the original:

Из темноты, для глаз всегда нежданно, она
как тень внезапно появлялась, от
родственной стихии отделясь. Сначала
освещались только ноги, так ставимые
тесно, что казалось, она идет по тонкому
канату. Она была в коротком летнем платье
ночного цвета – цвета фонарей, теней,
стволов, лоснящейся панели: бледнее рук ее,
темней лица. Посвящено Георгию Чулкову.
(*SSoch*, IV: 357)

She always unexpectedly appeared out of the
darkness, like a shadow leaving its kindred
element. At first her ankles would catch the
light: she moved them close together as if she
walked along a slender rope. Her summer dress
was short, of night’s own color, the color of the
streetlights and the shadows, of tree trunks and
of shining pavement—paler than her bare arms
and darker than her face. This kind of blank
verse Blok dedicated to Georgi Chulkov. (*G*,
189)

These lines, composed in iambic pentameters but written without lineation, contain an allusion to Blok’s 1907 cycle “Вольные мысли,” published with a dedication to the

poet's friend Georgy Chulkov.⁶⁵ The English text is likewise written in iambic pentameters that can be separated into nine lines. The boundaries of this rhythmic passage are easily defined. It is immediately preceded by another long poem (“Люби лишь то, что редкостно и мнимо...” / “Love only what is fanciful and rare...”) transcribed without lineation, but with a different meter and a rhyme scheme. Both this and the former example are indeed part of a sequence of pages over which Fyodor composes the longest poem in the novel. The account of the process of versification is interrupted by the narration of other events or other thoughts, including these examples of rhythmic prose. By collocating two different types of poetry (blank and rhymed verse), Nabokov highlights the effect of “трехголосие” and enhances the meta-poetic dimension of the novel.

Meter bears a significance in these parodic passages, and to reproduce it faithfully means to preserve the allusion to Blok's poetry. This allusion is, however, veiled: Nabokov seems to be aware of this when he adds a brief explanatory comment in Russian that both helps the reader and leaves room for the game of intertextual recognition. In the original, the note “Посвящено Георгию Чулкову” (Dedicated to Georgi Chulkov) tints this passage with a slightly humorous shade, as if signing the lines we have just read with Blok's name. Ultimately, it is here that metrical allusion turns into parody. The English translation unveils this allusion by revealing the author's name. Indeed, blank verse written in iambic pentameters has such a rich tradition in English literature that, without the clear reference, this passage could hardly have been spontaneously associated with Blok. The clarification turns these parodic lines in a pastiche that loses the humorous connotation and becomes imitation.

⁶⁵ Dolinin found a further intertextual layer in this passage. It may indeed contain an allusion to Khodasevich's blank verses from his 1920 collection “Путем зерна,” and the poem “Встреча” (“Encounter”) in particular. Dolinin backs up his claim by quoting Nabokov's review of Khodasevich's collection of poetry to the effect that in Khodasevich's blank verse one can feel “a vague influence of Blok” (qtd. in Dolinin 2019: 257).

In addition to “Благодарю тебя, Отчизна,” two more poems are created by Fyodor as a part of the events narrated in the novel. Unlike other verses scattered here and there throughout *Dar*, these texts are finalized, but nonetheless *not* transcribed with traditional lineation. The existence of these poems is therefore halfway between rhythmic prose and regular poetry with lineation.

One such poem, “Во тьме в незамерзающую воду...,” closes the first chapter of the novel. Following “Благодарю тебя, Отчизна,” it is likewise devoted to the theme of Fyodor’s native land, albeit in a different way. The previous poetic composition was inspired by a casual echo between two words and a swinging motion of a lamp. Here poetic inspiration reaches Fyodor because “through his deteriorating summer footwear” he starts to feel the ground with “extraordinary sensitivity when he walk[s] across an unpaved section” (*G*, 75), somewhat like Akakiy Akakievich, who felt St Petersburg’s cold wind passing through his old overcoat.

Hence, again, aesthetic experience is possible thanks to the alertness of the poet’s senses, this time quite an unusual sense: the memory of touching one’s native land with one’s feet. The poem’s thematic core is thus conceived: Fyodor wants “to express somehow that it was in his feet that he had the feeling of Russia, that he could touch and recognize all of her with his soles” (*ibid.*). The text begins to emerge in the form of brief flashes of single verses. The first flash is a paronymic combination between the words “Харон” and “паром”: when trying on a new pair of shoes, Fyodor thinks “Вот этим я ступлю на брег с парома Харона” (*SSoch*, IV: 249), translated not without loss of soundplay: “With this, with this I’ll step ashore. From Charon’s ferry” (*G*, 76).

When later Fyodor will look at his new shoes again, an iambic line will cross his mind. Here Nabokov plays with the alliteration of the consonant “b”: “он раздумчиво смотрел на блеск башмака. С парома на холодный берег” (*SSoch*, IV: 254). In English, the alliteration is successfully recreated with the sound “sh”: “he gazed meditatively at the shine of his shoe. Onto the cold shore from the ferry” (*G*, 81).

Following these small flashes, at the end of Chapter 1, the text finally emerges in its completeness. Through this poem, the narrator does not describe *how* aesthetic experience occurs, but rather *records* this process by introducing the verses of this newborn poem in a report of Fyodor's thoughts, as a part of his imaginary dialogue with poet Koncheyev:

«Еще бы! До самого конца. Вот и сейчас я счастлив, несмотря на позорную боль в ногах. Признаться, у меня опять началось это движение, волнение... Я опять буду всю ночь...».

«Покажите. Посмотрим как это получается: вот этим с черного парома сквозь (вечно?) тихо падающий снег (во тьме в незамерзающую воду отвесно падающий снег) (в обычную?) летейскую погоду вот этим я ступлю на берег. Не разбазарьте только волнения». (*SSoch*, IV: 260)

Oh, decidedly! To the very end. Even at this moment I am happy, in spite of the degrading pain in my pinched toes. To tell the truth, I again feel that turbulence, that excitement... Once again I shall spend the whole night ...”
 “Show me. Let's see how it works: It is with this, that from the slow black ferry ... No, try again: Through snow that falls on water never freezing ... Keep trying: Under the vertical slow snow in gray-enjambment-Lethean weather, in the usual season, with this I'll step upon the shore some day. That's better but be careful not to squander the excitement.” (*G*, 87)

On the level of sound, the separation between poetry and prose occurs, again, thanks to the presence of rhythm and meter. Since the final text of the poem is not transcribed with lineation in the novel, it is up to the reader to discard the wrong alternatives and reconstruct the composition as follows:

Во тьме в незамерзающую воду,
 сквозь тихо падающий снег,
 в обычную летейскую погоду
 вот этим я ступлю на берег.
 И к пристающему парому
 сук тянется, и медленным багром
 паромщик тянется к суку сырому
 и медленно вращается паром.

Through snow that falls on water never freezing
 Under the vertical slow snow in gray
 Lethean weather, in the usual season,
 with this I'll step upon the shore some day.
 And now a crooked bough looms near the ferry,
 and Charon with his boathook, in the dark,
 reaches for it, and catches it, and very
 slowly the bark revolves, the silent bark.

In Russian, the final version of the poem was published with lineation in the Ardis collection (*Stikhi*, 312). The alternation between iambic pentameters (ll. 1, 3, 5, 7) and iambic tetrameters (ll. 2, 4, 6, 8) diversifies its rhythm. In English, meter undergoes a simplification: the whole poem is written in iambic tetrameters, with an aBaBcDcD rhyme scheme that replicates the Russian counterpart.

Rhythmic uniformity, however, is disrupted by the introduction of two strong enjambments, absent from the Russian text: “Under the vertical slow snow in gray-enjambment-Lethean weather, in the usual season” (*G*, 87). In the poem’s second half, between ll. 7 and 8, there is another strong enjambment. Here the Russian text plays with the anaphoric repetition of the words “сук,” “тянется,” “медленно,” “паром” / “паромщик” that recur in the poem’s closing lines. In the translation, these lines are completely restructured and represent an accelerated enumeration of actions performed by Charon. The enjambment is therefore functional: it creates tension after this dynamic sequence of actions, shortly before closing the poem with a line devoted to the bark’s heavy and slow movement. Overall, the effect of the enjambment is an increased rhythmic dynamicity, which partly compensates for the loss of alternating meter in the Russian poem.

The third poem composed by Fyodor in *Dar* is the long text “Люби лишь то, что редкостно и мнимо,” dedicated to Zina Mertz. Many seminal themes are explored in this poem, including artistic creation, inspiration, distant journeys, romantic love. Stephen Blackwell (1999) pointed at the emergence of another important theme in the closing lines of this poem, namely the dissolution of boundaries:

Ожидание ее прихода. Она всегда опаздывала – и всегда приходила другой дорогой, чем он. Вот и получилось, что даже Берлин может быть таинственным. Под липовым цветением мигает фонарь. Темно, душисто, тихо. Тень прохожего по тумбе пробегает, как соболев пробегает через пеню. За пустырем как персик небо тает: вода в огнях, Венеция сквозит, – а улица кончается в Китае, а та звезда над Волгою висит. О, поклянись, что веришь в небылицу, что будешь только вымыслу верна, что не запрешь души своей в темницу, не скажешь, руку протянув: стена. (*SSoch*, IV: 357)

Waiting for her arrival. She was always late – and always came by another road than he. Thus it transpired that even Berlin could be mysterious. Within the linden’s bloom the streetlight winks. A dark and honeyed hush envelops us. Across the curb one’s passing shadow slinks: across a stump a sable ripples thus. The night sky melts to peach beyond that gate. There water gleams, there Venice vaguely shows. Look at that street—it runs to China straight, and yonder star above the Volga glows! Oh, swear to me to put in dreams your trust, and to believe in fantasy alone, and never let your soul in prison rust, nor stretch your arm and say: a wall of stone. (*G*, 189)

This passage revolves around the central image of a star, which “transcends the dividing space between all the locales” named in the text (Blackwell 1999: 620). At the same time, the poetic composition itself transcends boundaries, the boundaries between prose and poetry: when a part of this poem emerges from prosaic narration, the reader may not capture the transition immediately and find him- or herself enthralled in a web of rhymed iambic pentameters (in both texts, rhyme follows an aBaB scheme). The reader first goes through a stretch of rhythmic prose, and in a later moment realizes that this is the final part of Fyodor’s long poem. Now the reader is invited to backtrack. Thus, as Blackwell rightly notes, the process of the poem’s reemergence out of the novel’s pages reflects Fyodor’s very efforts to transcribe his poems (1999: 621). The presentation of the poem, concealed between pages of prose narration, becomes the formal expression of its theme of boundaries. Moreover, Fyodor’s poetic endeavor crosses the boundaries of the novel and becomes reflected in the experience of the reader, who needs to put the poem’s pieces together in order to reconstruct its final form.

In *The Gift*, a possible solution to the need to highlight the embedded poems, regardless of the presence of rhyme and meter, could have been to reintroduce lineation (a strategy Nabokov will sometimes adopt in the Russian *Lolita*). However, all the poems presented without lineation in *Dar* are likewise devoid of lineation in English.⁶⁶

In view of Nabokov’s theory of literal translation, his choice to recreate meter and rhyme in Fyodor’s poems that follow “*Stikhi*” is not self-evident. As far as the poems with traditional lineation are concerned, meter and rhyme aid the representation of Fyodor’s evolution as a young poet. As to the poems without lineation, the decision to translate them with meter and rhyme speaks for the complex role these verses play in the novel. A sudden passage from prose to poetry can be used to represent a moment of poetic

⁶⁶ With the sole exception of the Kirghiz legend (*SSoch*, IV: 317 and *G*, 146).

inspiration, or to achieve an ironic effect by parodying the work of a previous author. Thus, enabling the target reader to perceive the “трехголосие” emerges as a priority in *The Gift*.

Moreover, form in Fyodor’s poems can have an intertextual facet. The meter of a poem can become an essential component of a literary allusion, parody, or pastiche. Both *Dar* and *The Gift* end on an Onegin stanza without lineation, that replicates Pushkin’s aBaBccDDeFFeGG rhyme scheme. These lines conceal an invitation to re-read the novel, in a way that is reminiscent of the mechanism of *Dar*’s rhythmic prose, which also invites the audience to a repeated reading.

3.2.3.3 Content Changes

In the present section I study the translations of Fyodor’s poems not only as interlingual translations but also as authorial rewritings of the same text in another language, which complement the previous Russian poems. If one reads the translated poems alongside their Russian counterparts, one will notice that three main kinds of operation influence the content of the target texts: shifts within the text, addition of new words, and modification or substitution of single words or entire lines of a poem. However, any semantic or syntactic operation within a poetic text influences the poem’s formal features. I shall therefore start with an interpretation of the meanings of the target text in comparison while also observing the aesthetic quality of the alterations.

The agenda of fitting the translation into a metrical pattern is often the underlying cause for the addition of new words. This phenomenon has been observed in the poems on childhood, where it is associated with an attempt to create a rhythmic undersong. Sometimes these additions are single words and minor details, but they can still impact the interpretation of the text’s central image or theme. For example, in Chapter 2, the English version of the poem “Ласточка” contains a few additions that elucidate some key passages of the Russian text:

Однажды мы под вечер оба
 стояли на старом мосту.
 Скажи мне, спросил я, до гроба
 запомнишь – вон ласточку ту?
 И ты отвечала: еще бы!
 И как мы заплакали оба,
 как вскрикнула жизнь на лету...
 До завтра, навеки, до гроба, —
 однажды, на старом мосту... (SSoch, IV: 227)

One night between sunset and river
 On the old bridge we stood, you and I.
 Will you ever forget it, I queried,
 —That particular swift that went by?
 And you answered, so earnestly: Never!
 And what sobs made us suddenly shiver,
 What a cry life emitted in flight!
 Till we die, till tomorrow, for ever,
 You and I on the old bridge one night. (G, 106)

The first major addition occurs in the first line, where instead of the more generic Russian “под вечер,”⁶⁷ the English text sets the episode in a more precise location and moment, at sunset. By suspending the young couple “between sunset and river” on an old bridge (an elegiac place, often foreshadowing separation) the translator highlights their stasis in opposition to the environment — the setting sun, the flowing river. Thus, preparations are made for the following contrast between the immobile couple and the quickly skimming swallows they observe in the sky.

Another addition is found in l. 5, which corresponds to a central moment of the episode narrated in the poem. In the Russian text, the boy asks the girl whether she will always remember “вон ласточку ту” — literally, “that swallow over there.” In the English text, however, he asks if she will ever forget “that particular swift that went by.” The self-translation thus expands the words uttered by the boy and clarifies the meaning of the central image: he asks the girl to remember not a generic but a very concrete swift that skimmed by at a particular moment, a moment that will never come back but will always be cherished in the memory of the couple.

Shortly after having finished the revision of *The Gift*, in a 1962 interview he gave to the BBC, Nabokov explained this concept:

⁶⁷ As Efremova’s dictionary explains, this expression indicates a moment “before evening, close to evening”. Source: https://www.efremova.info/word/pod_vecher.html (accessed January 22, 2020).

There are two persons involved, a boy and a girl, standing on a bridge above the reflected sunset, and there are swallows skimming by, and the boy turns to the girl and says to her, “Tell me, will you always remember that swallow? — not any kind of swallow, not those swallows, there, but that particular swallow that skimmed by?” And she says, “Of course I will,” and they both burst into tears. (SO, 14)

Nabokov’s words reverberate with the English version of the poem, including ll. 4-5, which now clearly stand out as central to the understanding of the text. Besides, the girl’s promise to remember the swallow “до гроба,” or, in English, “never” to forget it, is placed in the very middle of the poem, which has a circular structure, starting and ending on the same words (this effect is strengthened in English). The choice to translate the boy’s question to the girl with “forget” rather than “remember” may have been driven by meter. Yet it enters an interplay with the image of the river. The setting sun and the river are two universal symbols of irrevocably passing time, which is one of the main themes of this poem, rich in symbolism inherited from the classic, European and Russian poetic traditions. The image of the swallow, combined with semantic references to death (the epiphoric repetition of “до гроба,” echoed in “till we die” in the English text), creates a double effect: on the one hand the bird usually signals the return of spring, on the other, poets traditionally associate swallows with the mortality of human beings and moments of melancholy. The reader of *The Gift* may also be reminded of the underworld river Lethe, granting forgetfulness to anyone who drinks from it, mentioned in the poem about Charon that Fyodor composed a few pages before. In “Ласточка,” the swallow is not only an omen of separation, a reminder that all things must pass but also a way to capture a brief and yet precious moment, something concrete (“particular”) that memory will be able to hold on to against forgetfulness and the passing of time.

On the level of content, the translation thus appears as a more vivid and clearer manifestation of the author’s idea of this autobiographical episode, with several additions that accentuate the poem’s core passages. In the same 1962 interview Nabokov defined the poem about the swift as a possible favorite among his Russian poems but wondered whether

he would still “be able to recite it in Russian” (*SO*, 14). Hence, for its author, the self-translation appeared to have replaced the old Russian version, of which he retained a pleasant but distant memory, while quoting the newer English version in the interview.

Sometimes even apparently minor additions, which may seem to have been introduced for the sake of meter, can have a significant impact on the target text’s meaning. While perfectly replicating the structure of an Onegin stanza, the closing lines of *The Gift* depart from the Russian original on several points, starting from the very beginning:

Прощай же, книга! Для видений
отсрочки смертной тоже нет.
С колен поднимется Евгений, –
но удаляется поэт.
И все же слух не может сразу
расстаться с музыкой, рассказу
дать замереть... судьба сама
еще звенит, – и для ума
внимательного нет границы –
там, где поставил точку я:
продленный призрак бытия
синеет за чертой страницы,
как завтрашние облака, –
и не кончается строка. (*SSoch*, IV: 540)

Good-by my book! Like mortal eyes,
imagined ones must close some day.
Onegin from his knees will rise—
but his creator strolls away.
And yet the ear cannot right now
part with the music and allow
the tale to fade; the chords of fate
itself continue to vibrate;
and no obstruction for the sage
exists where I have put The End:
the shadows of my world extend
beyond the skyline of the page,
blue as tomorrow’s morning haze
nor does this terminate the phrase. (*G*, 378)

In Russian, the poem opens with the words “Прощай же, книга!”, rendered in English as “Good-by, my book!” The short word “my,” added to the English text, is not a banal filler-in, for it impacts the narrative mechanism of the poem. Indeed, throughout the novel, the narrative mode freely switches from the first to the third person, and sometimes even jumps to first person plural. The latter, according to Dolinin, “refers to the hero together with the ‘Person Unknown,’ and emphasizes both their kinship and their separateness” (1995: 164). The “we” is both “he” the hero and “I” his author, who “is responsible for Fyodor’s fate” (*ibid.*).

However, in the closing lines of the novel something important happens: the author separates from his character and seems to bid him farewell.⁶⁸ In *The Gift*, this separation occurs in the poem's opening words. As a consequence, the switch in the narrative mode becomes immediately manifest. The Russian reader, on the other hand, may not become aware of this switch until l. 10, where the authorial "I" is explicitly mentioned ("там, где поставил точку я").

This poem contains more alterations that may influence its interpretation. In Russian, l. 1 ends on the word "видений" (visions) which has associations with the atmosphere of symbolist poetry (it is recurrent in Blok's poems, for instance). This word was rendered as "fantasy" in "Люби лишь то, что редкостно и мнимо," where the semantic field of invention is central. In the Onegin stanza, however, Nabokov paraphrased the whole sentence and used a synonym of fantasy: "imagined." At the same time, he preserved the allusion to the sense of sight contained in the word "видений" by riveting the English verse on the eyes of his character. The translation thus originates from the Russian text and takes its own direction by a somatic close-up that transforms an image into a metaphor.

The last lines of this poem are key to the whole novel: it is here that the book both ends and starts again, joining its edges to form a Möbius strip, or perhaps a spiral. This is another circular structure in which poetry plays an important role for the novel. In particular, ll. 8-9 deny what has been stated in the opening by rejecting the existence of boundaries ("границы") for the attentive intellect ("ума внимательного"). Several changes occur in the translation of this passage. At first one may think that the intellect is "attentive" or "observant" because it is supposed to notice that Fyodor and Zina have no keys to the apartment, where they could be alone at last. An attentive intellect would

⁶⁸ This device will be used by Nabokov again in a later novel, albeit in a slightly different manner: at the end of *Bend Sinister*, the author will separate from the protagonist whose "nether world" transpired through a puddle.

therefore foresee their next steps, which go beyond the novel's end, imagining their disappointment. The English text, however, renders this passage somewhat differently: "and no obstruction for the sage / exists." Given the importance of these lines, Nabokov's turn to wisdom, commonly attributed to the sage, has a wider significance than that of noticing that the lovers have no key.

The protagonist's "act[s] of individual creation" (SO, 118) are represented in detail in the novel, where the theme of artistic creation is central. The importance of aesthetic experience is in all likelihood connected to Bergson's philosophy: the ability of creative consciousness to transform inert matter into vital impetus derives from a person's ability to educate his or her senses to perceive more than what is inherently necessary or useful for survival.

The limits of time and space are not set for creative consciousness. While many scholars find dualism in Nabokov's metaphysics, in tune with the "двоемирие" (world duality) envisioned by Russian symbolists, the Moebius-strip structure overcomes this dualism. Indeed, Nabokov once described himself in philosophical terms as an "indivisible monist" (SO, 85). As Leona Toker observes, the "consciousness of the transformation of the duality of the physical and the spiritual into a continuum may be regarded as the metaphysical background of the self-reflexive Moebius-strip narrative structures in most of Nabokov's major novels" (1995: 369). Hence, when ll. 8-9 of the poem speak of "ума / внимательного," i.e. of an intellect's "attentiveness," placed in a focal position thanks to the strong enjambment, one may read this not only as an allusion to the reader's alertness to a plot detail, but also as pointing at the ethical effects of aesthetic experience. As a result, the spiral structure of the book is enhanced. Inviting multiple re-readings, it denies finite boundaries for creative consciousness. By introducing the figure of "the sage," a wise and virtuous person, the translation thus stresses and synthesizes this "metaphysical" and ethical level of reading.

As noted above, Fyodor's poems are often textually connected with the narrative that frames them. These connections, like invisible threads, tie the poetry of *Dar* with its prose. For instance, in line 10 of the sonnet that frames Chapter 4, there is a hint at the first pages of the book: "все так же на ветру, в одежде оживленной" (*SSoch*, IV: 391) lexically connects with description of the couple Fyodor sees outside of his new house "Мужчина, облаченный в зелено-бурое войлочное пальто, слегка оживляемое ветром, был высокий, густобровый старик" (*SSoch*, IV: 191). This connection has survived in the translation of the poem: in English, the line "The same wind blows, and in the same live robe" (*G*, 224) reverberates with "The man, arrayed in a rough greenish-brown overcoat to which the wind imparted a ripple of life" (*G*, 15).

The Onegin stanza that concludes the novel also contains textual references to previous pages. For instance, the lines "продленный призрак бытия / синеет за чертой страницы / как завтрашние облака" (*SSoch*, IV: 540) recall Fyodor's fragment on childhood "Синеет, синего синей, / почти не уступая в сини / воспоминанию о ней" (*SSoch*, IV: 214. In English: "Showed a blue that was bluer than blue / And was hardly inferior in blueness / To my present remembrance of it," *G*, 39). The poem from "*Stikhi*" was devoted to the memory of a color, the morning light that entered the boy's room from a narrow opening in the shutter. By contrast, in the Onegin stanza there is a future projection: "blue as tomorrow's morning haze" (*G*, 378). This future blue is therefore complementary to the blueness Fyodor pictured in his mind with an effort of his memory, through a return to his childhood.

Whereas the "blue" color is maintained in the target text, the English version of this line loses another connection – with the opening words of the novel: "Облачным, но светлым днем" (*SSoch*, IV: 191. In English: "One cloudy but luminous day," *G*, 15). The image of "завтрашние облака" (*SSoch*, IV: 540; literally, "tomorrow's clouds") textually joins the novel's end with its beginning. In the translation, where the clouds are not mentioned, this semantic tie between the novel's first and last pages is given up. The final

image of a skyline and a “morning haze” in the English poem could in turn become a reference to the “haze” that surrounded Fyodor’s father,⁶⁹ whose “shadow,” or presence, Fyodor still perceives by his side. Thus, the concluding poem of *The Gift* partly maintains the textual connections with the book’s previous sections but partly substitutes for them new intratextual references.

Semantic selection can influence not only the meaning but also the form of the poem. An example of a non-literal translation that impacts both meaning and sound of the target text can be found in the first lines of “Thank You, My Land.” In the Russian text’s opening lines, the speaker ironically thanks his native land “for the cruel distance” (“Благодарю тебя, отчизна / за злую даль благодарю,” *SSoch*, IV: 242); Dmitri translated and expanded these lines in English as “Thank you, my land for your remotest / Most cruel mist my thanks are due” (*G*, 68). The choice of the word “mist,” that stands in for the Russian “даль,” satisfied Nabokov; yet it has interesting implications. On the level of sound, the words “most” and “mist” echo with the word “remotest,” which recreates the idea of distance, present in l. 2 of the Russian text. At the same time, “most cruel mist” reverberates with the first version of the poem’s opening lines, composed before the disappointing party at the Chernyshevsky’s (“And maddest gift my thanks are due,” *G*, 42): the monosyllabic words “mist” and “gift” share two phonemes out of four.

On the level of content, the translation expands the image of “cruel distance” evoked by the Russian poem. While “даль” suggests a space out of reach, “mist” evokes damp, foggy, greyish weather with poor visibility. Especially in the proximity of the word “most,” it may evoke something moist, not unlike the alliterative couple of Russian words “серость” and “сырость” (grayness and dampness) used to depict Leshino several pages before (*SSoch*, IV: 212).

⁶⁹ “In and around my father [...] there was something difficult to convey in words, a haze, a mystery, an enigmatic reserve which made itself felt sometimes more and sometimes less” (*G*, 126).

More importantly, this poem's main role in the novel is to show the process and result of Fyodor's creative work. Hence, the word "mist" can be seen as a "reference [...] to the 'noises' in the channel of communication with that aesthetic realm where his poem has already 'sprouted'" (Toker 1989: 164). Thus, the expanded rendition of "cruel distance" accrues new meanings and links: the "most cruel mist" is not only northern Russia's remote and cold landscape but also a disturbance, a noise that confuses the poet's ability to hear his nascent text.⁷⁰

Like in the translations of "*Stikhi*," euphony and alliteration emerge as a significant factor in the process of semantic selection. One example is found in the Onegin stanza, where the Russian words "рассказу / дать замереть... судьба сама / еще звенит" are rendered with a highly euphonic line made of monosyllabic and alliterative words — "the tale to fade; the chords of fate" (G, 378). The translation also slightly alters the level of meaning, as in Russian the tale "замирает," i.e. literally "freezes" or "dies down." The idea of death is enclosed in this verb, which shares its root with the words "умирать" (to die) and "смерть" (death). Hence, in this passage the Russian text begins to deny death, a motif introduced in the poem's opening lines. While in the translation the line works very well on the level of sound and rhythm, from a semantic viewpoint the connotation of death is less intense.

Alliterative couples of words are frequent in Nabokov's self-translations. For instance, in the sonnet that frames Chapter 4, Nabokov recreates the alliteration contained in the opening line of the Russian poem's sestet: "Увы! Что б ни сказал ПОТОМОК ПРОСВЕЩЕННЫЙ" (SSoch, IV: 391) echoes "Alas! In vain historians pry and probe" (G, 224).

⁷⁰ While this is perhaps the most interesting modification, more new tints were introduced to the translation. For instance, the line "by you possessed, by you unnoticed" which translates "тобою полн, тобой не признан" acquires the connotation of an almost evil obsessiveness owing to the word "possessed." Moreover, "unnoticed" is also slightly different from the Russian text, where the words "не признан" refers first and foremost to a writer's literary recognition; the English text is here related less to the writer's profession and more to a general human dimension of a son unnoticed and forsaken by his motherland.

In other translations one may observe imitation of the source text's sounds. For example, in "Люби лишь то, что редкостно и мнимо...", Nabokov translates "асфальтовую гладь" (*Ssoch*, IV: 338) as "wet asphaltic gloss" (*G*, 169). Moreover, in the same poem, the closing line renders "не скажешь, руку протянув: стена" (*Ssoch*, IV: 357) as "nor stretch your arm and say: a wall of stone" (*G*, 189), thus adding a new word that fits the metrical scheme and, at the same time, reproduces the "s-t-n" sounds of the Russian "stena."

The translations are also enriched with new alliterations: several examples can be found in the very same poem, where "душисто, тихо" (*Ssoch*, IV: 357) is rendered as "honeyed hush" (*G*, 189), and "под липой освещенной" (*Ssoch*, IV: 338) as under the "translucent tree" (*G*, 169). This example may puzzle Nabokov's readers — the author could hardly have preferred such a general word as "tree" over a reference to a specific species, a linden in the Russian poem. However, the name of the species is not lost in translation, it has simply moved: some pages before, when Fyodor composed the first two sestets of this long poem, the Russian text spoke of "зеленые листья" (green leaves) ("Близ фонаря, с оттенком маскарада, / лист жилками зелеными сквозит. / У тех ворот - кривая тень Багдада, / а та звезда над Пулковом висит," *Ssoch*, IV: 337) whereas in his translation of the first line Nabokov added, among other things, the specification of the tree: "Near that streetlight veined lime-leaves masquerade / in chrysoprase with a translucent gleam." (*G*, 168).

The translation of this passage the streetlight reveals the anatomy of a tree's foliage. Starting from the metaphor of the masquerade (which anticipates a real masquerade Fyodor will miss in order to finish his book), the English text transforms the noun into a verb. Moreover, tree leaves disguise in "chrysoprase," a peculiar semantic choice that stands for the more general "зеленый" (green) used in the Russian poem. This gemstone is indeed "translucent" and is known for its apple-green color, a more precise and brighter shade of green with a light tint of yellow.

The most important hypotext for this particular gemstone is found in the New Testament, where the chrysoprase is included in a list of twelve precious stones that adorn the foundation of New Jerusalem's walls (Revelation 21:20). In Chapter 5 of *Dar*, just before his intense dream about his father's return,⁷¹ Fyodor will mention chrysolite, another gemstone from this biblical list, associating it with a star.⁷² Nonetheless, while "chrysolite" is a less specific word and easier to encounter in other poets (from Shakespeare to Blok), chrysoprases are rarely found in the work of either English or Russian poets; it is, to my knowledge, a *hapax legomenon* in Nabokov's own writings as well. However, both chrysoprase and chrysolite are akin to the word "chrysalis," with which they share their roots (χρυσός, meaning "gold"). This similarity was noticed by Emily Dickinson, in whose poems devoted to a butterfly, chrysoprase becomes an attribute of the chrysalis's color.⁷³ To convey the surprising natural process of metamorphosis and the sight of a butterfly's iridescent wings, a poet can indeed draw semantic material from the world of gemstones. Similarly, in Nabokov's poem "chrysoprase" determines the leaves' color more precisely and strengthens the expressive power by comparing tree leaves illuminated by a streetlight to a gemstone's translucency. Moreover, the name of this particular stone is unexpected for its specificity, and sparkles a series of associations — natural, religious, exotic — that harmonize with the poem's motif of distant cities, from Baghdad to Pulkovo and Venice, and with the image of a star.

Thus, the self-translations of Fyodor's poems display a general tendency to either preserve bits of meaning or add new details. While instances of semantic loss can also be

⁷¹ As pointed out by Gennady Barabtarlo, this dream is strongly reminiscent of Nabokov's diary entry of the day his own father died (see Boyd, 1990: 191–93; Barabtarlo 2018: 158).

⁷² The flow of chaotic but highly alliterative words that cross Fyodor's mind before falling asleep includes "хрустальный хруст той ночи христианской под хризолитовой звездой" (*SSoch*, IV: 528). The mention of the gemstone doubles in English: "The crystal crunching of that Christian night beneath a chrysolitic star," and a few lines below: "A falling star, a cruising chrysolite, an aviator's avatar" (*G*, 363).

⁷³ "The Butterfly's assumption-gown / In chrysoprase apartments hung, / This afternoon put on" (Dickinson 1912: 95).

found, the translator's work mostly results in capturing new shades of meaning in the poems attributed to the protagonist. In these moments, self-translation can become a tool of poetic expression, but always within the novel's frame, maintaining a balance between the aesthetic quality of the target text, the faithfulness to the original poems, and to the role they play in the *Künstlerroman* plot of *Dar*.

3.2.3.4 Intertextuality

The presence of intertextual elements persists in the poems that follow "*Stikhi*." However, efforts to maintain them in translation can be detected only in some cases, especially in allusions to Pushkin's works. Thus, the Onegin stanza that closes *Dar* contains allusions to *Eugene Onegin* not only at the level of form but also in its content, when l. 3 names Pushkin's famous protagonist directly ("С колен поднимется Евгений," *SSoch*, IV: 540). The translation maintains the reference, but substitutes Onegin's name with his surname: "Onegin from his knees will rise" (*G*, 387). The reason for this change may be twofold: on the one hand, the substitution may have been required by meter (in English, "Eugene" is short of a syllable), but, on the other, it preempts ambiguity in the target language.

By mentioning the surname of Pushkin's protagonist, the translator may have eased the recognition of a series of allusions to *Eugene Onegin* contained in the final poem. The clarity of this allusion may therefore guide the reader in the interpretation of the poem's form. In Russian, the process of recognition was rather overturned: a Russian reader can hardly fail to recognize an Onegin stanza, whereas in classic Russian literature the name "Evgeny" can be more ambiguous, as it is found in several famous works of prose and poetry (although Onegin is on his knees at the end of the poem, but Pushkin himself had another Evgeny in *The Bronze Horseman*).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Mandelstam, for instance, alludes to *The Bronze Horseman* when he names Evgeny in his 1913 poem "Петербургские строфы": "Летит в туман моторов вереница; / Самолюбивый, скромный пешеход — / Чудак Евгений — бедности стыдится, / Бензин вдыхает и судьбу

The switch to the surname enhances the textual parallelisms between the endings of *The Gift* and of *Eugene Onegin*. So does the substitution of “там, где поставил точку я” (*SSoch*, IV: 540) with “where I have put The End” (*G*, 387), which now reverberates with Nabokov’s translation of Pushkin’s novel in verse:

Blest who life’s banquet early
left, having not drained to the bottom
the goblet full of wine;
who did not read life’s novel to the end
and all at once could part with it
as I with my Onegin. (*EO R*, I: 309)

The ending of *The Gift* strengthens the cinematic effect of the novel’s ending, and, by extension, of its association with Onegin’s *in medias res* ending (see Toker 1989: 152). Another parallel between *Onegin* and Nabokov’s translation of the final verses of *The Gift* can be found in the use of the verb “part with” in the lines “And yet the ear cannot right now / part with the music and allow” (*G*, 387). Therefore, in *The Gift*, the allusions to *Onegin* are not only maintained but even reinforced.

The intertextual layer of the Onegin stanza that closes *Dar* is intentional and fundamental for the understanding of this poem. Quite different is the case when a Russian poem contains “veiled” allusions to Pushkin. The poem “Благодарю тебя, Отчизна” and its translation “Thank You, My Land” can provide an example of a hidden allusion to *Eugene Onegin*. According to Dolinin (1997: 644), the intertextual dimension of this poem is especially important, because the poet’s dialogue with his country actually represents a dialogue with Russian literature, prominently including Pushkin. The references to Pushkin start during the genesis of the poem, when Fyodor rambles: “За чистый и крылатый дар. Икры. Латы. Откуда этот римлянин? Нет, нет, все улетело...” (*SSoch*, IV: 216). As Dolinin explains, the search for an epithet for the word “дар” (gift) — obviously central for the whole novel — takes Fyodor back to some

клянёт!” (A line of cars flies into the fog; / a proud, shy pedestrian / Like the eccentric Evgeny is ashamed of poverty / breathes in gasoline and curses his fate! Mandelstam 2009: 48).

pushkinian drafts, both containing lines that end on the ambiguously sounding words “и крылатый”: “В прохладе сладостных фонтанов...”⁷⁵ and “Мы рождены мой брат названный.”⁷⁶ Dolinin’s claim is that here Fyodor tries to solve the same poetic issues as his famous precursor, and these artistic efforts establish a connection between the poets (1997: 645). However, since puns are strictly related to the language that carries them, the specific wordplay of “и крылатый” and “икры латы” is lost in the English translation along with the possible allusion to Pushkin’s verses.

The theme of gratitude has an extended literary tradition. Among many texts, in Russian poetry it is present in Lermontov’s “Благодарность” (1840), translated by Nabokov for *Three Russian Poets*. The evolution of this theme has developed throughout the years from solemn odes to works of sarcasm and irony: already in Lermontov one finds thankfulness “for the bitter taste of tears” (“За горечь слез,” Lermontov 2014: 326). Fyodor follows a similar path in his evolution from cheerful thankfulness for his poetic gift to sarcastic gratitude for Russia’s “most cruel mist.”

This poem may therefore be seen as a continuation of the sarcastic use of the topos of gratitude. Among the texts alluded to is Chapter 4 of *Eugeny Onegin*. As pointed out in another study by Dolinin (2007: 24), one can find semantic and syntactic parallels between the opening lines of “Благодарю тебя, Отчизна” and Pushkin’s “Благодарю за наслажденья, [...] За все, за все твои дары; / Благодарю тебя. Тобою, / Среди тревог и в тишине, / Я наслаждался ... и вполне” (Pushkin 1950, V: 138). Nabokov’s translation of these lines in his *Eugene Onegin*⁷⁷ reverberates once again with his translation of Fyodor’s poem: in particular the line “For all, for all your gifts / My thanks to you. In you” (*EO*, I: 248) as transformed in Fyodor’s verse into “for your remotest / most cruel mist my thanks

⁷⁵ “Как прозорливый и крылатый / Поэт той чудной стороны” (Pushkin 1950, III: 79).

⁷⁶ “Твой слог могучий и крылатый / Какой-то дразнит пародист” (Pushkin 1950, III: 197).

⁷⁷ “O my light youth! / My thanks for the delights, / the melancholy, the dear torments, / the hum, the storms, the feasts, / for all, for all your gifts / my thanks to you. In you / amidst turmoils and in the stillness / I have delighted... and in full [...]” (*EO R*, I: 248).

are due. / By you possessed...” (G, 60). Formally, the allusion is maintained, but nothing hints at it for the benefit of an Anglophone reader. Nevertheless, while this allusion deepens the novel’s Pushkinian layer, it is not strictly necessary for the understanding of the poem itself.

The poetry of *Dar* includes veiled allusions to other works by Pushkin, less famous among non-Russian readers than *Eugene Onegin*. The text’s movement to another language and poetic tradition endangers these less obvious allusions. For example, in the poem “Люби лишь то, что редкостно и мнимо...” there are at least several possible Pushkinian elements. One was noticed by D. Barton Johnson (1985: 98-100) in the lines “нагорный снег, мерцающий в Тибете, / горячий ключ и в иное цветы” (*SSoch*, IV: 338)⁷⁸: here, the image of the hot spring may be traced back to Pushkin’s 1827 “Три ключа” (Three Springs).

Another line of this poem may have been inspired by an image that recurs in Pushkin’s works. This is the first line of the following quatrain:

Не облака, а горные отроги;
костер в лесу, не лампа у окна.
О, поклянись, что до конца дороги
ты будешь только вымыслу верна... (*SSoch*,
IV: 338)

Those are not clouds-but star-high mountain spurs;
not lamplit blinds-but camplight on a tent!
O swear to me that while the heartblood stirs,
you will be true to what we shall invent. (G, 169)

This passage concludes a long sequence of verses written without lineation, and its images are therefore placed in focal position. In the novel, the image of the mountains is a happy one: in Chapter 3, Fyodor’s reflection on the “real wealth” of life includes “the shape of dreams, tears of happiness, distant mountains” (G, 176). But the image of distant mountains may also allude to Pushkin’s “Journey to Arzrum” (1835), where the speaker recalls how he had once mistaken the mountain spurs on the horizon for distant clouds: “В Ставрополе увидел я на краю неба облака, поразившие мне взоры ровно за девять

⁷⁸ Translated as “Tibetan mountain-snows, their glancing shine / and a hot spring near flowers touched with rime” (G, 169).

лет. Они были всё те же, всё на том же месте. Это — снежные вершины Кавказской цепи”⁷⁹ (Pushkin 1950, VI: 644).

The sight of these majestic mountains and their resemblance to clouds is likely to have influenced both Pushkin’s 1822 narrative poem “Prisoner of the Caucasus” (“Великолепные картины! / Престолы вечные снегов / Очам казались их вершины / Недвижной цепью облаков,”⁸⁰ Pushkin 1950, IV: 113) and *The Captain’s Daughter* (1836). In the latter novel, this analogy is reversed when Peter Grinyov confuses the approaching snow storm for a little hill.

The theme of the journey runs as a *fil rouge* through these works: Grinyov’s journey is a dangerous one, but had he followed the cautious advice to return, had he been afraid of the cloud on the horizon, he would not have met Pugachev during the tempest (the encounter was bound to save Petrusha’s life more than once). Thus, the connection between Fyodor and Pushkin through the image of clouds and distant mountains may denote the poets’ shared perception of mystery that wraps a man’s future, their attempt to romantically peer into the distance of an unknown land, and the grateful acceptance of the challenge represented by a road, metaphorical of real.

The substitution of the metaphor “до конца дороги” (until the end of the road, rendered as “while the heartblood stirs”) is exceptional in the self-translation, since these lines are devoted to an imaginary journey, and are part of the poem’s imagery of distant places and blurring boundaries. This loss is partly compensated by the use of the verb “invent,” placed in a highlighted position, at the end of the stanza: this verb contains in its etymological root the idea of “discovery” and “coming upon,” found in the Latin word *invenio*, from which the English word derives.

⁷⁹ “In Stavropol, I saw some clouds near the skyline that struck me exactly nine years ago. They were the same, in the same place. These are the snowy peaks of the Caucasus mountain chain.”

⁸⁰ “Magnificent pictures! / Eternal thrones of snows / To the eyes their peaks appeared / As an immobile chain of clouds.”

The allusion to Pushkin is not necessarily gone from the translation of Fyodor's poem. However, the mechanism observed in the self-translations of "*Stikhi*" persists here: the recognition of intertextuality is not impossible but less likely in the context of a foreign language and a foreign literary tradition. The game of intertextuality can easily be lost unless the translator takes specific steps to preserve it. Amid the poems of *Dar* there are "hidden" allusions to the works of authors other than Pushkin. Such is the case of a brief fragment published with lineation:

Здесь все так плоско, так непрочно,
так плохо сделана луна,
хотя из Гамбурга нарочно
она сюда привезена. (*SSoch*, IV: 277)

As pointed out by Dolinin, these rather cryptic lines represent an allusion to Gogol's "Notes of a Madman" (1835), where the protagonist Poprishchin confesses that he "вообразил себе необыкновенную нежность и непрочность луны. Луна ведь обыкновенно делается в Гамбурге; и прескверно делается"⁸¹ (quoted in Dolinin 2019: 159-60).

The translation loses this textual connection: in English, the moon is described as "much too rough," which is far from Gogol's "tenderness and frailty." The English version of this brief poem thus distances itself from the hypotext to which the Russian original alludes. The translation is, instead, focused on the hypertext's motif of the poet's disgust for Berlin, leaving the intertextual element behind: "Things here are in a sorry state; / Even the moon is much too rough / Though it is rumored to come straight / From Hamburg where they make the stuff" (*G*, 106). The reference to Hamburg, however, opens the possibility of the reader's recollecting Gogol.

If this short poem alluded to a very specific literary work, other texts join a long and rich literary tradition by exploring certain universal themes or images. Such is the case of

⁸¹ "Imagined the moon's unusual tenderness and fragility. After all, the moon is usually made in Hamburg; and it is done foully."

“Благодарю тебя, Отчизна” with its central theme of thankfulness, but also of such poems as “Ласточка” and “Во тьме в незамерзающую воду.”

As mentioned above, the image of the swallow is part of an illustrious poetic tradition in European and Russian literature. This bird of early spring becomes a symbol of such phenomena as the quick flow of time, death, or the immortal human soul – in the poetry of seminal authors like Anton Delvig, Gavriil Derzhavin, Afanasy Fet, Mikhail Lermontov, Andrey Bely, Viacheslav Ivanov, Vladislav Khodasevich, Osip Mandelstam among others.⁸² Its image reemerged in Russian contemporary poetry as well, e. g. in Alexander Kushner: “Я не любил шестидесятых, / Семидесятых, никаких, / А только ласточек — внучатых / Племянниц фетовских, стрельчатых, / И мандельштамовских, слепых”⁸³ (Kushner 2005: 645) – here the speaker is trying to escape his own decades and reenter a timeless tradition.

Fyodor’s poem has already become a part of this tradition. Nevertheless, its real author both draws from the previous poets’ *topoi* and distances himself from them. While the setting on the old bridge at sunset is traditionally elegiac, the poem becomes personal thanks to its focus on the memory of a precious moment, embodied in a particular swallow. It both inherits the swallow’s traditional melancholy associations, and modifies them. It is this personal dimension that prevails in the English text, where no particular hints are given to the reader about other poets’ swallows and old bridges. Moreover, due to the universality of the poem’s central image, its movement towards a new language and a new poetic tradition may sparkle new intertextual connections, such as with Alfred Tennyson’s “The Princess” (1847), where the poet addresses the swallow as a quick messenger of love.

⁸² In his commentary to *Dar*, Dolinin provides a brief analysis of some of these *hypotext*’s of Nabokov’s Russian poem (2019: 160-61).

⁸³ “I did not love the Sixties / Nor did I love any Seventies / But only swallows - Fet’s grandnephews with their arrows / and Mandelstam’s, the blind ones.”

The English version of this poem may also recall the 1861 poem “The Bridge” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whose work Nabokov was well acquainted with.⁸⁴

The poem “Во тьме в незамерзающую воду” is by its very nature prone to intertextuality. Taking its roots in classical myths about the old man who accompanies human souls to the otherworld, the image of Charon in his boat has a long history in European literature and visual art. Fyodor’s verses about the ferryman of Hades partly follow and partly distance themselves from the Russian traditional poetic use of this myth. This can be observed on the basis of the poem’s vocabulary.

While the “багор” (boathook) is a less traditional but still orthodox alternative to the more common oar, which Dante’s demoniac Charon cruelly used to speed up the slowest souls, the “паром” (ferry) is a rather unusual semantic choice. In Russian poetry, Charon’s boat was usually a “челн” (a dugout boat, mentioned for example in Vasily Zhukovsky’s 1831 ballad “Жалоба Цереры”) or a “ладья” (a longship, present in the poetic works of Pushkin, Khodasevich, and Bryusov, among others). It has been acknowledged that Mandelstam considered using “паром” in his poem “Когда Психея жизнь спускается к теням...,” but found that Charon as “хозяин парома” (a ferry master) can only appear in parodic verses (Mandelstam 2009: 516; also noticed by Levinton 2007: 61–62, and Dolinin 2019: 130-31). In the Russian text of Fyodor’s poem, Charon remains unnamed: he is but a “ferryman” (“и медленным багром / паромщик тянется к суку сырому / и медленно вращается паром.” *SSoch*, IV: 260). The character is thus devoid of such traditional attributes as piercing eyes, white hair, and an angry or sad temper. Fyodor’s poem is, rather, focused on the man’s hard work, on his slow heavy movements, from which the reader may deduce that the ferryman is a tired or elderly man. No portrait details are given.

⁸⁴ Dolinin (2012: 282) points to reminiscences of Longfellow’s poem “The Reaper and the Flowers” in the story “Signs and Symbols,” and notes that the complete collection of Longfellow’s poetry was part of Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov’s St Petersburg library.

The presence of Charon's name in the English version of this poem strengthens its connection with the classical literary heritage. Indeed, even his boat is a more traditional one: in the self-translation, Charon uses a "bark," a more general and poetic term for a vessel, reiterated in the poem's closing line ("slowly the bark revolves, the silent bark." *G*, 87). These changes affect the target text's atmosphere, but may also be related to the loss of an intertextual element that was present in the Russian text.

Distancing itself from the classical tradition, the Russian version of this poem results in a more abstract, more modern text (the connection with Mandelstam's attempts to use the same word, "паром," may be accidental, and yet is significant). We know that the poem originated from Fyodor's sense of touching his native land (or soil, "земля," they are homonyms in Russian) with his feet. The link with the underworld came after he saw his own feet x-rayed in a shoe shop. This graphic experience was followed by Fyodor's usual flow of alliterative words. The underworld setting, however, is but a metaphor for something else, for an exile's impossible return to Russia, to a place that now feels as distant as Hades. Thus, Fyodor imagines that it is "with this" foot that he will "step ashore" – "сквозь тихо падающий снег / в обычную лете́йскую погоду / вот этим я ступлю на брег" (*SSoch*, IV: 260). The verse about the snow is strongly reminiscent of Akhmatova's 1919 poem "Призрак," where the speaker nostalgically recalls a peaceful world now gone forever: "И, ускоряя ровный бег, / Как бы в предчувствии погони, / Сквозь мягко падающий снег / Под синей сеткой мчатся кони"⁸⁵ (Akhmatova 1976: 178).

On the other hand, the words "на брег" spark a series of Pushkinian associations. In particular, the rhyme "на брег" / "снег" can be found in *Eugene Onegin's* Chapter 4, stanza

⁸⁵ "And, accelerating their smooth run, / As if in anticipating chase, / Through softly falling snow / Horses rush under a blue net." Interestingly, the same chapter of *Dar* contains another possible reference to this poem, noticed by Dolinin (2019: 83): "я мысленно вижу, как моя мать, в шеншилях и вуали с мушками, садится в сани [...], как мчит ее, прижавшую сизо-пушистую муфту к лицу, вороная пара под синей сеткой" (*SSoch*, IV: 209; translated as "I mentally saw my mother, in chinchilla coat and black-dotted veil, getting into the sleigh [...] and holding her dove-gray fluffy muff to her face as she sped behind a pair of black horses covered with a blue net," *G*, 35)

XLII, in the description of a Russian winter (“веселый / Мелькает, вьется первый снег, / Звездами падая на брег,” Pushkin 1950, V: 94).⁸⁶ But the plural “берега,” a poetic synonym of the more colloquial “беpera,” is often found in Russian poetry in association with St. Petersburg and the banks of Neva, starting with the second stanza of *Eugene Onegin*, which Russian readers are highly likely to know by heart: “Онегин, добрый мой приятель, / Родился на берегах Невы” (Pushkin 1950, V: 10).⁸⁷

Similarly, in Pushkin’s fair copy of stanza XXX of Chapter VIII, there is a mention of Neva’s banks in association with “frozen waters” that can reverberate with the Lethean “незамерзающую воду” (*SSoch*, IV: 260) from Fyodor’s poem: “На берегах замерзлых вод, / На улице, в передней, в зале / За ней он гонится как тень” (Pushkin 1950, V: 554).⁸⁸ This line is likely to have derived from a juvenile humorous 1817 quatrain that Pushkin composed in his school days: “И останешься с вопросом / На берегу замерзлых вод: / «Мамзель Шредер с красным носом / Милых Вельо не ведет?»” (Pushkin 1950, I: 276).⁸⁹

Even more importantly, “берега” are the shores of both Neva and Lethe in Pushkin’s early nostalgic poem to his beloved sister. He confesses to her that he is to come home from Tsarskoe Selo – “И быстрою стрелой / На невский берег примчуся, / С подругой обнимуся” – but soon remembers that this is only a fantasy and he is held captive like a dead person’s soul in the underworld, “Я вдруг в глухих стенах, / Как Леты на берегах, / Явился заключенным, / Навеки погребенным” (Pushkin 1950, I: 40).⁹⁰ The passage from the Lethean to the earthly shores is made in an 1822 unfinished poem where Pushkin

⁸⁶ “The gay / first snow flicks, whirls, / falling in stars upon the bank” (*EO R*, I: 194).

⁸⁷ “Onegin, a good pal of mine, / was born upon the Neva’s banks” (*EO R*, I: 96).

⁸⁸ “On the embankment of the frozen waters, in street, in vestibule, in ballroom, he chases like a shadow after her.” In his commentary, Nabokov notices that “The Neva was *not* frozen in October 1824, which is the latest possible date here” (*EO*, II: 212).

⁸⁹ “With a question you’ll remain / on the bank of frozen waters / ‘Does red-nosed Mademoiselle Schröder / Bring the sweet Velho girls?’”

⁹⁰ “And quick as an arrow / I’ll rush to the Neva banks, / I will embrace my friend. Suddenly I am surrounded by thick walls, / Like the banks of Lethe, / I find myself a prisoner, / Buried forever.”

muses about the afterlife and draws an eerie image of “shadows,” spirits that leave the world of the dead to reach the earth:

Да, тени тайною толпой
От берегов печальной Леты
Слетаются на брег земной.
Они уныло посещают
Места, где жизнь была милей. (Pushkin 1950, II: 107)⁹¹

Fyodor’s association between the banks of Lethe and Neva can thus be traced back to Pushkin’s exploration of the valency of the word “берег.” In his *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov translated “берега” as “banks” or “embankment,” since “shores” are more suitable for natural, even seaside environments. Hence, in the English version of Fyodor’s poem about Charon, the “shore” inevitably loses its homonymic reference to the Neva banks. The loss is not an indifferent one: the parallel between the underworld and unreachable and potentially lethal St. Petersburg is key to the poem.

It is possible to suppose that the English translation may have switched the focus of the poem by recreating a more classical imagery around Charon and his underworld as a way to compensate for the weakening of the semantic and intertextual parallelism between the banks (“берега”) of Lethe and the banks of St. Petersburg’s Neva river. Furthermore, the English version of the poem and the description of its creation are particularly reminiscent of the “Proteus” episode in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, where Stephen Dedalus strolls along Sandymount Strand. The episode is mostly presented as the stream of the character’s consciousness, from which the iambs of a poem sometimes emerge. Here Nabokov may have shared with Joyce not only the reference to Greek mythology in a larger sense, but also, more specifically, the imagery of water and shores. Even more interestingly, there is in “Proteus” a semantic focus on walking, on the character’s boots and feet, cracking little shells in the sand, which, combined with moments of poetic inspiration, may reverberate with Fyodor’s experience. Moreover, the poem Stephen composes is also not provided in

⁹¹ “Yes, shadows in a secret crowd / From the shores of the sad Lethe / Flock to the earth. / They sadly visit / Places where life was dearer.”

this episode, but we are only given the materials out of which he creates it (its final text is be given later, in the “Aeolus” episode).

The approach to the translation of intertextuality observed in the discussion of “*Stikhi*” continues in the other poems of the novel. Nabokov’s own translations of Russian classics still function as potential hypotexts for Fyodor’s poems in their English version. Intertextuality is, again, partly lost in the translated poems. Aleatory allusions – to use Michael Riffaterre’s term (1990) for intertextual elements which are not fundamental for the reading of a text or are highly dependent on the reader’s cultural background – are often sacrificed in the translations. Such is the case with Gogol’s “moon from Hamburg”: similar allusions do not always emerge as a priority for the self-translator, who is likely to focus on a more direct meaning of the text or slightly shift its focus by means of changes and substitutions. However, instances of obligatory intertextuality, i.e. references that are fundamental for the understanding of a poem (and the novel in general), have been not only maintained but even enriched and developed, as in the case of the final Onegin stanza.

3.2.4 Conclusions

The study of the poems embedded in *Dar* and their translations answers some questions and raises others. These poems were created by Nabokov for a fictional poet and differ from the author’s own poetry. Nevertheless, the presence of autobiographical traits in Fyodor’s character and poetics is hard to deny. *Dar* stages an evolution in Fyodor’s art, from fascination with modernist experiments and Bely’s prosodic preferences to more traditional forms. In *The Gift*, this evolution is recreated thanks to the switch from free verse with a detectable undersong, reminiscent of English-language modernist poetry, to poems with definite meter and rhyme schemes, starting from the composition of “Thank You, My Land.”

Yet self-translation is a complicated task that may trigger not only linguistic, but also artistic and psychological issues. Fyodor’s poems are not precisely describable as

Nabokov's "own writings." In terms of the *skopos* theory, which studies translated texts in terms of their purpose, Nabokov's translations of Fyodor's poems were not made with the sole purpose of creating the best possible English version of the source texts in aesthetic terms. They had to recreate poems in English in such a way as to make them fit the novel's narrative frame and reflect the protagonist's artistic development. Nevertheless, the self-translation's communication chain illustrated in Chapter 1 can still be applied to the case of the poetry Nabokov composed for *Dar* and translated for *The Gift*. Indeed, a fundamental feature of self-translation persists in these poems: both source and target texts were generated by the same authorial intention, and, therefore, the translation methodology applied by Nabokov is strictly related to this intention (hence the authority to reject Dmitri's rhymed poems for "Stikhi"). This apparently contradictory methodology is actually quite a faithful reflection of the sequence of Fyodor's Russian poems as they are presented in the novel. The choice not to replicate the experiments with Bely's patterns of half-accent in the English translations of the poems on childhood may resemble an attempt to domesticate the formal level of the target texts. Indeed, the translations of "Stikhi" reverberate with English and American modernist poetry in several ways, including register and form. The choice of free verse for Fyodor's childhood poems was in fact a translator's compromise: free verse is much more common and natural in English poetry than in Russian poetry at Fyodor's time.

Dar is profoundly meta-literary, and so is *The Gift*. References to Russian history, culture, literature and poetry were not substituted by corresponding American elements, and, when possible, allusions to Russian poetry that are necessary for the understanding of the prominent features of the text were maintained by Nabokov. Overall, *The Gift* can be defined as, in Venuti's terms, a foreignized translation. The presence of Russian literature was maintained also thanks to synthetic explanatory additions within the prose, prose that functions as a frame for Fyodor's poems, which become immersed in the Russian émigré

world of 1920s Berlin. Nevertheless, the depth of the intertextual layers of *Dar* is impressive, and, some of these layers were inevitably left behind.

Once a poem enters a new literary and linguistic territory, it can generate new intertextual references, especially if it delves into themes that are common to all European poetry due to shared classical roots. Nabokov was not only a bilingual writer, but also a multilingual reader of poetry. Hence, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the imagery of English and American poets may have influenced the imagery of his Russian poetry. This is one of the still unanswered questions that this analysis raises. George Steiner's idea of "extra-territoriality" is suggestive in this regard: Nabokov's love of poetry is not confined to Russian literature; it extends to Europe and beyond, but this should not reduce the importance of Russia for his work and artistic personality.

The process of self-translation triggered changes in the content of the poems. In the poems discussed in this chapter, a tendency to specify rather than generalize emerged from Nabokov's translation methodology. Seldom omitting information, he seemed to prefer addition of information, to prefer clarification over vaguer details. His authorial modifications were generated not only by the necessity to fit the text in a certain meter or rhyme scheme, but also by a slightly different focus on the same text.

A similar tendency to specification could already be observed back in the days of the "free" approach to translation practiced in such publications as *Three Russian Poets* (1944) and *Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev* (1947). In these works, Nabokov would often offer a personal interpretation of a poetic image, or even add new specific information according to his own understanding of the text.⁹² Moreover, the analysis of his prosody suggests that

⁹² For instance, as he writes in a commentary to Tyutchev's "Appeasement," he "preferred to specify the 'feathered creatures,' which is all the original has by way of birds, because [he] wanted the actual birds of the Russian woodland that Tyutchev had in mind to burst into song here, as they would at this point in a Russian reader's perception" (quoted in Shvabrin 2019: 240). Moreover, in such poems as "Tears" Nabokov "sought to develop a potential concealed in Tyutchev's image according to his individual understanding of that image" (Shvabrin 242).

in these translations he would sometimes change the meter of the poem to the meter preferred in the poetry of the target language.

The parallel between translations made in the “non-literal” period and the self-translations made for *The Gift* should not alter these conclusions. Whereas in “free” translations there is a dimension of appropriation of the target text and a sense of responsibility for its aesthetic qualities,⁹³ in the poetic translations for *The Gift* there is a more practical goal. Since we are in the 1960’s, long after Nabokov’s switch to literalism in poetry translation, a significant presence of interventions in the poems’ form and content confirms that these poems were translated first and foremost as part of a novel, not as poetic texts *per se*. And yet, just like their Russian counterparts, these texts do have a poetic value of their own that should be considered both independently and as part of a bilingual poetic and narrative text.

3.3 Humbert Humbert’s Poetry

Nabokov translated *Lolita* into Russian from February 1963 to March 1965. As can be seen from the postscript to the Russian edition of the novel,⁹⁴ the motivation for this work was the fear of what bad translators could do to his “poor little girl” (*PP*, 147). The Russian *Lolita*, which began to circulate illegally in the Soviet Union after its publication in New

⁹³ Marina Tsvetaeva reported a similar experience with the translation of poetry, when she claimed that when she translated she aspired “to create a true artistic work,” even when her source text was an unsatisfying piece of poetry, and, like Nabokov, corrected the author’s mistakes: “My problem is that when I translate anything, I want to create a true artistic work, which the original text often is not. That I do not want to repeat the author’s mistakes and his randomness. That, first and foremost, I try to correct the meaning” (Tsvetaeva 2012: 428).

⁹⁴ “Издавая «Лолиту» по-русски, я преследую очень простую цель: хочу, чтобы моя лучшая английская книга — или, скажем еще скромнее, одна из лучших моих английских книг — была правильно переведена на мой родной язык” (*RL*, 308. “In publishing *Lolita* in Russian, I am pursuing a very simple aim: I want my best English book — or, let us say more modestly, one of my best English books — to be translated correctly into my native language.” Trans. Earl D. Sampson 1982: 192).

York in August 1967,⁹⁵ was at first described by scholars in rather simplistic terms as a good but not particularly creative rewriting (see, for instance, the chapter on *Lolita* in Jane Grayson's 1977 pioneering monograph on Nabokov's bilingual novels). This assessment, possibly influenced by Nabokov's own statement in the postscript that "железной рукой" he managed to contain "демонов, подбивавших на пропуски и дополнения" (*RL*, 308),⁹⁶ was not always confirmed by later studies, and *Lolita* in Russian received praise as a brilliant work of linguistic creativity with a literary value of its own. Thus, Gennady Barabtarlo recommends that we do not take Nabokov's words literally because "the sly demons did frequently get out of hand. Indeed, the Russian *Lolita* is dimpled and freckled with nice little additions and elaborations and tricks that beam at the bilingual re-reader" (Barabtarlo 1988: 238). In his 1995 entry in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* devoted to the translation of *Lolita*, Alexander Dolinin highlights its creativity and agrees with Elizabeth K. Beaujour's claim that the two *Lolitas* are different and yet intimately connected versions of the same work. Beaujour's thought-provoking reflection, which broadly anticipates numerous studies on self-translation, claims that because self-translation "makes a text retrospectively incomplete, both versions [of the text] become avatars of a hypothetical total text in which the versions in both languages would rejoin one another and be reconciled" (Beaujour 1989: 112). Dolinin concludes that "of course, a leading part in the duo will always belong to the original, [...] [b]ut even in the country of *Lolita*'s birth, its most sophisticated readers could profit greatly from considering the Russian counterpart of Nabokov's nymphet and coming nearer to the totality of the author's vision" (1995: 328).

⁹⁵ Ellendea Proffer has reported in 1970 that "almost every person seriously interested in literature that one meets in the Soviet Union has read at least two works by Nabokov, and *Lolita* is almost always one of them" (Proffer 1970: 253).

⁹⁶ "the iron hand with which I checked the demons who incited me to deletions and additions" (Trans. Earl D. Sampson 1982: 192).

In the postscript to the novel's self-translation, Nabokov confesses that switching back to Russian was not an easy experience and, perhaps, even an unsuccessful one.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, *Lolita* was never officially retranslated in Russian, a fact that only reasserts the special status that self-translations enjoy on the literary market. As pointed out by Gabriella Imposti, Nabokov's self-translation is indeed perceived as "an ultimate edition, authorized by its author, endowed with the same status of the original, which discourages the appearance of any further reworkings of the source text" (2013: 257).

Notwithstanding the multitude of academic publications devoted to the Russian *Lolita* in the fields of both Nabokov and Translation studies,⁹⁸ Humbert's poems and their self-translations have never been objects of a separate study. Of course, poetry plays a far more modest role in *Lolita* than it does in a novel like *The Gift*. And yet it is there and rewards attention.

The story of *Lolita* is almost entirely narrated by Humbert Humbert. As a consequence, the narrator is also the speaker to whom poetry in the novel is attributed. Humbert's poems — the book contains nearly a dozen poetic texts or fragments of texts — can be divided in two main groups: poetry that is parodic or imitative in nature, and regular "original" poems. The present section is divided according to this categorization. In particular, I examine Nabokov's approach to self-translating poetic quotation and parody as an element of intertextuality in *Lolita*. I confront these poems with the results of the study of *The Gift*, but also with Nabokov's previous works of standard translation that involved a linguistic transposition of parodic elements. To my knowledge, Humbert's

⁹⁷ "Американскому читателю я так страстно твержу о превосходстве моего русского слога над моим слогом английским, что иной славист может и впрямь подумать, что мой перевод «Лолиты» во сто раз лучше оригинала. Меня же только мутит ныне от дребезжания моих ржавых русских струн" (*RL*, 306; "I so fervently stress to my American readers the superiority of my Russian style over my English that some Slavists might really think that my translation of *Lolita* is a hundred times better than the original, but the rattle of my rusty Russian strings only nauseates me now," 1982: 192).

⁹⁸ After the interest in the phenomenon of self-translation significantly increased in the late 00s, the field of translation studies has seen a steady surge of publications devoted to Nabokov, including studies on *Lolita*. Eva Gentes's updated bibliography on self-translation is a useful source of information in this regard.

“original” verses and their Russian translation are the only instance of original poetry Nabokov self-translated from English to Russian.

3.3.1 Quotation and Parody

Even if *Lolita* is significantly less concerned with discussions and reflections on poetry than *The Gift*, it is perhaps no less rich in literary allusions, quotations, parodies. Everything we see in the novel — including its rich framework of literary references — comes filtered through the eyes of an autodiegetic unreliable narrator. One should therefore keep in mind that a complex system of literary allusions was created by Nabokov *ad hoc* for his character, and, not unlike a vast portion of the meta-literality of *Dar*, constitutes a significant ingredient of a character’s complex portrait. This character is, to say the least, much less likeable than Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, but he invests great efforts in his attempt to charm the reader. By embedding his passion for Dolores within a network of literary references to such “romantic dreamers” as Emma Bovary, Edgar Allan Poe’s lyrical heroes, and Don Quixote, Humbert tries to give a tragic status to his story and distances himself from a probably more suitable company of psychiatric cases and criminals (see also Pifer 1995: 312).

Whilst *Lolita* has been defined as Nabokov’s most American novel, its narrator is a carrier of predominantly (but not exclusively) European cultural luggage: to justify his unhealthy obsession with underage girls, he draws on English, French and Russian romanticism, but also goes as far as Russian folklore, Greek mythology, and the Old Testament. Little wonder that Dolores, whose cultural references are deeply rooted in American mass culture, especially pop music and cinema, does not understand Humbert and accuses him of speaking “like a book” (*AnL*, 114). Indeed, much of the novel’s comedy “derives from the incongruous picture of the Parisian-born European set adrift in the provincial backwaters of America” (Pifer 1995: 308).

Unlike Fyodor, Humbert is no poet; he is a “poet manqué”: he takes delight in the art of versification but is unable to pay disinterested attention to the world and the people around him. It is significant in this regards that at least half of the verses introduced by Humbert in his narration are not original works but (mis)quotations, parodies, or imitations. Their source is often (but not always) revealed by the narrator and constitutes an integral part of the novel’s complex intertextual game.

3.3.1.1 Quotation and Parodies of English Classics

In some cases, Humbert quotes only a few lines from the work of a well-known poet, as he does in the following example, where he ponders over Charlotte’s love letter and begins to contemplate the idea of marrying her⁹⁹:

Suddenly, gentlemen of the jury, I felt a Dostoevskian grin dawning (through the very grimace that twisted my lips) like a distant and terrible sun. I imagined (under conditions of new and perfect visibility) all the casual caresses her mother’s husband would be able to lavish on his Lolita. I would hold her against me three times a day, every day. All my troubles would be expelled, I would be a healthy man. “To hold thee lightly on a gentle knee and print on thy soft cheek a parent’s kiss...” Well-read Humbert! (*AnL*, 70)

Внезапно, господа присяжные, я почувал, что сквозь самую эту гримасу, искажавшую мне рот, усмешечка из Достоевского брезжит, как далекая и ужасная заря. В новых условиях улучшившейся видимости я стал представлять себе все те ласки, которыми походя мог бы осыпать Лолиту муж ее матери. Мне бы удалось всласть прижаться к ней раза три в день — каждый день. Испарились бы все мои заботы. Я стал бы здоровым человеком.
«Легко и осторожно на коленях Тебя держать и поцелуй отцовский На нежной щечке запечатлевать» — как когда-то сказал английский поэт. О начитанный Гумберт! (*RL*, 68-69)

The reference to Dostoevsky may allude to an episode of *Crime and Punishment* (1866), where Raskolnikov reads his mother’s letter and moves from tears to a sinister smile.¹⁰⁰ The “well-read” Humbert enhances the persuasive potential of the idea of

⁹⁹ As is well known, Charlotte’s letter can be seen as a parody of Tatiana’s letter from Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, another example of solipsistic love driven by romantic fantasies and readings.

¹⁰⁰ In particular, it may echo the following passage: “лицо его было мокро от слез; но когда он кончил, оно было бледно, искривлено судорогой, и тяжелая, желчная, злая улыбка

marrying Charlotte with a quote from Canto III of Lord Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (1812). As a consequence of this allusion, the perversity of Humbert's plan may have slightly better chances to pass unnoticed. In other words, literature is used here as a distracting element in Humbert's rhetorical attempt to convince the "gentlemen of the jury" to believe that as little as "casual caresses" may be enough to transform him into a healthy man. In Russian, this phrase becomes reminiscent of Ostap Bender's "господа присяжные заседатели,"¹⁰¹ but, as pointed out by Julian Connolly, this narratological device may have also been influenced by Dostoevsky's addressing an "invisible listener" in "The Gentle Creature" (Connolly 1997: 19).

The way a hypotext can acquire new meanings in a different literary work is one of intertextuality's most interesting mechanisms, and in *Lolita* we see this in full action: the verses a father addressed to his daughter Ada in Byron's narrative poem are now used by a pedophile to describe the caresses with which he plans to harass the object of his sexual desire. The transfiguration of a tender line of paternal love into an expression of forbidden passion prohibited by law and custom may even be interpreted as an unsettling allusion to Freud's Oedipus complex (more perceivable in Russian, where Nabokov uses the word "father," instead of the gender-neutral "parent"). While technically this example may appear as a case of standard translation, the shift of meaning in the quotation from Byron affects the translator's task: Nabokov is rendering not Byron's poem *per se* but its distorted reflection in Humbert's mind.

At least two divergences from Byron's text can be spotted in the Russian translation of this fragment. First, Nabokov uses a clarifying strategy that is reminiscent of the approach to intertextuality observed in *The Gift*: by means of a brief addition ("как когда-то сказал английский поэт," as an English poet once said), the translator calls attention

змеилась по его губам" (Dostoevsky 1973: 35 ["his face was wet with tears; but when he finished, it was pale, distorted by a spasm, and a heavy, bitter and evil smile was on his lips"]).

¹⁰¹ The con man from the 1928 novel *The Twelve Chairs* by Ilf and Petrov, one of the few works of Soviet literature Nabokov admired.

to the quotation and vaguely points at its source, leaving, however, space for the reader to locate it. Furthermore, the translation of Byron's fragment is transcribed with lineation in the Russian *Lolita*, whereas in the source *Lolita* the poem is not visually highlighted and thus appears more dissolved amid Humbert's thoughts.

In English, the quotation is made up of two iambic pentameters, which in Russian become three iambic pentameters. Since no new information was added to the poem, the change may be attributed to a phenomenon that characterizes English-Russian poetry translations in general: the Russian language tends to expand English monosyllabic verbs and adjectives into longer words. Nabokov was aware of this phenomenon and mentioned it in his essay "Notes on Prosody," pointing out that declension and conjugation tends to even further lengthen Russian words:

The predominance of polysyllables in Russian verse (as compared to the prodigious quantity of monosyllabic adjectives and verbs in English) is basically owing to the absence of monosyllabic adjectives in Russian (there is only one: *zloy*, "wicked") and a comparative paucity of monosyllabic past tenses among the verbs (e.g., *pel*, "sang"), all of which, adjectives and verbs alike, are lengthened by number, declension, conjugation, and nonmasculine gender. (*NoP*, 47)

Nabokov concludes that "Very seldom, in translations from Russian into English and vice versa, can one monosyllabic noun be rendered by another" (*NoP*, 48). Indeed, Humbert's quotation from Byron is a good example of this: monosyllabic words such as "hold," "knee," "print," "thy," "soft," "cheek" etc., require more space in the corresponding Russian line.

It appears that the need to fit the content of Byron's poem into a regular meter has prevailed over slavish fidelity to meaning, and a slight change has occurred in the first line: whereas in the original text the speaker imagines holding the child "lightly on a gentle knee," in Russian Humbert imagines holding Dolores "легко и осторожно на коленях," i.e. to hold her "lightly and cautiously on the knees." While this change does not impact the poem's image, it is already possible to anticipate that, as in *The Gift*, in *Lolita* Nabokov does not use his literal "Onegin" methodology of poetry translation.

Quotation becomes parody when Humbert recalls the verses of another British poet, Robert Browning. Following an allusion to Browning in the novel's Part One,¹⁰² Chapter 22 of Part Two contains a brief poem composed by Humbert for Dolores convalescing at the hospital. In his take on Browning's "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" (1842), Humbert imagines the girl in a hospital bed reading a magazine:

...and smiling a little, and shaking my poor head over my fond fancies, I tottered back to my bed, and lay as quiet as a saint—

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores,
On a patch of sunny green
With Sanchicha reading stories
In a movie magazine—

—which was represented by numerous specimens wherever Dolores landed [...]. (*AnL*, 245)

... и, со слабой улыбкой покачивая головой
вслед нежной грезе, я насилу добрался до
кровати и долго лежал, тих и свят, как
сказано — цитирую не совсем точно — у
Роберта Браунинга —

Свят? Форсит! Когда Долорес
Смутлая на мураве
Вырезает, раззадорясь,
Вздор о кинобожестве —

— вырезает из пестрых журнальчиков,
окужавших Долорес на всех наших
стоянках [...]. (*RL*, 235)

The poem that falls victim of Humbert's parody is devoted to a monk's resentment of a fellow monk, Brother Lawrence, whom the speaker depicts with a constant feeling of irritation. As in Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842), but also in *Lolita* itself, the poem's speaker presents a version of the facts that reveals more than he actually wishes to reveal. In particular, the fragment used by Humbert describes the monk's suspicion that Brother Lawrence may have had impure thoughts about two women, Dolores and Sanchicha.¹⁰³ Their description, however, is so rich in vivid details, that the reader may suspect the speaker himself of excessively attentive observation of these women.

¹⁰² Nabokov draws on Browning's "Pippa Passes" ("From a cleft rose-peach the whole Dryad sprang," 2015: 58): "Wow! Looks swank," remarked my vulgar darling squinting at the stucco as she crept out into the audible drizzle and with a childish hand tweaked loose the frockfold that had stuck in the peach-cleft — to quote Robert Browning" (*AnL*, 117). The allusion is also present in Russian: "«Ну и шик!» заметила моя вульгарная красотка, щурясь на лепной фасад. Она вылезла из автомобиля в шелест морозящего дождя и рывком детской ручки оправила платье, застрявшее между щечками персика, — перефразирую Роберта Браунинга" (*RL*, 114).

¹⁰³ Stanza four of the poem is parodied here: "Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores / Squats outside the Convent bank / With Sanchicha, telling stories, / Steeping tresses in the tank, / Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs, / —Can't I see his dead eye glow, / Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's? / (That is, if he'd let it show!)" (Browning 2015: 85).

Humbert's play on Browning's lines adds a further layer of irony to a text that already was an ironic representation of weakness and hypocrisy: from the unrighteous thoughts of an ironically "saintly" monk, the poem switches to Humbert Humbert's no less ironical but more disturbing proclamation of his rectitude following the separation from Dolores, whom he pictures "on a patch of sunny green" reading glamorous movie magazines (an image reminiscent of Magda in *Laughter in the Dark*).

The translation provides the British poet's name, thus revealing the origin of Humbert's pastiche, and ironically calls it a "mis-quotation." Both the English and Russian versions of this poem are equimetric to their model, composed in trochaic tetrameters with an alternating aBaB rhyme scheme. While both poems are characterized by the presence of sound repetitions and consonances, these devices appear more intense in the translation. For instance, having moved the adjective "brown" from l. 1 to l. 2, the Russian text plays with the repetition of the syllable "му" in the words "смуглая" and "мураве" (the latter indicates a young vivid green grass that stands for the "sunny green" of the original text). Moreover, the closing lines of the Russian poem display a particularly intense succession of recurrent consonants ("в," "з," "д," "р") that dominate in the words "вырезает," "раззадорясь" and "вздор." Thus, in the Russian rendition of this poem it is possible to observe the translator's intention to enrich the prosody as well as the semantic content of the target text with strong sound repetitions. As a consequence, he introduces new details to the Russian poem's closing lines, instead of translating the English ones literally, including the directly dismissive "вздор" ("nonsense") and the word "кинобожество," a "cinematic deity," that enhances the ironic tone of Humbert's parody.

On the level of content, the translation differs significantly from the English version of Humbert's poem. In Russian, Nabokov roughly recreated the central image of Dolores enjoying the sunshine with a magazine in her hands. However, the translator's attention to sound and form seem to prevail over fidelity to meaning. The poem's opening words are especially interesting in this regard. Line 1 of the Russian text imitates the sound of the

corresponding line from the “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”: compare “Saint, forsooth!” with “Свят? Форсит!” The short form of the adjective “святой” echoes the English monosyllabic “saint,” while the meaning of “форсит” (from “форсить,” which can be translated as “to show off,” “to boast,” or “to put on airs”) drifts completely away from its English source (though it suits the ironic tone of the poem), yet its sound is remarkably close to that of the original.

Sound imitation at the expense of semantic fidelity meets the requirement of coherence between the poem and the novel that frames it: Humbert’s pastiche was born out of an echo between his self-representation as a martyr and the words “saint” and “Dolores” in Browning’s poem. Similarly, the translation partly imitates the phonemes of l. 3 of the English text. Having omitted the Spanish name “Sanchicha,” the Russian poem echoes “reading stories” with the verb “раззадорясь” (from “раззадориться,” meaning “to get excited”); both rhyme with “Dolores.”

In this example, prose is also used by the translator as a space for retrieving words that were omitted in the poem. When Humbert’s narration switches back to prose, he specifies that Dolores clips images from “пестрых журнальчиков,” i.e. cuts images out of “colorful magazines,” thus retrieving the “movie magazine” mentioned in the original’s closing line but absent from the translation. When poetry is framed within a novel, a non-literal translation can take advantage of the possibility to have prose passages that surround the poem compensate for the translated poem’s semantic loss.

3.3.1.2 Quotation from Imaginary Sources

The cycle of poems inserted by Humbert in his narrative includes two rhymed texts that stem from non-existent cultural sources. At the end of Chapter 13, Part One, Humbert recalls a song he sang to Dolores in an attempt to distract her from one of his first acts of sexual harassment. The piece — in Humbert’s own words “a foolish song that was then

popular” (*AnL*, 59) — revolves around the story of a woman named Carmen, killed by the speaker, who presumably was her lover:

At this point I may as well give the words of that song hit in full—to the best of my recollection at least—I don’t think I ever had it right. Here goes:

O my Carmen, my little Carmen!
Something, something those something nights,
And the stars, and the cars, and the bars and
the barmen— And, O my charmin’, our dreadful
fights.
And the something town where so gaily, arm in
Arm, we went, and our final row,
And the gun I killed you with, O my Carmen,
The gun I am holding now.

(Drew his .32 automatic, I guess, and put a
bullet through his moll’s eye.) (*AnL*, 61)

Тут позволю себе заодно привести слова
вышеупомянутой модной песенки или, по
крайней мере, то из нее, что мне
запомнилось — я, кажется, никогда не знал
ее по-настоящему. Так вот:

О Кармен, Карменситочка, вспомни-ка там
Таратам — таратунные струи фонтана,
И гитары, и бары, и фары, траатам,
И твои все измены, гитана!
И там город в огнях, где с тобой я бродил,
И последнюю ссору таратам — таратуя,
И ту пулю, которой тебя я убил,
Кольт, который — траторы — держу я...

(Выхватил, верно, небольшой кольт и
всадил пулю крале в лоб.) (*RL*, 60)

These lines belong to the realm of music, with which Nabokov had a peculiar and sometimes conflicted relationship. As Julian Connolly notes in his study “The Quest for a Natural Melody in the Fiction of Vladimir Nabokov” (1999), Humbert’s reference to the “special spell” of the song, to its distractive and perhaps hypnotizing power, “represents a late reflection of a property associated with music earlier in Nabokov’s work — the capacity of music to create a sphere of private reverie, in which the individual may indulge in solipsistic fantasies regardless of those around him.” This may be the reason why Humbert’s key statement, “Lolita had been safely solipsized” (*AnL*, 60), occurs in the same chapter as this song (Connolly 1999: 78-79).

Invented as this “foolish song” may be, it contains allusions to real cultural products from both lowbrow and classical backgrounds. In their search for real-life musical sources of Humbert’s song, scholars have suggested that it may have been inspired by a popular composition titled “Frankie and Johnny” (Wylie 2000: 446-47), but also the folk song “O my darling Clementine” (Rodgers 2018: 18). It is significant that both these possible sources involve the death of a woman, as does the most obvious literary reference

contained in this text – Prosper Mérimée’s novella *Carmen* (1845). In Humbert’s song, however, Mérimée’s story is modernized through the introduction of such elements as cars, guns, and bars.

Whatever its possible source, Humbert confesses that he misremembers and distorts it, for his knowledge of popular culture is admittedly poor. The reader may be tricked into thinking that the song presages Dolores’s murder, and indeed Humbert will tease the reader with this false anticipation in the novel’s Part Two: the narrator reiterates the importance of this song throughout the text and compares Dolores to Carmen at some key moments, including the episode devoted to Humbert and Dolly’s last meeting.

The Russian song is equimetric to its English counterpart, but displays an increased metrical regularity (both poems alternate anapaestic trimeters and tetrameters). On the level of content, however, the self-translation departs significantly from the song’s original version. In the opening line, the Russian text addresses the girl as “Карменситочка,” a word that doubles the diminutive suffix (in the American *Lolita*, Humbert sometimes uses Carmencita to address Dolores), adding a Russian diminutive suffix to the Spanish one. The translation’s second line introduces a new element: with “something nights” left behind, Nabokov adds the image of a fountain’s streaming water, “струи фонтана,” which rhymes with another line that diverges from the English song, “и твои все измены гитана!” (and all your infidelities, Gitana). By introducing an open reference to Mérimée’s Carmen’s Romani origins, the translator may be creating new intertextual connections in the target language and the corresponding literary system.

Indeed, in the 1960s Nabokov could hardly have expected his Russian audience to recognize references to American pop and folk songs. These possible allusions are inevitably lost in the target text, limited to a brief note that describes the composition as a “модная песенка” (popular little song). By contrast, the introduction of the semantic field related to gypsies and their guitars (“И гитары, и бары” – the guitars were added in the translation) may recreate the atmosphere of popular Gypsy songs, known in Russia for

their romantic and often dramatic character. On a deeper level, the rhyming “фонтана” / “гитана” may sparkle associations with Pushkin’s Southern poems “The Fountain of Bakhchisaray” (1824) and “The Gypsies” (1827). In particular, the latter poem was a major source of inspiration for Merimée’s *Carmen*. Indeed, “страсти роковые” (fateful passions, Pushkin 1950, IV: 234) pervade both stories, whose protagonists are Romantic Byronic heroes who end up murdering gypsy women they are passionately in love with.

If one sets aside the misleading murder anticipation, there is one important point of contact between these literary sources and *Lolita*: Humbert’s status as an outsider to the community of the woman he desires, and, as a consequence, the estranged eyes with which he observes this community. Thus, the “highbrow” intertextual layer of this song is retained with the reference to Merimée’s *Carmen*, perfectly working in Russian but also enriched with a possible reference to the Russian hypotext of *Carmen*’s story. As far as popular music is concerned, the allusion to real-life American songs is blurred. As the translation delicately points at the atmosphere of gypsy romances that most Russian readers are familiar with, it compensates for this loss.

In the novel’s Part Two, shortly after his (possibly imagined)¹⁰⁴ encounter with Dolores in her capacity as Mrs. Schiller, Humbert quotes a short but interesting distich by “an old poet,” who, as suggested in the *Annotated Lolita*, is “invented, but his message is signal” (*AnL*, 444). And indeed, the Russian translation informs us that the poet probably never existed:

¹⁰⁴ Scholars (Tekiner 1979; Toker 1989; Dolinin 1995) have pointed out the unreliability of the Coalmont episode, due to a “chronologic discrepancy” (Dolinin 1995: 327). This discrepancy becomes especially obvious if one compares the Russian and English *Lolita*: “In the faulty 1958 edition Humbert receives Dolly’s letter “early” in September 1952 . Subsequently, Nabokov replaces the word “early” with “late.” In his 1967 Russian translation Nabokov specifies the date – September 22, 1952 – in the description of Humbert’s going to the mailbox, whereas in the English original he mentions it three pages later” (Toker 1989: 210-11).

To quote an old poet:

The moral sense in mortals is the duty
We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty.
(*AnL*, 283)

Закончу эту главку цитатой из старого и
едва ли существовавшего поэта:

Так пошлиною нравственности ты
Обложено в нас, чувство красоты! (*RL*, 283)

Before *Lolita*, Nabokov already attributed important messages to the pen of an invented figure. For instance, the often-quoted cryptic epigraph of *Invitation to a Beheading* is assigned to an imaginary philosopher, Pierre Delalande,¹⁰⁵ who also appears in *Dar*, and, subsequently, in *The Gift*.

Similarly, Humbert's distich is unusually serious, almost philosophical. The English version of this short poem is characterized by the presence of three almost homophonic words, "moral," "mortals," and "mortal." In his book *Style is Matter: The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (2007), Leland de la Durantaye paraphrased the English version of this "quotation" as follows:

[T]he tax or "duty" that keeps the sense of beauty (sensual perception of beauty) from becoming mortal (i.e., fatal) for certain mortals is the moral sense. Phrased otherwise, mortals' sense of beauty, if not reined in by the moral sense, can be mortal (fatal). (2007: 62)

The Russian translation could be paraphrased in a simpler way: the sense of beauty is taxed within us by morality. Beauty's attribute "mortal" may be absent because the quasi-homophony between the words "moral" and "mortal" is untranslatable in Russian. However, if one accepts de la Durantaye's interpretation, the omission of "mortal" impacts the poem's meaning.

Taken independently from its English counterpart, the link between aesthetics and ethics in the Russian poem may echo Dostoevsky's theory of moral beauty,¹⁰⁶ yet should

¹⁰⁵ "Comme un fou se croit Dieu, nous nous croyons mortels" (*IB*, 10).

¹⁰⁶ The well-known statement "Beauty will save the world," uttered by Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* (1868), refers of course to moral beauty, which for the Russian novelist had, first and foremost, a religious significance: Dostoevsky considered Jesus Christ in aesthetic terms as "the highest personification of the moral ideal" (Lantz 2004: 7). In an 1868 letter, Dostoevsky wrote to Apollon Maikov that "[t]here is only one positively beautiful figure in the world, Christ, and so the

not be identified with it. In his analysis of these lines, Vladimir Alexandrov, who takes into account both versions of the couplet,¹⁰⁷ provides another interpretation:

In other words, an individual's perception of something or someone as beautiful automatically awakens an ethical faculty in that person; this emerges as a function of being alive, or "mortal." (1991: 183)

Therefore, it is through the alertness of the senses rather than through solipsizing desire that individual perception transforms the enjoyment of beauty into aesthetic experience. The expression "moral sense" can thus be read here as a synonym of "aesthetic bliss," the moment when the self transcends its boundaries (Toker 1989: 228).

This short poem represents an eloquent example of how self-translation can be used as a tool of disambiguation of the authorial intention. Seen from this perspective, the omission of the "mortal" attribute of "beauty" in the Russian translation is less crucial: if we interpret "mortal" as the attribute of being alive, then its loss in the self-translation does not change the overall meaning of the poem and proclaims not the fatality of beauty in the absence of morality but the importance of ethics in the perception of beauty.

3.3.1.3 Imitation and Parody of T. S. Eliot

The brief cycle of poems fictionally authored by Humbert Humbert symmetrically starts and ends with an imitation of T. S. Eliot. In Part One, the very first sample of Humbert's art of versification is provided to the reader. Here, the narrator evokes the years of his youth and recalls the path he followed on the way to his studies in English literature:

appearance of this immeasurably beautiful figure is, of course, an infinite miracle" (qtd. in Lantz 2004: 8).

¹⁰⁷ Alexandrov's comment is not focused on the comparison of these two versions of the text, but he mentions the Russian a few lines above, when he points out that Nabokov invented the old poet, "as the Russian translation implies" (1991: 183).

At first, I planned to take a degree in psychiatry as many manqué talents do; but I was even more manqué than that; a peculiar exhaustion, I am so oppressed, doctor, set in; and I switched to English literature, where so many frustrated poets end as pipe-smoking teachers in tweeds. [...] I published tortuous essays in obscure journals. I composed pastiches:

...Fräulein von Kulp
 may turn, her hand upon the door;
 I will not follow her. Nor Fresca. Nor that Gull.
 (*AnL*, 17)

Сначала я думал стать психиатром, как многие неудачники; но я был неудачником особенным; меня охватила диковинная усталость (надо пойти к доктору — такое томление); и я перешел на изучение английской литературы, которым пробавляется не один поэт-пустоцвет, превратясь в профессора с трубочкой, в пиджаке из добротной шерсти. [...] Я печатал извилистые этюды в малочитаемых журналах. Я сочинял пародии — на Элиота, например:

Пускай фрейляйн фон Кульп, еще держась
 За скобку двери, обернется... Нет,
 Не двинусь ни за нею, ни за Фреской.
 Ни за той чайкой... (*RL*, 17)

These lines represent a patchwork-like parody of T. S. Eliot's "Gerontion" (1920), a poem permeated with thoughts of socio-historical crisis and individual emptiness in a way characteristic of a modernist poet.¹⁰⁸ Humbert's "art," however, is quick to transform tragedy into perverse comedy: in his version, Fräulein von Kulp and Fresca are not ghostly presences whirled in a cosmic hurricane but underage nymphets.

Like other types of intertextual elements, parody requires interaction between the text and its reader, who, ideally, recognizes the hypotext and, as a result, may understand the expanded meaning of the hypertext. In *Lolita*, parody is a form of communication between the narrator and his reader, who is supposed to be able to recognize a parody of Eliot and sympathize with the narrator's wit. In Russian, a parody of an English poet, however, is less recognizable: the Russian version of this passage, like that of several

¹⁰⁸ See, in particular, such passages as "Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp / Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door. Vacant shuttles / Weave the wind. I have no ghosts, / An old man in a draughty house / Under a windy knob" (ll. 27–28) and "de la Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled" (l. 66); "Gull against the wind, in the windy straits / Of Belle Isle" (ll. 69–70). (See also the entry "pastiche" in *The Annotated Lolita*, 337). *Lolita* contains another allusion to this poem, when in Chapter 26 Humbert states: "I picked her up one depraved May evening somewhere between Montreal and New York" (*AnL*, 258). The Russian text unveils the allusion and its source: "Я ее подобрал как-то в мае, в «порочном мае», как говорит Элиот, где-то между Монреалем и Нью-Йорком" (*RL*, 248).

examples discussed above, helps the Russian reader to identify the source of the literary allusion by prompting the author's name (“на Элиота”).¹⁰⁹

Since the object of this poetic parody is composed in free verse, both versions of Humbert's poem lack a regular meter. As a consequence, while imitating the distinguishing characteristics of Eliot's poetry, such as fragmented rhythm, variable line length and unexpected enjambment, the self-translation displays almost no semantic difference. Sound repetition is stimulated by the requirements of the prosody of this brief fragment. For instance, in the pair “скобка” and “фреской,” the word “скобка” (door handle — a detail absent from the English text) may have been added for prosodic reasons. As in the quotation from Byron, the number of lines increases in the Russian text, but, more interestingly, Nabokov modifies the poem's punctuation and introduces two ellipses. As a result, the parody appears more comically emotional and recalls Eliot's tendency to overuse ellipses in his early poetry.¹¹⁰

In Part One, the reader may interpret Humbert's parody as an expression of ironic criticism of T. S. Eliot, who, incidentally, was known for his practice of parody. However, as Linda Hutcheon points out in her *Theory of Parody*, in line with other modernist works such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's allusions and parodies of classics such as Melville and Dante, do not mock or ridicule the precursor texts: “if anything, [parody] is to be seen [...] as an ideal or at least as a norm from which the modern departs” (Hutcheon 2000: 5). By means of transposition of classical authors to contemporary texts, modernist writers

¹⁰⁹ One may wonder whether the Russian readers had access to Eliot's poetry, which, unsurprisingly, was not endorsed by the Soviet Regime. Nevertheless, translations of his poems were included in the 1939 anthology *Poety Ameriki. XX Vek* (The Poets of America. The 20th Century), published in Moscow by Goslitizdat. His poems were also translated by Samuil Marshak and Andrey Sergeev, for the first Russian-language collection of T. S. Eliot's poetry (1971). In January 1965, following the news of Eliot's death, Joseph Brodsky, exiled in the village of Norinskaya, wrote the poem “Na Smert' Eliota” (“On the Death of Eliot”).

¹¹⁰ See, for instance, his poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” composed between 1910 and 1911. A more mature Eliot admitted the practice: “I have been a sinner myself in the use of broken conversations punctuated by three dots” (2015: 419).

created continuity between past and present, reinforcing the role of the classics as a starting point for their own art.

Parody can therefore have a double nature. According to Yuri Tynyanov (1921), parody can be sympathetic to its target, and the object of parody can be both respected and admired. Indeed, Humbert's parody of Eliot is an expression of admiration rather than disdain. This impression is confirmed when, in one of the key episodes of Part Two, shortly before the murder of Clare Quilty, a poetic death sentence strongly reminiscent of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday"¹¹¹ is read aloud:

Because you took advantage of a sinner
because you took advantage
because you took
because you took advantage of my
disadvantage..
"That's good, you know. That's damned good."
(*AnL*, 299)

За то, что ты взял грешника враспloch,
За то, что взял враспloch,
За то, что взял,
За то, что взял враспloch мою оплошность...
«Ну, это, знаете, хорошо. Чертовски
хорошо!» (RL, 288)

The opening lines of this composition strikingly resemble the text they imitate. However, Humbert's version is different in content, structure and outcome. Eliot's poem, filled with uncertainty and a sense Christian humility, is not a static text: there is evolution from the first line, "Because I do not hope" (Eliot 2015: 87), to the poem's final part, where there is a shift to an anaphoric repetition of "*Although* I do not hope" (92, italics mine). By contrast, Humbert's pompous and vociferous imitation is a vicious circle: its closing lines "because of all you did, because of all I did not / you have to die" (*AnL*, 300) hopelessly return to the same adverb as in the poem's opening.

Both the English and the Russian versions of Humbert's text imitate Eliot's distinctive fragmented style. As in the previous example, since there is no need to fit the translation into a rigid metrical structure, Nabokov can maintain the poem's semantic

¹¹¹ "Because I do not hope to turn again / Because I do not hope / Because I do not hope to turn / Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope / I no longer strive to strive towards such things / (Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?) / Why should I mourn / The vanished power of the usual reign?" (Eliot 2015: 87).

material quite close to the English original. Nevertheless, there are some shades of difference between these fragments: for instance, the closing line of this stanza, which can be translated as “you took by surprise my inadvertence,” presents perhaps a more self-aware Humbert, since disadvantage is not something one could be blamed for, whereas for an “оплошность” one may be held responsible. The root of both “оплошность” and “врасплох” comes from the adjective “плохой,” meaning bad or sick, which matches the word “грешник” (sinner) and the reference to Adam that will follow (“when I stood Adam-naked / before a federal law,” *AnL*, 300).

Both poems are rich in sound repetitions and alliterations that influence their rhythm: “moulting moist,” “marriage” and “mountain”, “stinging stars,” “poppies,” “popcorn,” “croppers,” “dull doll”; and “влажный,” “нежный,” “наскучившую куклу,” “воображая брак,” “украл у покровителя”.

The poem’s vocabulary, particularly in the text’s final part, is characterized by self-referential pompous poetic imagery, bathetically heightened in such passages as the following:

because you stole her
 from her wax-browed and dignified protector
 spitting into his heavy-lidded eye
 ripping his flavid toga and at dawn
 leaving the hog to roll upon his new discomfort
 the awfulness of love and violets
 remorse despair while you took a dull doll to
 pieces
 and threw its head away because of all you did
 because of all I did not you have to die (*AnL*,
 300)

За то, что ты ее украл
 У покровителя ее,
 — А был он величав, с челом как воск —
 Но ты — ему ты плюнул
 В глаз под тяжелым веком, изорвал
 Его шафрановую тогу,
 И на заре оставил кабана
 Валяться на земле в недуге новом,
 Среди ужаса фиалок и любви,
 Раскаянья, отчаянья, а ты
 Наскучившую куклу взял
 И, на кусочки растащив ее,
 Прочь бросил голову. За это,
 За все, что сделал ты,
 За все, чего не сделал я, —
 Ты должен умереть! (*RL*, 289)

Humbert's "toga" is the garment worn by male Roman citizens and "flavid" is a synonym of "yellow" with a Latin root and imperial associations.¹¹² This detail is rendered with a Russian adjective that has exotic but less regal connotations — "шафрановую тогу" (saffron toga) — and indeed yellow was an expensive color obtained from saffron (so precious that it was usually worn by brides in the Roman empire). Overall, the passage is rich in high-intensity images and motifs such as the "hog" at dawn, love and violets, remorse and despair, a broken doll.

Among the formal modifications, a variation in the length of lines can be observed in the Russian translation, which contains a greater number of shorter lines. Moreover, the Russian text's rhythm acquires a more discernible iambic undersong and regular punctuation, resulting in a slightly more traditional poem, but still in free verse. Despite these modifications, the translation continues to imitate Humbert's (and Eliot's) fragmented pace with frequent enjambment. Thus, in this poem, Nabokov intervened upon form rather than content, slightly adapting it to the target language and literature: in the 1960s, Russian free verse did not have such an established tradition and was a more marginal phenomenon than in English and American poetry.

Quilty's interrupting comments further downgrade this episode from a poignant revenge accompanied by pseudo-modernist verse to a tragicomic dialogue between two criminals. The pedophile playwright scorns Humbert's poem (and mocks Eliot's anaphoras) with comments like "A little repetitious, what?" (*AnL*, 300). Rather than a parody, Humbert's text is a poor imitation, described ironically by Quilty as "a fine poem. Your best as far as I am concerned" (*ibid.*). Hence, as Barry P. Scherr pointed out, in this episode the real author of *Lolita* demonstrates that Humbert's "imitative verse illustrates his poverty of imagination" (1995: 620) and his lack of genuine talent.

¹¹² Flavid derives from *flavus*, meaning golden or yellow. The name Flavius of the Flavian dynasty derives from the same word. Flavius was also a common *praenomen* among Roman emperors.

More often than not, Humbert's parodies subvert their literary models. As argued by Tynyanov, "The comic is usually the colouring which accompanies parody, but is by no means the colouring of the parodic itself. [...] Parody lies wholly in a dialectical play with the device. If a parody of tragedy becomes a comedy, a comedy parodied may become a tragedy" (Tynyanov 1921: 48). Thus, Browning's innocent irony that teases human weaknesses acquires a grim shade when adapted to Humbert's story. His final imitation of Eliot is supposed to be serious and tragic, but instead slips into dark comedy: rather than Humbert, it is Nabokov who mocks Eliot through his character's admiration and imitation of the modernist poet.

Nabokov's practice as a translator provides several examples of translation of parodies and imitations. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which Nabokov transposed into a very Russian *Ania v strane chudes* (1924), is famous for its inventive puns and parodies of poems popular in Victorian England. In his translation, Nabokov brilliantly recreated Carroll's wordplay, but transferred all the cultural and literary references to a Russian setting. Thanks to this method, he adapted the book to an audience of Russian émigré children, who were unlikely to recognize parodies of British authors such as Isaac Watts and Robert Southey. For instance, Nabokov used Pushkin's "The Gypsies" – the line "Птичка божия не знает" ("God's bird doesn't know," Pushkin 1950, IV: 209) – to replace a parody of Isaac Watt's 1715 moralistic poem "Against Idleness and Mischief" (in Carroll's reworking "How Doth the Little Crocodile").¹¹³ This

¹¹³ In his original poem, Watts uses an image of a bee as a model of hard work. In Carroll's parody, the crocodile is pictured as a deceptive and predatory creature. In Pushkin's text, the image of the bird is used as a symbol of the Gypsies. Nabokov's version works because, as Julian Connolly explains, the "disjuncture created in the reader's mind between Pushkin's lines about a carefree bird and Nabokov's lines about a carefree but carnivorous crocodile produces a most pleasant and humorous reaction" (Connolly 1995: 20). Thus Carroll's "How doth the little crocodile / Improve his shining tail / And pour the waters of the Nile / On every golden scale!" / "How cheerfully he seems to grin, / How neatly spreads his claws, / And welcomes little fishes in / With gentle smiling jaws!" (Carroll 1993: 27) becomes Nabokov's "Крокодилушка не знает / Ни заботы, ни труда. /

method of cultural adaptation, a typical example of what Venuti calls domestication, allowed Nabokov to preserve Carroll's original intention by having his audience guess the source of the poem.

By contrast, in *Eugene Onegin* Nabokov unfolded the origin and meaning of intertextual elements in the wide space provided by the commentary to his translation. Pushkin's parodies are often directed at Russian writers, but sometimes also at French and British ones. Regardless of the hypotext's language, Nabokov insisted on translating literally every passage of *Eugene Onegin*, and explained the stylistic features of this or that parody in the commentary. For instance, in the commentary to Chapter VIII (II: 5) Nabokov reflects on a parody of Ivan Dmitriev's translation of a line from Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" (1734–35):

Yet even more interesting are such passages as those in which the aped phrase is found in the Russian version of the French translation of an English author, so that in result Pushkin's pastiche (which we have to render in English) is three times removed from its model! What should the translator do in the following case? (*EO*, III: 142)

Nabokov's solution is a literal rendering of Pushkin's manuscript line ("And Dmitriev was not our detractor," *EO*, III: 142), supplemented by a detailed explanation of the parody and meta-translatory thoughts. He provides both a literal rendition of Dmitriev's original line ("Kongrev applauded me, Svift was not my detractor," *ibid.*), and reports Pope's English verse ("And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd my Lays," *EO*, III: 143), which Dmitriev paraphrased from a French translation. In conclusion, Nabokov argues that because Pushkin was thinking not of Pope but of Dmitriev "in an accurate English translation, we should keep the 'detractor' and resist the formidable temptation to render Pushkin's line: And Dmitriev, too, endured my lays..." (*ibid.*). Nabokov gave up the possibility to take three steps back to the English source of Pushkin's parody. In other words, in his guise of a scrupulous scholar-translator, he preferred an intellectual exchange

Золотит его чешуйки / Быстротечная вода. / Милых рыбок ждет он в гости, / На брюшке
среди камышей: / Лапки врозь, дугою хвостик, / И улыбка до ушей..." (*SSoch*, I: 368)

with the audience to the temptation to recreate an aesthetically appealing text that could grant a part of his readers a pleasant moment of recognition of a parody's model.

Such antithetic translation strategies may follow Nabokov's evolution from free translation to literalism. However, his approach to the translation of parody appears first and foremost coherent with the translation's overall purpose: whereas in *Ania v strane chudes* Nabokov adapted Carroll's story to a precise and particular target audience, in his *Eugene Onegin* he tried to convey the untranslatable beauty and cultural depth of Pushkin's poetry to the general reader. It is noteworthy that in 1970 Nabokov did not dismiss his translations of Carroll's poems, made with a domesticated non-literal method: in answer to Simon Karlinsky's article devoted to *Ania v strane chudes* (1970), Nabokov claimed that Karlinsky was "much too kind" to this translation: "How much better I could have done it fifteen years later! The only good bits are the poems and the word-play" (SO, 286). The examples of parodic and imitative poems analyzed in this section only confirm that, despite his reputation of an uncompromising literalist, Nabokov was perfectly capable of flexibility as a translator of poetry.

In the translations of Humbert's imitations and pastiches, Nabokov appears willing to sacrifice semantic fidelity in favor of such elements as form, rhythm, and, especially, the poems' parodic nature. If parody uses "subversive mimicry" to point out any "weakness, pretension or lack of self-awareness in its original" (Sage 2006: 167), then its successful outcome in poetry is strongly dependent on form, because, unlike caricature, parody works indirectly through style: "it 'quotes' from and alludes to its original, abridging and inverting its characteristic devices" (ibid.).

To recreate the formal characteristics of Humbert's parodies in Russian was therefore a necessary condition for the preservation of parodic mechanisms in the Russian *Lolita*. As far as culturally specific elements are concerned, the poems analyzed in this section have shown a tendency to foreignize the target text by means of references to English-language sources. Foreignization, however, is not excessive: for instance, in Humbert's final

imitation of Eliot, Nabokov carries out an operation of mild formal adaptation of the poem to the prosody of the target language, where free verse had a more modest tradition. Overall, original literary references are certainly maintained in *Lolita*'s poems and many examples feature brief explanatory remarks that reveal the author's name and are reminiscent of the strategy observed in *The Gift*.

Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's poetry echoes the voices of the authors he admires, but is never plainly imitative. Nevertheless, there is a poem in *Dar* whose translation can be interpreted as a translation of parody, or better, self-parody: the brief text attributed to Fyodor "Задумчиво и безнадежно / распространяет аромат / и неосуществимо нежно / уж полу-увядает сад" (*SSoch* IV, 332). As seen above, this example of Fyodor's early poetry is also an ironic imitation of Nabokov's own juvenile fascination with Bely's prosodic experiments. In Englishing this fragment, Nabokov applied a method that is reminiscent of the approach observed in this section: he recreated the complex pattern of half-accents — a crucial part of the self-parody — at the expense of semantic fidelity.

Nabokov stated in a 1966 interview that "Satire is a lesson, parody is a game" (*SO*, 76). He further distinguished between parody in the "familiar sense of grotesque imitation" and the idea — defined by Fyodor in *The Gift* as the "spirit of parody" (*G*, 24) — of a "lighthearted, delicate, mockingbird game, such as Pushkin's parody of Derzhavin in 'Exegi Monumentum'" (*SO*, 76). Humbert's parodies and imitations are more akin to "grotesque imitation" than a "lighthearted" and "delicate" game. Their translation is in tune with their primary function — to embody Humbert's perverse application of literature. Hence, in the poetic parodies and imitations in *Lolita*, Nabokov gave up literalism in order to "translate" the wider scope with which these poems were composed: to show through concrete examples that poets should never *use* art to pursue practical, let alone criminal intentions. A warning that artists who had experienced totalitarianism could well understand.

3.3.2 Humbert's Original Poems

Like *Dar*, *Lolita* contains a series of poems fictionally attributed to the protagonist of the novel. However, Humbert's poetic endeavors produce results that are unlike those of Fyodor's poems, both in terms of artistic quality and of their function within the novel. The previous section has shown that Humbert uses erudition to increase the persuasive power of his narration by introducing literary parodies and imitations. Similarly, his original poems do not germinate from spiritual or aesthetic experience and, as a result, do not appear as genuine works of literature. By attributing a series of poems to the narrator of *Lolita*, Nabokov had the possibility to depict Humbert as a good poet. Yet, the novel's real author chose *not* to do so and made him a "poet manqué." This trait is in tune with other features of the character's portrait, such as his incapacity for sympathy and compassion: in Nabokov's worldview, aesthetic experience and verse-writing are intrinsically ethical activities.

A large fraction of Fyodor's poetry can be read independently from the novel. By contrast, Humbert's poems are designed to become an integral part of his version of the story about Dolores. Below I analyze Humbert's rhymes and their Russian translations not as poetic creations in their own right but as artificially crafted texts aimed at reflecting and deepening the complex portrait of their fictional author.

3.3.2.1 Short Rhymes

With the exception of the long poem presented in Chapter 25 of Part Two, the poems authored, as it were, by Humbert Humbert are mostly fragments or brief exercises in versification. His poetry is striking for sound repetitions, wordplay and punning. When he is not parodying or imitating someone else's poems, the narrator of *Lolita* invests in the formal aspect of his texts, as it happens, for instance, in this "nonsense" limerick, presented in Chapter 25 of Part Two:

I recalled the rather charming nonsense verse I used to write her when she was a child: “nonsense,” she used to say mockingly, “is correct.”

The Squirrel and his Squirrel, the Rabs and their Rabbits
Have certain obscure and peculiar habits.
Male hummingbirds make the most exquisite rockets.
The snake when he walks holds his hands in his
pockets... (*AnL*, 255)

Я припомнил довольно изящные, чепушинные стишки, которые я для нее писал, когда она была ребенком. «Не чепушинные», говорила она насмешливо, «а просто чепуха»:

Пролетают колибри на аэропланах,
Проходит змея, держа руки в карманах...
или:
Так ведет себя странно с крольчихою кролик,
Что кролиководы смеются до колик. (*RL*, 245)

The Russian poem, while maintaining the same simple rhyme scheme (anapaestic tetrameters with some iambic substitutions), inverts the order of the lines and separates them by means of the conjunction “или” (or). As a result, instead of a single fragment (strongly evocative of Carroll’s *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*), the Russian text appears to be quoting two couplets from separate poems. Within the novel, the translation thus strengthens the impression that Humbert may have composed a little cycle of such “nonsense” verse.

While this poem can hardly be described as “charming,” it certainly is an odd text. Its most striking feature is an unpleasant contrast between form and meaning. The anapaestic meter imitates the style of limerick-like children’s poems, yet the lines contain sexual allusions.

The first couplet of the Russian poem contains an anaphoric repetition of the prefix “про” (пролетают, проходит, anagrammed in аэропропланах). These sounds are echoed in the following part, which omits the image of the squirrels and focuses on the rabbits: крольчихою, кролик, кролиководы. The couplets are also connected by the similarity between the words “колик” (a word absent from the English text, a full rhyme for the word “кролик”) and “колибри.” In the original poem, the “male” hummingbird could be seen as an allusion to Humbert Humbert’s name. Hummingbirds are mentioned several times in the novel. For instance, in an episode of Chapter 2, Part Two, Humbert mistakes nocturnal hawkmoths for a storm of hummingbirds: this is just one of the many details that, not

without a dose of irony, deliberately distances the character from his author.¹¹⁴ While this particular phonetic association is lost in Russian, the translation mimics the main formal features of the source text at the expense of semantic fidelity: in both versions soundplay is a cover for risky innuendos.

At times, Humbert enriches his narration with rhythmic fragments, melding prose with poetry in a way that could recall the rhythmic prose of *Dar*. However, in *The Gift*, the translator's overall effort to maintain the mechanism of rhythmic prose confirms the importance of this specific mode for the novel. By contrast, in the Russian *Lolita*, rhythmic fragments often become visually separated from prose by means of lineation, which turns them into rhymed fragments.

An example of this kind of change has already been noted in the quotation from Byron (Part One, Chapter 17). Even more significantly, lineation is introduced in a short poem in Chapter 25 of Part One. Here, Humbert composes a few verses that draw a parallel between his passion for Dolores and the romantic yearnings of two important writers, Edgar Allan Poe and Dante Alighieri:

Goodness, what crazy purchases were prompted by the poignant predilection Humbert had in those days for check weaves, bright cottons, frills, puffed-out short sleeves, soft pleats, snug-fitting bodices and generously full skirts! Oh Lolita, you are my girl, as Vee was Poe's and Bea Dante's, and what little girl would not like to whirl in a circular skirt and scanties? Did I have something special in mind? coaxing voices asked me. Swimming suits? (*AnL*, 107)

Господи, на какие прихотливые покупки толкнула Гумберта свойственная ему в эти дни слабость к клетчатым тканям, ярким ситцам, оборкам, пышным коротким рукавчикам, мягкой плиссировке, платьицам, тесно прилегающим наверху и очень широким внизу!

Полюбил я Лолиту, как Вирджинию — По,
И как Данте — свою Беатриче;
Закружились девчонки, раздувая юбочки:
Панталончики — верх неприличия!

Ласковые голоса спрашивали меня, что именно я желал бы видеть? Купальные костюмы? (*RL*, 104)

¹¹⁴ In a 1958 interview Nabokov mentioned the episode from this perspective: "I've taken great care to separate myself from him [Humbert]. For instance, the good reader notices that Humbert Humbert confuses, just to take an instance, hummingbirds with hawk moths. Now, I would never do that, being an entomologist" (conversation with Lionell Trilling and Pierre Berton, published in *Conversations with Vladimir Nabokov* 2017: 12).

The English poem — transcribed without lineation, as if it were born freely out of Humbert’s flow of thoughts — alternates trimeters and tetrameters of anapaests and iambs, with an AbAb rhyme scheme. The self-translation displays an increased metrical regularity, with a predominance of anapaests over iambs, but skips the rhyme between ll. 1 and 3 (there is, however, an internal rhyme in l. 3, between the words “девчонки” and “юбчонки”). The predominance of anapaests in the Russian text is probably the result of an increased presence of polysyllabic words in comparison to the English poem, where the rhythm is steadier, based on many shorter words. For instance, the women’s shortened names are translated in full forms in Russian: “Vee” becomes “Вирджинию,” “Bea” is “Беатриче,” which somewhat decreases the false-familiar tone of the source text. As if to compensate, such neutral monosyllabic words as “girl” and “skirt” are rendered in Russian with suffixes that indicate informal familiarity (“девчонки,” “юбчонки”). Thus, both poems are permeated with a playful, maliciously cheerful atmosphere, with a touch of *poshlost’*. Their prosody is, again, characterized by sound repetitions: for instance, the English has recurring “l” and “s” consonants (“little girl,” “like to whirl,” “circular skirt” and “scanties”), while the translation recreates the alliteration of the source poem by taking up the “ch” sound from “Беатриче” and carries it across the remaining lines: “девчонки,” “юбчонки,” “панталончики,” “неприличия.”

In the Russian *Lolita*, the visual separation of this brief poem and its increased metrical regularity upgrade it from a spontaneous flow of rhyming thoughts to a small independent text. As a result, the translation draws attention to the importance of this poem within Humbert’s narration – Humbert uses the rhetorical device of attempting to justify his criminal behavior by means of its correlation with the biographies of universally appreciated authors (although his analogy with Poe, who had married Virginia in order to be close to her mother, whom he loved but could not marry, is not very felicitous for him).

In the previous example, the Russian text balances between recreating Humbert’s playful and eerily cheerful style and retaining the poem’s meaning. Elsewhere, the

untranslatability of wordplay and soundplay shift the target text's focus towards other features. For instance, in the chapter devoted to Humbert's diary, an entry begins as follows: "Monday. *Delectatio morosa*. I spend my doleful days in dumps and dolors" (*AnL*, 43). The iambic pentameter that follows the Latin Christian term¹¹⁵ plays with cognates of the word "dolor," the Latin root of Dolly's name,¹¹⁶ and stands out for a heavy alliteration of the "d" consonant (anticipated in "Monday" and "Delectatio").

Both the wordplay and the alliteration cannot be conveyed in the translation: in Russian, no synonyms for "pain" descend from the Latin "dolor." This may explain why, in this case, the translator adopted an opposite strategy to the one observed in the previous examples. The Russian poem gives up the reproduction of the figures of speech, and represents the poem's content quite closely to the original:

Понедельник. *Delectatio morosa*.
«Я провожу томительные дни
В хандре и грусти...» (*RL*, 42)

Here Nabokov split the English iambic pentameter into two poetic lines, a full iambic pentameter and a fragment made of an iamb and an amphibrach, transcribed with traditional lineation and enclosed in quotation marks.

The loss associated with the untranslatability of the wordplay is partly compensated by vague allusiveness. The introduction of quotation marks seems to imply that Humbert is recalling someone else's verses, thus turning our attention towards the intertextual level of this passage.

The English iambic pentameter can indeed be read not only as an alliterative play with cognates of "dolor" but also as a Shakespearean pastiche. The line "I spend my doleful days in dumps and dolors" may recall, for instance, *Romeo and Juliet*, where, in Act 4 Scene 5, a Capulet clown-servant sings the following song:

¹¹⁵ *Delectatio morosa* means the pleasure that derives from imagining something sinful.

¹¹⁶ "The name alludes to "Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, and the Seven Sorrows concerning the life of Jesus" (*AnL*, 332).

When griping grief the heart doth wound
And doleful dumps the mind oppress,
Then music with her silver sound— (4.5. 148-50).

In this episode, Peter inadvertently reveals his bad musical skills, along with his poor memory: this passage, foreshadowing the play's tragic ending, is a misquotation of a song by Richard Edwardes entitled "In Commendation of Music" (Wilson 2011: 43).¹¹⁷ The second line of his song contains the same "d" alliteration as Humbert's text. But Shakespeare also used the expression "doleful days" in *Henry IV, Part 2*:

PISTOL What, shall we have incision? Shall we imbrue?
[Snatches up his sword.]
Then Death rock me asleep, abridge my doleful days!
Why then, let grievous ghastly gaping wounds
Untwind the sisters three; come, Atropos, I say!

HOSTESS Here's goodly stuff toward! (2.4. 157–61)

The first lines – attributed to Falstaff's friend Pistol – may sound like words of a brave man willing to sacrifice his life, but they are actually uttered by a "staggering rascal" who uses poetic devices, alliteration (as in "death" and "doleful days"), and the language of tragedy to appear more serious than he actually is. As Russ McDonald points out, "Pistol wants to sound like a Marlovian hero – in one of his first speeches he misquotes Marlowe's Tamburlaine – and thus assembles his speeches with the verbal materials of the tragedian" (2003: 23). His pathetic words, however, do not impress the hostess of the tavern, who, a bit like Quilty during the recital of his death sentence, replies with an ironic line.

Seen as a pastiche of Shakespeare, the verse from Humbert's diary alludes to dislikeable and comic characters, who misquote and misuse other people's words in an unsuccessful attempt to be taken seriously. Given Humbert's tendency to overlook details, he may have used the Shakespearean language in an approximate way, as if forgetting that it comes from unattractive characters.

¹¹⁷ From Edwardes's *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576)

The embedding of the Russian translation in quotation marks calls attention to the intertextual standing of the lines. However, to my knowledge, the words “«Я провожу томительные дни / В хандре и грусти...»” cannot be attributed to any Russian poet. They sound rather like a pastiche of trite poetic *topoi* used in Russian to convey sadness. In particular, the phrase “томительные дни” reverberates with the works of early symbolist poets, such as Vladimir Merezhkovsky (see, for instance his 1892 text “Одиночество в любви”¹¹⁸) and Fyodor Sologub (in a 1913 poem he uses the opening line “Мои томительные дни” three times; 2014: 430). Moreover, the word “хандра,” thoroughly analyzed in Nabokov’s commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, immediately echoes Pushkin’s “русская хандра,” a Russian kind of spleen that is said to have affected Onegin.

Thus, since translation tends to leave behind intertextual elements encoded within metrical and semantic choices, here Nabokov uses a “domesticating” substitute for an allusion to English plays, a substitute with Russian referents. In this specific case, the method could be reminiscent of the one used in *Ania v strane chudes*: the moment of recognition — made possible thanks to a pastiche of Russian poetic clichés — is privileged over the preservation of the original literary subtext.

A similar process of domestication occurs elsewhere in the novel: Gennady Barabtarlo especially enjoyed “the virtuoso replacing” of another element from the rich Shakespearian layer of *Lolita*: in Chapter 35 of Part Two, Nabokov substitutes an allusion to Macbeth’s famous soliloquy (“As the Bard said, with that cold in his head, to borrow and to borrow and to borrow,” *AnL*, 301) with an allusion to *Eugene Onegin* (1, III) — “у меня сейчас маловато в банке, но ничего, буду жить долгами, как жил его отец, по словам поэта” (*RL*, 290. I haven’t got a lot in the bank right now, but that’s all right, I’ll live by means of debts, as his father did, in the Bard’s words, trans. Barabtarlo 1988: 238).¹¹⁹ On

¹¹⁸ “Влача томительные дни, / Мы все — одни, всегда — одни” (Dragging weary days / We are all alone, always alone, Merezhkovsky 1910: 20).

¹¹⁹ *Lolita*’s Shakespearian layer has been discussed in, for instance, Schuman 2014.

some occasions Nabokov substituted allusions to the English “Bard” with Russian “counterparts” both in Humbert’s prose narration and in his poetry.

If poetic language is intertextual, sometimes a loose rendition of a poem provides the possibility to generate new literary allusions in the target language, thereby evoking new shades of meaning. For instance, in Chapter 26 of Part Two, Humbert composes for his wife Rita a quatrain in iambic pentameters with an aBaB rhyme scheme. While meter and rhyme are faithfully reproduced in the Russian translation, its content is freely paraphrased as follows:

I sang her a wistful French ballad, and strung
together some fugitive rhymes to amuse her:

The place was called Enchanted Hunters.

Query:

What Indian dyes, Diana, did thy dell
endorse to make of Picture Lake a very
blood bath of trees before the blue hotel? (*AnL*,
263)

[Я] спел ей вполголоса задумчивую
французскую балладу и сочинил альбомный
стишок ей в забаву:

Палитра кленов в озере, как рана,
Отражена. Ведет их на убой
В багряном одеянии Диана
Перед гостиницею голубой. (*RL*, 253)

The Russian version of the poem is rather different from its English source, but shares with it the images of the trees, the water of a lake, the hotel, the red and blue hues, and Diana, the Roman goddess of hunt. Some of these are key words that recur throughout the novel: the lake, for instance, recalls the “Hourglass,” or “Our Glass” Lake, which, according to Appel, symbolizes “H.H.’s solipsism (the circumscribing mirror of ‘our glass’) and obsession with time (‘hourglass’)” (*AnL*, 372). The reference to Diana hints at the “Enchanted Hunters” hotel, where Humbert spent his first night with Dolores, but also at Quilty’s play, where Dolly, as Humbert vaguely recalls, “was assigned the part of a farmer’s daughter who imagines herself to be a woodland witch, or Diana, or something” (*AnL*, 200). The poem may thus be interpreted as a prophecy of a murder, or “убой,” that will eventually take place in Chapter 35 of Part Two.

Rita wonders, “Why blue when it is white, why blue for heaven’s sake?” (*AnL*, 263). According to Alfred Appel’s comments, “What Rita does not understand is that a white

surface, the chalk of that hotel, does look blue in a wash of light and shade on a vivid fall day, amid red foliage. H.H. is merely paying a tribute to French impressionist painters” (*AnL*, 437).

The English version of the poem may allude to a theoretical text of that period. Ralph A. Ciancio has noted that l. 2 alludes to Eugène Chevreul’s 1839 *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours, and their Application to the Arts*:

Chevreul, a chemist by profession and the director of dyeing at the Gobelins tapestry factory in Paris, conducted systematic experiments demonstrating that two differently dyed threads fuse and appear to be one single color when viewed at a distance; that adjacent or neighboring colors modify the actual appearance of each; and that any given color would influence its neighbor in the direction of that color’s complementary. (2013: 241)

Indeed, the expression “Indian dyes,” while enriching the poem’s euphony by its consonance with the words “Diana” and “did thy dell,” is more apt for a context of fabric dyeing rather than painting. If applied to the liquid substance of a “Picture” lake, this image of color, blending with its impressionist background, becomes particularly vivid: perhaps one of the most successful – although ominous – poetic images Nabokov gave to Humbert’s otherwise bland rhymes.

The theme of visual arts is carried on a few lines below, when Humbert confesses to have forgotten and mixed up some facts, but “such suffusions of swimming colors are not to be disdained by the artist in recollection” (*AnL*, 263). The pictorial metaphor is maintained in the Russian text: “подобным смешением смазанных красок не должен брезговать художник-мнемозинист” (*RL*, 253). The rendering of “recollection” with an allusion to Mnemosyne enriches the translation with an ironic hint at Nabokov’s autobiography *Speak, Memory* and its Russian version *Drugie Berega*, where the mother of the muses is evoked numerous times (for some time Nabokov even planned to title the British edition of the book *Speak, Mnemosyne*, *SM*, 11).

The addition of this allusion may confirm that Nabokov gave his character a specific trait that distances Humbert from himself: a tendency to “re-touche” the past (see section 3.1 and *SO*, 186) when not visited by what Bergson called “spontaneous” memory.

Whereas the English poem poses a question to Diana – about the paints that she used to convey the redness of the trees reflected in the lake – its Russian translation can be roughly paraphrased as follows: “like a wound, a palette of maple trees is reflected in the lake. Dressed in a crimson robe, Diana leads them to be slaughtered before the blue hotel.” Gone are the Indian dyes and the hotel’s name. The latter detail is provided, instead, in a prose passage just a few lines above the poem, when Humbert clarifies: “мне пришлось некоторое время прогуливать и проветривать Риту в раскрашенном осенью парке Зачарованных Охотников” (*RL*, 253).¹²⁰ Perhaps, the Russian words for “Enchanted Hunters” were too long to fit in the translation’s metrical pattern, and so, given the importance of the hotel’s name for its connection to Diana and Quilty, Nabokov again used the space provided by prose in order to retrieve an element omitted in the poem.

The semantic field of the visual arts is preserved in the self-translation, albeit in a different form. Instead of the “Indian dyes,” Nabokov introduces the metaphor of a “palette of maple trees” (палитра кленов, echoed by the word отражена in the next line) for the mottled autumn forest. The general term “trees” is replaced in Russian by the reference to the species: this translation is in tune with Nabokov’s tendency to maintain or even increase semantic precision in the translation of the details of flora.¹²¹ This change enhances the expressive power of the poem, since in autumn maple leaves tend to be bright red and orange.

However, the term may also have been introduced for the sake of intertextuality. The adjective “багряный” was popular among Russian symbolist poets; it frequently recurs in

¹²⁰ The corresponding English passage is “In the silent painted part where I walked her and aired her a little” (*AnL*, 263).

¹²¹ See the discussion of this subject in sections 3.2.3.3 and 4.4.2.

Andrey Bely's texts. His novel *Petersburg* (1913), famously admired by Nabokov, reflects the tense atmosphere of pre-revolutionary Imperial Russia. Blood-red sunsets in the skies of Petersburg — *багряные закаты* — become a premonition of the historical cataclysms about to overwhelm Russia.¹²² Crimson sunsets are also found in Bely's poetry, as noted in Valery Bryusov's 1904 review of the collection "Zoloto v lazuri."¹²³

Furthermore, Bely repeatedly used the adjective "багряный" to describe maple trees: this image can be found both in *Petersburg*¹²⁴ and in Bely's early poems, such as "Ожидание" (1901) and "На улице" (1904). In particular, in the poem "Ожидание," published in the cycle "Багряница в тернях," a crimson-leaved maple tree is symbolic of a longing for change and for the future.¹²⁵

A summary of Bely's reflections on colors and their meaning can be found in a July 14, 1903, letter to Blok. Red and "багряница" — another key word in Bely's poetry, indicating the scarlet robe of mockery put on Christ before the crucifixion — are defined as symbols of the first coming of Christ on Earth (Bely 2001: 80-81). Thus, in Humbert's poem, the attribution of a shade of red to Diana's robe takes us back to the Christian associations of the name Dolores with "Mater Dolorosa," and her seven sorrows (or dolours), which traditionally include Mary's meeting Jesus on the Via Dolorosa.

¹²² In Bely's novel, the crimson sun is reflected in the windows of houses ("Чуть темнело; бледно стали поблескивать фонари, озаряя подъезд; четвертые этажи еще багрятели закатом," Bely 1981: 96. [It was getting a bit dark; the street lamps had begun to shine, lighting up the entrance; the fourth storeys were still crimson with the sunset]). It can also appear in a woman's eyes ("В глазах ее еще багрятели закатные пятна" (123 ["In her eyes the spots of the sunset were still crimson"])).

¹²³ In the opening lines of his review, Bryusov compares Bely's newly published collection with another recent publication, Vyacheslav Ivanov's "Prozrachnost": "Bely's work is more dazzling: it is similar to flashes of a lightning, sparkles of precious stones, [...] the solemn glow of crimson sunsets" (Bryusov 1990: 107).

¹²⁴ Chapter 6: "[В] ветер бились багряные листья там кленов, ударяясь о жерди; но багряные листья уже свеялись" (Bely 1981: 247. [there the crimson leaves of the maples were beating into the wind, hitting the bars; but the crimson leaves were already gone]).

¹²⁵ "Душе опять чего-то жаль. Сырым туманом сходит ночь. Багряный клен, кивая вдаль, с тоской отсюда рвется прочь" (My soul again is sorry about something / The night descends with a damp fog / The crimson maple, nodding into the distance / Yearns and longs to get away from here, Bely 2006: 159).

Hence, in the Russian text, the use of the adjective “багряный” in proximity to Diana’s clothes and autumnal maple trees becomes a hint at Bely’s poetic language from behind Humbert’s back. Observed within the context of Humbert’s poem, the allusion to Bely –a somewhat clichéd element of the symbolist author’s imagery – deepens the communicative power of this ominous poetic fragment, foreshadowing an imminent moment of change and a “blood bath” (*AnL*, 263).

3.3.2.2 A Maniac’s Masterpiece

The long poem composed during Humbert’s “retreat” in a Quebec sanatorium (*AnL*, 255), presented in Chapter 25 of Part Two, is a rather turbid and nervous text. Its chaotic content is, however, framed in a rationally designed structure of fifty-two lines divided into thirteen quatrains. Both these numbers are fatidic in the novel. As pointed out in the *Annotated Lolita*, Humbert and Dolly spent fifty-two weeks travelling the United States, while “Ray’s Foreword indicates that Lolita, H.H., and Quilty all die in 1952” (*AnL*, 373). Humbert first saw Annabel on his thirteenth birthday, and he explains that “[t]he median age of pubescence for girls has been found to be thirteen years and nine months in New York and Chicago” (*AnL*, 43); Dolores turns thirteen while she is on her journey with Humbert, and he gives her Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid* as a birthday gift. Edgar Allan Poe’s bride was thirteen when he – aged twenty-seven – married her in 1836.

The faithful keeping of these numbers in the structure of the Russian poem confirms their importance. The meter of the English text, rhymed according to an alternate rhyme scheme, is not perfectly regular, but the tendency is to alternate anapaests with amphibrachs and iambs, often substituting the first foot with a dactyl, especially in the – quite numerous – lines that are constructed in an interrogative form. The poem’s syntax is simple and a sentence often fits in a single line. Short syntactic structures and alternation

between tetrameters and trimeters contribute to creating a disrupted, nervous and fast-paced rhythm.

A sense of disorientation and loss is conveyed by the poem's opening stanzas, where, after a brief verbal identikit of Dolores, the rhythm speeds up towards a sequence of nervous questions:

Where are you riding, Dolores Haze?
What make is the magic carpet?
Is a Cream Cougar the present craze?
And where are you parked, my car pet? (*AnL*, 256)

The Russian poem is equilinear and replicates the alternation between tetrameters and trimeters. However, while sometimes mirroring the meter of the English text (as for instance in the poem's opening line, repeated in stanza 12), it tends to increase the number of simple anapaestic lines or anapaestic lines with one or two iambic substitutions. For instance, the third stanza is rendered in Russian as follows:

Где разъезжаешь, Долорес Гейз?
Твой волшебный ковер какой марки?
Кагуар ли кремовый в моде днесь?
Ты в каком запаркована парке? (*RL*, 246)

Here, in contrast to the English version, both trimeters are composed solely of anapaests. This metrical change reflects the Russian traditional inclination to uniformity in anapaestic meter, whereas in English poetry substitutions are more natural.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the Russian poem, like its English counterpart, does not display a perfectly regular metrical scheme, which — in the context of the target language's poetic tradition — can be seen as corresponding to the rhythmic effect produced by the English version of this text.

¹²⁶ Nabokov discusses this phenomenon in his "Notes on Prosody": "English poets, when they do turn to temions, so consistently and so naturally intermingle anapaestic lines with amphibrachic ones that the English student of verse, unacquainted with other languages, is apt to dismiss the amphibrach altogether [...] and to regard the amphibrachic lines, even when they predominate in a poem, as acephalous anapaests. In Russian, on the other hand, until the emancipation of meter associated with Blok's name, there was a definite tendency on the part of poets using ternaries to have every line of the poem, no matter how long [...] run strictly amphibrachically, or strictly anapaestically, or strictly dactylically" (*NoP*, 81).

This stanza is also the only quatrain where Nabokov managed to match Dolly's American surname with a Russian word. In the English poem, seven quatrains contain a line ending on the word "Haze," meaning that more than a half of the poem's stanzas rhyme the girl's surname. In poetry, a special relationship develops between rhymed couples of words, creating new links of meaning that go beyond traditional syntactic structures. This is especially true when a rhyming semantic pair includes a word that is key to the poem, such as "Haze."

In some cases, Humbert rhymes Dolly's surname with such neutral words as "days," "bays," or "weighs." However, more often than not, he selects words with negative or unsettling semantic connotations, such as "daze," "maze," "craze," "raise" (a "hairy fist"), "decays." Between ll. 33 and 34 there is also an alliteration with the word "hate": "Dying, dying, Lolita Haze, / Of hate and remorse, I'm dying" (*AnL*, 256).

The Russian translation maintains the presence of Dolly's surname in a focal position at the end of the lines, but struggles to rhyme the foreign sound of "Гейз" with Russian words. As a result, seven stanzas of the Russian poem skip a rhyme in the AbAb scheme. The poem's rhythm is thus further disrupted, while the semantic pairs established by the rhymes with the word "Haze" have less expressive power in the target text than in the source.

In English, the rhymes in the first five quatrains are especially elaborate. Starting from the poem's l. 2, a chain of rhyming words that resemble or echo each other phonetically connects the poem's opening stanzas: "scarlet" / "starlet"; "darling" / "starling"; "carpet" / "car pet"; "star-men" / "Carmen"; "darlin'" / "snarlin'." In Russian, the corresponding lines are rhymed, but the chain is significantly weaker: "румяны" / "экрана"; "неверно" / "Стерна"; "марки" / "парке"; "пелерине" / "машине"; "ушах" / "штанах"; "дорогая" / "страдающая."

A rhyme in stanza 3 plays with the words "carpet" and "car pet." The Russian poem renders this with an alternative (albeit weaker) pun based on the homophony of the

English noun “park,” indicating a green area in a city, and the verb “to park,” the action of putting a vehicle in a dedicated place, from which the Russian words “парк” and “парковать,” respectively, descend.

The expression “magic carpet” is used by Humbert in Chapter 18 of Part Two, to describe Quilty’s car following Humbert Humber and Dolores on the road. The image of the carpet recurs in Nabokov’s works as a metaphor for cancelling time: one finds it in the long composition “The Paris Poem” (“No better joy would I choose than to fold / its magnificent carpet in such a fashion / as to make the design of today coincide / with the past, with a former pattern” *PP*, 123) and in Nabokov’s autobiography: “I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another” (*SM*, 139). In Humbert’s world, however, the “magic carpet” is a metaphor for a pedophile’s car, a debasement of the magic from *The Arabian Nights*. Whereas in Humbert’s narration the “magic carpet” is an accomplice in child abduction, a vehicle that crosses geographical space, in Nabokov’s own imagery it is a metaphor for personal time travel.

The following quatrain (st. 4) introduces another untranslatable element when it puns with the words “cars” and “Carmen”:

Who is your hero, Dolores Haze?
Still one of those blue-caped star-men?
Oh the balmy days and the palmy bays,
And the cars, and the bars, my Carmen!
(*AnL*, 256)

Кто твой герой, Долорес Гейз?
Супермен в голубой пелерине?
О, дальний мираж, о, пальмовый пляж
О, Кармен в роскошной машине!
(*RL*, 246)

In this stanza, Humbert finds a cross-linguistic rhyme for the Spanish name Carmen, while l. 4 is a textual reference to Humbert’s song from the novel’s Part One (“And the stars, and the cars, and the bars, and the barmen,” *AnL*, 61). Here, as in the sofa scene,

Humbert points at another possible interpretation of “Carmen” as a combination of the words “car” and “men.”¹²⁷

The translation loses the pun between “car” and “Carmen” and omits both rhymes with Dolly’s names contained in the source text. However, the internal rhyme in l. 3 between “balmy” and “palmy” is preserved. Sacrificing semantic accuracy, Nabokov recreates the euphony of the English original not only by the etymologically related words “пальмовый” and “palmy,” but also through the phonetic rendition of the word “balmy” as “дальний.”

Despite the difficulty of translating wordplay, the Russian version of Humbert’s longest poem preserves a few puns with Dolly’s name, and even introduces new ones, as if to compensate for the loss of the chain of rhymes with the word “Haze.” For instance, the internal rhyme of stanza 7 – “My Dolly, my folly!” (*AnL*, 256) – is partly maintained in the Russian text: Nabokov renders it as “Моя боль, моя Долли!” (*RL*, 246). The translation is not literal, but works well thanks to the juxtaposition of the Russian word for “pain” with the etymology of the girl’s name (this semantic pairing is also present in stanza 5: “Как больно, Долорес, от джаза в ушах!” *ibid.*).

In stanza 9, there is a consonance between the surname “Гейз” and the closing word of the following line, “угрозы”:

Маюсь, маюсь, Лолита Гейз,
Тут раскаянье, тут и угрозы.
И сжимаю опять волосатый кулак,
И вижу опять твои слезы. (*RL*, 247)

As a result, a small chain of associations emerges between “Гейз,” “угрозы,” and the rhyming noun “слезы.” A similar sound repetition in stanza 11 involves the consonants “д,” “г” and “з” that characterize Dolly’s name: “Долорес Гейз и мужчина. / Дай газу, вынь кольт, догоняй, догони” (*RL*, 247).

¹²⁷ In Chapter 13 of Part One, after the sofa scene with the song, Humbert states that Dolly wanted “to be fetched by car, my little Carmen” (*AnL*, 61).

An ingenious rhyme with the name “Dolores” is found in the Russian stanza 10:

Officer, officer, there they go— In the rain, where that lighted store is! And her socks are white, and I love her so, And her name is Haze, Dolores. (<i>AnL</i> , 256)	Патрульщик, патрульщик, вон там, под дождем, Где струится ночь, светофорясь... Она в белых носках, она — сказка моя, И зовут ее: Гейз, Долорес. (<i>RL</i> , 247)
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In the English text, the rhyme is between “store is” and “Dolores.” In Russian, Nabokov creates a neologism to help capture both the sound and the atmosphere, if not the literal meaning, of the original poem: “где струится ночь светофорясь.” The translation also mimics the “st” sound of “store” in the verb “струится.”

Like the “lighted store,” the traffic light of the Russian text is typical of nocturnal urban landscapes. The representation of the night as “flowing” enhances the image of a rainy night. In Russian the verb is rendered with “струится,” echoed by the “tru” repetition in “патрульщик” (here Nabokov seems to avoid a possible alternative translation of “officer” as “полицейский,” a western word with negative connotations in post-war USSR).

Overall, alliterations recur throughout the English poem, and are often transposed or recreated anew in the Russian translation. Sound dominates over meaning when, for example in stanza 2, an internal rhyme between “daze” and “maze” is replaced by the rhyme between “аду” and “бреду,” generating a different image. Also, in stanza 5, alliteration trumps semantic fidelity when “torn T-shirts” becomes “мятых майках.”

The closing stanzas of both poems are also rich in alliteration and consonances. In English, a sequence of liquid “l” consonants recurs in the opening lines, while a repetition of adjacent consonants “s” and “t” marks the closing line:

My car is limping, Dolores Haze, And the last long lap is the hardest, And I shall be dumped where the weed decays, And the rest is rust and stardust. (<i>AnL</i> , 256)	Икар мой хромает, Долорес Гейз, Путь последний тяжел. Уже поздно. Скоро свалят меня в придорожный бурьян, А все прочее — ржа и рой звездный. (<i>RL</i> , 247)
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The poem ends on evocative images, reflecting Humbert's appeal to the reader's sympathy through the creation of a metaphor of his own decay. The Russian text's closing lines ingeniously create a rich, but somewhat strident sound pattern with "r," "z," and "d" consonants, while keeping the meaning of the translation close to the original.

In the Russian version of this quatrain, Nabokov renders "My car" with another word from Humbert's personal vocabulary, "Икар" (Icarus), a personification of his vehicle that strengthens the link between the poem and the narrative that frames it. In the translated *Lolita*, Humbert owns a "грёзово-синий Икар" (*RL*, 218), the Russianized substitute of his dream-blue Melmoth (Humbert named his car "Melmoth the Wanderer" after the protagonist of Charles Robert Maturin's eponymous 1820 Gothic novel, see Appel's note in *AnL*, 416). As a translation of "my car" within the poem, "икар" results in an especially fortunate solution due to its phonetic resemblance to the words it substitutes for: one of the details that can be appreciated by the bilingual reader of the two *Lolitas*.

The replacement of Melmoth with Icarus is a step towards the Russian reader that eases the understanding of an intertextual reference. However, domestication of literary allusions is not applied consistently in the translation of Humbert's poem. For instance, stanza 2 contains a veiled quotation from Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1765): "I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze, / I cannot get out, said the starling" (*AnL*, 255). The allusion points at an episode where Yorick, the novel's narrator, is afraid of being sent to the Bastille and associates his fear of imprisonment with a caged starling, who seems to scream "I can't get out," a phrase that is repeated multiple times over less than a page:

In my return back through the passage, I heard the same words repeated twice over; and looking up, I saw it was a starling hung in a little cage. – "I can't get out – I can't get out," said the starling. (Sterne 1794: 86)

Relocated to Humbert's poem, the starling's cry "becomes a symbol of all enslavement and confinement, and, returning to his room, he [Yorlick] imagines at length a solitary captive in the Bastille" (note to the chapter in *The Annotated Lolita*, 450).

Before Humbert, this poignant episode had already been used by another fictional character, Maria Bertram in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), analyzed by Nabokov in his *Lectures on Literature*. In *Mansfield Park*, the bird's cage is likened to the locked iron gates of Sotherton, representing, as Nabokov points out, Maria's "tension and unhappiness" at her engagement to Rushworth (*LL*, 26): "But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said" (Austen 2017: 192). In Humbert's poem, the image of a caged starling could be evocative not only of Dolly's stolen freedom, but also of the fictional newspaper story about an ape's drawing of her cage reported in Nabokov's essay "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*."¹²⁸

The Russian translation unfolds this allusion and transforms it into a quotation accompanied by the indication of its author: "Я в аду, я в бреду: «ВЫЙТИ Я НЕ МОГУ» / Повторяет скворец у Стерна" (*RL*, 246). Hence, in this case, the translator did not turn to domestication; instead, Nabokov applied the strategy of adding a clarifying explanation that puts the target text's reader in a better position to recognize the source of the allusion. This method of adding brief explanatory comments was recurrent in *The Gift*, but also in other works, such as "A Guide to Berlin," where Nabokov confessed that in the translation "Two or three scattered phrases have been added for the sake of factual clarity" (*Stories*, 658).

Culturally specific elements usually represent another challenge for translators. Similarly to allusions to literary works, words that belong to the realm of music, cinema, food, clothes, and other objects from everyday life often lose their network of meaningful associations when a literary text moves towards a different culture.

Like the rest of the novel, Humbert's longest poem contains a semantic layer that belongs to American popular culture and everyday life. In the translation of this text, some

¹²⁸ "The initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage" (*AnL*, 311).

culturally specific elements such as the system of measurements remain American: for instance, in stanza 12, “pounds” and “inches” are rendered as “фунты” and “дюймы.” However, a foreignized translation does not emerge as Nabokov’s primary goal in the Russian *Lolita*. For example, elsewhere in the novel, he renders an American expression containing a reference to local currency – “A penny for your thoughts” (*AnL*, 456) – with a very Russian and rhyming “Дам тебе грош, коль не соврешь” (*RL*, 200).

Nabokov’s translation of culturally specific elements sometimes reveals his struggle to find efficient solutions that mediate between two very distant cultures, even conflicting ones at the moment of *Lolita*’s translation. Humbert’s longest poem maintains a significant fraction of the American elements that belong to Dolly’s world, such as Superman, luxury cars and palmy beaches. Nevertheless, some change and loss has occurred in the Russian text.

One of the strategies of this translation is the substitution of an English word for another that performs a similar function in the target language. For instance, in stanza 5, the word “jukebox” was substituted with “джаз,” a different but still American word:

Oh Dolores, that juke-box hurts!
Are you still dancin’, darlin’?
(Both in worn levis, both in torn T-shirts,
And I, in my corner, snarlin’). (*AnL*, 255)

Как больно, Долорес, от джаза в ушах!
С кем танцуешь ты, дорогая?
Оба в мятых майках, потертых штанах,
И сижу я в углу, страдаю. (*RL*, 246)

Coin-operated music machines — iconic objects of the 1950s America associated with early rock’n’roll culture — could actually be spotted in some Soviet restaurants. Their “official” name was “музыкальные автоматы,” but in the 1960s they were commonly called “меломан,” after the Polish model “Meloman 120” that was allowed in the Soviet Union. These machines, however, offered regime-approved music, and American jukeboxes were unknown to the Russian market. Nabokov’s solution is therefore efficient both from the viewpoint of euphony (“джаз” imitates the [dʒ] sound of “jukebox”) and

meaning: a popular genre heavily criticized by the Soviet regime, jazz belongs to the semantic field of the kind of popular culture that in the 1960s could easily be associated by any Russian reader with American culture and lifestyle.

Humbert's narration contains an important semantic category – the clothes that reflect Dolly's teenage world. This stanza, for instance, bears another cultural hurdle: Dolly's worn Levis and torn T-shirt. What today would pass for a perfectly normal outfit both in Russia and the United States, in the 1950s and even the 1960s had very different cultural connotations in the countries on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain.

As James Sullivan explains in his 2006 study *Jeans: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, “Lolita was postwar America” (93) and such typically American settings as “[t]he motels and shopping plazas” represent “the consummate low-culture backdrops for Lolita’s jeans, sneakers, and lollipops” (94). Jeans are, of course, the American garment *par excellence*, but in the late 1940s and early 1950s they were still a symbol of youthful rebellion.¹²⁹ Yet, it was in those years that the style of “worn” Levis jeans and “torn T-shirts” began to enter Hollywood: Dolly’s emulation of cinema stars (mentioned in the poem’s opening stanza: “profession none, or ‘starlet,’” *AnL*, 256) influences her clothing choices. It was also thanks to such “starlets” as Marilyn Monroe and movie stars such as Marlon Brando that jeans gained popularity in the United States, and, by the 1960s — when Nabokov was translating *Lolita* into Russian — were canonized and universally accepted, becoming one of the symbols of America worldwide.

Nabokov’s old-fashioned but inventive renditions of the elements of Dolly’s teenage wardrobe have gradually become famous after the Russian *Lolita* started to filter across the Soviet border: his translations of the words “jeans” and “sneakers” as “синих ковбойских панталонах и полотняных тапочках” (*RL*, 41) became emblematic of an

¹²⁹ In those years blue jeans “symbolized the emerging international youth culture of the post-World War 2 period” (Goedde 2009: 613). In particular, in the 1950s jeans became “physical markers of social and cultural protest against middle-class respectability and its grey flannel suit standard” (*ibid.*).

émigré writer's detachment from his native language in its constant evolution. However, in the early 1960s, when Nabokov was self-translating *Lolita*, the word “джинсы” was only beginning to make its way towards the Russian literary language.¹³⁰ The Russian *Lolita* reached its audience in a moment of transition, when American everyday culture was gradually entering Russian society and its language, despite the regime's efforts to prevent such contamination. While “ковбойские штаны” actually reflects the origins of jeans, in the Russian version of Humbert's poem Nabokov opted for a more general synonym of Levis jeans: “потертые штаны.”

Yet “worn Levis” have specific socio-cultural connotations for Dolly's generation and suggest her distance from Humbert. In the English poem, this line spotlights the complicity and mutual understanding between “gnarled McFate” and Dolores, wearing the same youthful clothes. This detail excludes Humbert, the old-fashioned European intellectual who is said to be “snarlin” in his corner – a perfect incarnation of the outsider.

The Russian reader may still perceive Humbert's estrangement from the dancing couple, but it is somewhat less clear why they wear “wrinkled” short-sleeved shirts and “worn pants.” Within the context of the novel, the reader is given a chance to perceive the generational and cultural gap between Dolores and Humbert, but this specific passage of Humbert's poem is an example of what is lost in translation.

Humbert's longest poem, with its combination of complex prosody and diverse vocabulary, mixing high literary sources with everyday American culture, is “a maniac's masterpiece” (*AnL*, 257). The translation renders both its ingenuity and its lack of poetic harmony.

¹³⁰ In the National Corpus of Russian, the word “джинсы” first appears in print in 1961 in the literary journal *Yunost'*, where Vasily Aksenov used it in his novel *Zvezdnyi билет*. The next example dates to 1964, when Arkady and Boris Strugatsky published their novella “Ponedel'nik nachinaetsia v subbotu,” followed by Oleg Mikhaylov's story “Chto est' krasota?” also published in *Yunost'*. (<http://ruscorpora.ru/>, accessed May 1, 2020).

3.3.2.3 Heteroglossia in Humbert's Poetry

Humbert's narration, a literary effort undertaken by a cultivated European, is punctuated with French terms and phrases that provide him with more pretext for punning and for teasing Dolly for her poor French. While in the English *Lolita* the numerous French words were originally left untranslated,¹³¹ the Russian edition of the novel is accompanied by an appendix of notes where Nabokov glosses foreign terms and phrases.

Two poems in *Lolita* bear a trace of the novel's heteroglossia: a French stanza in the long poem of Part Two's Chapter 25, and a brief poetic fragment in French quoted by Mona in a letter to Dolly. In Russian, these rhymed texts were translated with the use of opposite strategies.

The French quatrain (stanza 8) in Humbert's poem is preceded by a French rhyme in stanza 7: "Her eyes were *vair* [...] / Know old perfume called *Soleil vert*?" (*AnL*, 256), which in Russian becomes inter-linguistic: "Был взор ее сер [...] / Есть духи — называются *Soleil Vert*" (*RL*, 246).

In the Russian *Lolita*, Nabokov transcribed stanza 8 in French, and provided its literal rendition in the appendix of notes:

*L'autre soir un air froid d'opéra m'alita:
Son félé—bien fol est qui s'y fie!
Il neige, le décor s'écroule, Lolita!
Lolita, qu'ai-je fait de ta vie?
(AnL, 256; RL, 247)*

Намедни вечером от стужи оперной арии она слегла:
Надтреснутый звук — «как тот глуп, кто ей вверится»!
Идет снег, декорация валится, Лолита!
Лолита, что сделал я с твоей жизнью? (*RL*, 313)

Rather than adorning the text with foreign rhymes, these French lines make Humbert's "main" poem sound even more like a messy patchwork of meta-linguistic wordplay. The Russian *Lolita* preserves the multi-voiced effect on the level of sound. The appendix provides the target reader with the possibility to understand the content of the quatrain thanks to a literal gloss.

¹³¹ Only *The Annotated Lolita* explains the French terms.

In the note, the translation method contrasts with the one used within the novel: here Nabokov faithfully reproduces the sense of the poem, but ignores such formal aspects as meter and rhyme. He also hints at the intertextual layer of this passage by enclosing a part of the second line in quotation marks.¹³² Nevertheless, Nabokov does not go as far as to elucidate the passage’s complex intertextuality, in contrast with his practice regarding literary allusions and quotations in, for instance, *Eugene Onegin*.

On another occasion, in Chapter 19 of Part Two, Nabokov translates directly within the text a brief poetic fragment originally written in French, thus sacrificing an element of the novel’s heteroglossia. Mona’s letter to Dolores contains a brief excerpt from Quilty’s play, in which Dolly did not have the chance to act:

As expected, poor Poet stumbled in Scene III when arriving at the bit of French nonsense. Remember? *Ne manque pas de dire à ton amant, Chimène, comme le lac est beau car il faut qu’il t’y mène*. Lucky beau! *Qu’il t’y*—What a tongue-twister! (*AnL*, 223)

Как и ожидалось, бедный ПОЭТ сбился в третьей сцене, в том месте, где я всегда спотыкалась, — на этих глупых стихах. Помнишь?

Пусть скажет озеро любовнику Химены Что’ предпочесть: тоску иль тишь и гладь измены.

Я тут подчеркнула спотычки. (*RL*, 214)

Humbert comments: “The letter contained an element of mysterious nastiness that I am too tired today to analyze” (*AnL*, 223). The allusion to Quilty, however, is obvious. In the French text, written in classic alexandrines, Mona reiterates the words that contain the playwright’s name. In the Russian poem, Mona highlights and draws attention to the letters that form the word “Куильти,” camouflaging it by some extra letters.

The translation — here again separated from prose by means of lineation — is a rough rendition of the original fragment, which alludes to Pierre Corneille’s tragicomedy *Le Cid* (1637). As Carl Proffer pointed out in *Keys to Lolita* (1968), a quest for a meaning of this

¹³² Alfred Appel clarifies that “Line two is a traditional saying, originating with Virgil, though it is in fact drawn here from *Le Roi s’amuse* (1832), a play by Victor Hugo” (*AnL*, 432).

allusion would disappoint the reader, as there are no evident parallels between Chimene and Dolores: the sole purpose of these lines is to smuggle in Quilty's name.

In the draft of the novel's translation, Nabokov even omitted the reference to Corneille and translated this passage in a completely different manner: "Задумался поэт[,] посланье намаракав[,] чего тут больше: буквильтипографских знаков [?]"¹³³ (quoted in Babikov 2019: 636). Andrey Babikov suggests that these verses may have been retranslated and acquired their final form after the transcription of "Quilty" has changed from "Квильти" to "Куильти" (ibid.). In the first version, Nabokov substituted the reference to *Le Cid* with a possible allusion to Boris Pasternak's poem "Nobelevskaya premiya" (1959), also parodied in Nabokov's poem "Kakoe sdela! ya durnoe delo" (*PP*, 146-47).¹³⁴

The translator's challenge was to maintain intertextuality while re-creating the encoded message. The importance of the latter, however, prevailed in the final rendition of these lines, which fit Mona's letter coherently: "тоску иль тишь" can also be a "tongue-twister," like the previous line's words highlighted in bold, "пусть скажет." Babikov observes that there is a mistake in the published translation of this passage, because the "difficult" part highlights an extra "s" before the letters that make up Quilty's surname ("скуильти"). Yet the presence of more bold letters than are necessary to form the word "Куильти" could be deliberate: both pairs of adjacent consonants underlined in the first line start with an "s" (сть, ск), and so does "скуильти" in the next line. As a result, in addition to a diversionary maneuver the couplet contains a sequence of cacophonous and tricky consonant pairs, where the actress is, indeed, liable to "stumble."

¹³³ "The poet paused to think, having drafted the message, what prevails here: letters or typographic signs?"

¹³⁴ In an earlier version of the poem, which Pasternak shared with a non-Soviet journalist, the speaker wondered: "Что ж посмел я намаракать, / Пакостник я и злодей?" (qtd. in Babikov 636). Nabokov's notorious aversion to Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* also resonates in the postscript to the Russian *Lolita* (*RL*, 308).

The appendix attached to the Russian edition of *Lolita* is a space that allows Nabokov to translate Humbert's French thoughts and utterances into Russian, so as to preserve the novel's heteroglossia, and the narrator's bilingualism, without creating unnecessary obstacles for the reader. This pertains to the translation of Humbert's longest poem as well. However, when Mona uses French to hide a clue that points at Clare Quilty, the Russian *Lolita* privileges an easier recognition of this clue over the bilingual atmosphere of the text.

Thus a series of distinguishing features emerges from the analysis of Humbert's poems: their tendency to wordplay, a disrupted rhythm, inconsistent textual coherence; a playful tone that clashes with a story of child abduction and abuse. From an artistic point of view, the latter tension is yet another powerfully unsettling device.

If by means of parody Humbert shows off his sophisticated literary taste, in the original poems he boasts an ability to play with language – especially when he has “only words to play with” (*AnL*, 32) – but ends up revealing more than he wishes to. His poetry is either imitative or odd and unbalanced, reflecting his inability to *create* something truly good. A proud erudite, Humbert displays a tendency to mix up poetic clichés, previously absorbed from other poets.

Literary allusions in Humbert's poems are translated in different ways. Sometimes, a quotation is preserved and even explained directly within the poem by means of a brief throw-in. Elsewhere, when allusions to English hypotexts are substituted with Russian intertextual elements, it appears that Humbert – a European intellectual – has enlarged his knowledge of Russian literature in the translated novel.¹³⁵ This, however, does not contradict *Lolita*'s plot and suits the novel's rich intertextual layer, which draws from a multitude of European and American authors. Moreover, rewritten in Russian, Humbert's poems accrue new semantic associations with texts that make up the Russian poetic canon.

¹³⁵ These strategies can also be observed in Nabokov's self-translated prose (see Denissova 2004: 96-100).

As far as culturally specific elements are concerned, it is rather difficult to ascribe the self-translations of the poems in the Russian *Lolita* to either domestication or foreignization. Some movement of the text towards the target reader can be discerned in the translation. However, this movement is aimed at making the novel's "Americanness" accessible and acceptable, and the American setting remains perceivable in the Russian *Lolita* and its verse passages.

Humbert's original poems exist in the stale and unwelcoming zone that constitutes his world. In terms of vocabulary, this world revolves around the core of his destructive passion for Dolores and, after her departure, the memories of the time they spent together. The child-like verse, the pet-names he invents for her,¹³⁶ the endless literary references he associates with Dolores, the geography of their travels – the cars, the motels, the lakes, the bars, even Dolly's clothes and their very specific colors, not to mention her physical features: everything is mythologized to create a sealed space where Humbert would have wanted to trap the girl.

If one imagines reading them separately from the novel, Humbert's poems would probably make little sense – by contrast to Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's poems if read outside their narrative context. This is because Humbert's poetry speaks a "solipsizing" language that only makes sense if one actually enters his mind and follows his version of the story.

This semantic mechanism is reminiscent of the experience of language in surrealist poetry: as Michael Riffaterre explains in his article "Extended Metaphor in Surrealist Poetry," the images created by surrealist poets are

arbitrary only in relation to our habitual logic and utilitarian attitude toward reality and language. In the reality of the text, they are rigorously determined by the verbal sequence and are, therefore, justified and appropriate within the framework of a given poem. (1983: 202)

¹³⁶ The frequent use of pet-names also characterized the relationship between Albinus and Magda, in the novel *Laughter in the Dark*. As in *Lolita*, it is symptomatic of an unhealthy passion, of lack of genuine love.

Humbert is not a surrealist, but the techniques of avant-garde poets were familiar to Nabokov, even if he stood aside from most of the experiments popular in the years of his youth. Surrealists created their own “verbal logic” outside of normal language, such as “a special code” aimed at disorienting their reader (ibid.). This is precisely what Humbert does as a poet: he creates a web of alliterative words and puns, allusions, internal and external references, in order to enthrall the reader in his own world.

3.4 Concluding Remarks: Poetry Embedded in Prose

Nabokov’s last finished novel, *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), contains a Russian poem attributed to its protagonist and narrator Vadim Vadimovich N., a distinguished Russian-American writer. The poem’s first stanza is transcribed as follows:

My zabyváem chto vlyublyónnost'
Ne prósto povorót litsá,
A pod kupávami bezdónnost',
Nochnáya pánika plovtsá. (*LATH*, 25)

In the novel, Vadim Vadimovich recites the poem to his future wife Iris, who speaks no Russian. Her perplexity probably mirrors the reaction of the monolingual American reader at the sight of a Russian poem transcribed in Latin letters. What “sounds like an incantation” to Iris’s foreign and perhaps vaguely distracted ear, is actually an important text: in 1979 Véra Nabokov will hint at the poem’s closing lines in her introduction to Nabokov’s posthumous collection *Stikhi*, for it is here that the concept of “potustoronnost” — a key notion for Nabokov’s entire oeuvre — is mentioned openly (*Stikhi*, 3).

Having recited the Russian text, Vadim Vadimovich comes quickly to his wife’s (and the Anglophone reader’s) aid with a literal rendition of the poem, supplemented with further details and the translator’s commentary. This is the first stanza’s translation as read by Vadim Vadimovich:

It goes like this. We forget—or rather tend to forget—that being in love (vlyublyonnost’) does not depend on the facial angle of the loved one, but is a

bottomless spot under the nenuphars, a swimmer's panic in the night (here the iambic tetrameter happens to be rendered — last line of the first stanza, *nochnáya pánika plovtsá*). (*LATH*, 25)

Vadim Vadimovich thus performs an act of self-translation right within the novel. In this passage, he has the possibility to explain an untranslatable noun, and also to note a lucky metrical coincidence, even though an imitation of the poem's formal features is not his goal. Nabokov himself followed a similar process in his literature classes, where he used to read aloud the Russian texts of the poems he taught, before analyzing their English gloss with the students. Moreover, he contemplated the idea of printing a Latin transcription with accents of *Eugene Onegin's* original text to supplement his literal translation of Pushkin's novel in verse.

Thus, in *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov depicts a moment of poetry translation that is in tune with his late-life attitudes: first, the untranslatable “enchanted” sound of the original is provided to the target audience; subsequently, a literal rendition and the author-translator's notes make the poem's content accessible to its foreign reader. And, indeed, in the following chapter, as if confirming the efficiency of this translation method, Iris will confess that she has reread the poem “a hundred times, both the English for the matter and the Russian for the music” and believes it to be “an absolutely divine piece” (*LATH*, 28).

This meta-translatory and meta-poetic episode can be especially keenly appreciated by the bilingual reader, who is able to understand the original text and collate it with the translation. The versions of the poems studied in this chapter address a monolingual audience, but the very fact of their existence in two languages can be seen as an invitation to a process of “bilingual” reading. In *Look at the Harlequins!* Nabokov's alter-ego takes on the self-translator's role directly within the narration. In previous novels, it was their real author who transposed his characters' embedded poetry into a new language and a new literary culture.

Both *Dar* and *Lolita* were translated in the 1960s, years after Nabokov's switch to literalism in poetry translation. And yet, the poetry framed in these novels was not translated with the slavish fidelity that Nabokov bellicosely advocated since the 1950s. The poems contained in two of his major novels were translated not as "cribs" or literal paraphrases pedagogically aimed at supporting the target reader's study of the source text but as poetic texts adapted to the target language.

The non-literal approach to poetry translation has often been described through the metaphor of acting (see Chapter 1 above). In order to rewrite a poem in the target language, a good translator needs to "act" the role of the poet he is translating, leaving his own artistic personality behind. The translator-actor's job must start with a thorough study of the text and of its author. A self-translator is obviously at an advantage in this task, but the analysis conducted in this chapter has shown that the very fact of the poems' attribution to fictional characters impacted Nabokov's translation method.

In his study "Discourse in the novel," Mikhail Bakhtin distinguishes the language of prose from poetic language in terms of distance between author and speaker. According to Bakhtin's model, in poetry this distance is minimal: each word of a poem is "directly aimed at expressing the poet's authorial intention," contributing to form a text that represents a "single intentional unit" (1975: 109). By contrast, prose can display various degrees of distance between the author's intention and the language used to express it. In different novels, but also in different moments within the same novel, the language of a prose writer can either directly express his semantic intentions or refract them (Bakhtin 1975: 111). In a polyphonic novel, the distance between author and speaker is the largest, because the characters' voices are not overwhelmed by the author's own voice, which is — hierarchically speaking — not superior to the voices of other characters. Hence, Bakhtin describes the novel as a "multistylistic, heteroglossic, multivoiced" (1975: 75) text, whose heterogeneous stylistic units are combined to form a harmonious system.

The plurality of voices can be achieved in multiple ways. One of them is inset narratives; another is and the embedding of other genres. Thus, in *Dar*, two literary works fictionally authored and published by Fyodor become part of the novel's text with a *mise en abyme* mechanism: one is Chernyshevsky's biography, an example of Fyodor's shift to prose, the other Fyodor's early collection *Stikhi*. The latter has a title and a thematic conception, and is characterized by a specific poetic style. Seen from Bakhtin's perspective, poetry attributed to a fictional character can be interpreted as one of the manifestations of his or her voice. Yet the issue of authorial intention is here complicated by the character's presence between the author and the reader.

In *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert's unreliable but charismatic first-person narration requires a constant alertness on the reader's part. Both his original poems and his use of literary quotations have the specific aim of making him appear more human, less of a villain. His amateur poetry is less organized and consistent than Fyodor's poetic production. Its distinguishing features include a tendency to imitate other authors and an unharmonious style that relies on puns and wordplay. Humbert intends his poetic language to appear erudite, modern (or sensitive to contemporary culture), and sophisticated, but the language remains clumsy and psychotic. When faced with the task of rewriting *Lolita* in Russian, Nabokov re-creates Humbert's poetic voice by a translation method that favors prosodic and euphonic aspects over strict semantic fidelity.

According to Bakhtin, poetry embedded in prose can be characterized by different degrees of "objectification" (1975: 135). This parameter indicates the distance between the poem and the novel's author and, conversely, the poem's proximity to its fictional author. Thus, on one pole there are poems that are not objectified: they are nominally attributed to the character but can in fact be interpreted as a direct expression of the author's poetic word. Bakhtin provides the example of poetry embedded in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-96). On the other side of the spectrum there are "almost completely

objectified” poems, such as the compositions attributed to captain Lebyadkin in Dostoevsky’s *Demons* (1871-72).

The objectification of Lebyadkin’s poetry had previously been noted by Vladislav Khodasevich. In his 1931 essay “Poeziya Ignata Lebyadkina,” Khodasevich argued that Lebyadkin’s poems are a reflection of the character who authored them, a “ridiculous, ignorant, drunk” man (1996: 199). His poems are dressed in a “laughable and vulgar” form that clashes with their serious, even tragic content (ibid.). According to Khodasevich, this contrast generates a tragicomic distortion of the very notion of poetry, just as Lebyadkin is a “tragic distortion of the human image” (ibid.). Khodasevich draws a comparison between Dostoevsky’s novel and the parody of Kozma Prutkov: whereas Prutkov’s comic messages were wrapped in elevated poetic style, Lebyadkin burlesques serious subjects.

Hence, in Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel, poetry is used to enhance the expressiveness of Lebyadkin’s voice, letting his personality speak through his verses. The attribution of poetry to a novel’s character can thus become an efficient means of character portrayal as well as an ingenious language game.

If the distance between an author and his poetic language is normally minimal, when a poem is embedded in a novel and attributed to a character, it is a part of this character’s portrayal, an evocation of his voice and his, rather than the author’s, personality. What Nabokov does in *Dar* and *Lolita* is not dissimilar, but the distance between author and character, as well as between author and embedded poetry, differs in these novels.

The study conducted in this chapter has shown that the translations of Fyodor’s poems reflect the dynamicity of their fictional author and his literary career. The evolution of his poetry is especially evident in the English version of the novel, when, after the poems on childhood, he transitions towards a more traditional poetic form with meter and rhyme. Hence, one may presume that the distance between Nabokov and his character can also be dynamic: while the poems from *Stikhi* represent an example of Fyodor’s early poetry, his later poetic texts may be less objectified. Such may be the case with the poem “Ласточка,”

described by Nabokov as one of *his* favorite Russian poems (SO, 14). Its English rendition can be read as an autonomous poetic text that reflects and complements the original with yet another manifestation of the authorial intention. The translation of the collection on childhood, on the other hand, points at a greater degree of objectification: by choosing a poetic style that is reminiscent of English modernist poetry, Nabokov privileged their function in the novel as a part of the character's portrait, as a snapshot of an earlier stage of Fyodor's career.

The meta-literary dimension of *Dar* places Fyodor's poetry in a special position. The novel is devoted to the maturation of a literary gift, and it is through the examples of the protagonist's work that the reader is given glimpses of this process. By contrast, in *Lolita*, Humbert's poetry leaves the reader with a feeling of stale immobility, if not ongoing descent into darkness and desperation.

As in Dostoevsky's *Demons*, the poems attributed to Humbert are meant, by their fictional author, to appear serious, but often display clashes between form, meaning, and context. A limerick in the style of children's poetry is unsettling, ambiguous, rife with sexual allusions. When Humbert tries his hand at writing a serious poem, a death sentence for his nemesis, he produces a tragicomic imitation of another poet's style. The comic effect is provoked by the contrast between the pathos of the poem's content and the derivativeness of its form: but then murder is not a creative act. The translations maintain the distance between the novel's author and its narrator. In both versions of the novel, both prose and poetry are highly objectified. Nabokov even leaves clues that point at the distance between himself and his character, such as Humbert's reflections about a good memoirist (AnL, 263), completely antithetic to Nabokov's own idea of memory.

The Russian version of *Lolita* has a double frame: (1) the feigned paratext – the fictional introduction by John Ray, also present in English, and (2) the actual paratext – the notes and the author's postscript, which in Genette's theory would figure as a "threshold" zone between the real world and the world of the novel (1997: 2). One of the

notes glosses the French quatrain from Humbert's poem written at the Quebec sanatorium. Here, in the liminal area beyond the novel's narrative space, Nabokov takes off Humbert's mask and speaks in his own voice.¹³⁷ However, in both *The Gift* and *Lolita*, despite different degrees of objectification, Nabokov gives up his method of translation "as commentary," and becomes an "actor-translator" who speaks in the voice of the fictional authors whose poetry he translates.

The poem embedded in *Look at the Harlequins!* as a part of Vadim Vadimovich's dialogue with Iris may not be objectified at all: a few years after the novel's publication, Véra Nabokova attributed it to her husband, defining it as "his last poem" (*Stikhi*, 3). Both within the frame of the novel (a parodic autobiography) and outside of it, the poem is a philosophical reflection about "vlyublennost'" as a special state of consciousness that expands the boundaries of the tangible world. Its literal gloss, an integral part of the novel's meta-poetic episode, reflects Nabokov's late-life preference for a literal approach to poetry translation.

Yet literalism did not turn into a universal method in Nabokov's translation practice. In particular, with regards to self-translation of poetry embedded in prose, there is openness to methodological flexibility. As shown in this chapter, the main factors that impacted his choices in that endeavor were the nature of a poetic text, its function within the novel, the target audience, and the cultural distance between source and target languages.

The following chapter is devoted to yet another situation of poetry translation: the English self-translations of the Russian poems signed by Nabokov and published in his bilingual collection *Poems and Problems*.

¹³⁷ As a result, the translation from French becomes an unadorned "crib" that supports the reader's interaction with the original text.

4

Poems and Problems

4.1 Introduction

Poems and Problems was published by McGraw-Hill in 1971. According to Brian Boyd, Nabokov began translating a selection of his Russian poems in Montreux in December 1968.¹³⁸ He assembled the fair copy of the book in 1969 and in December of the same year sent a letter to his publisher to accompany the first typescript of *Poems and Problems*. After a further examination of his old papers, however, Nabokov found a few more poems that he wished to include in the upcoming collection. As a result, he did not correct the proofs of the final version of *Poems and Problems* until December 1970 (Boyd 1991: 580).

The collection is divided in three main sections: thirty-nine Russian poems, printed *en face* with their English self-translations, fourteen English poems (previously published in the 1959 *Poems*), and eighteen chess problems. As we can see from Nabokov's letter to Frank E. Tayler of McGraw-Hill, in December 1969 the structure of the future collection was already clearly defined by its author.¹³⁹

The section devoted to his Russian poems includes, in Nabokov's own words, "no more than one percent of the mass of verse which I exuded with monstrous regularity

¹³⁸ "As he [Nabokov] remained in Montreux, poring over his old Russian verse and devising new chess problems, his latest English fiction continued to surge ahead" (Boyd 1991: 565). We are therefore in the months after *Ada* and before the writing of *Transparent Things*.

¹³⁹ Nabokov accompanied the manuscript with a brief description of the upcoming book: "I am airmailing separately (to-morrow) the complete typescript of POEMS AND PROBLEMS. It consists of: 1) a Dedication to my wife; 2) a Preface; 3) 36 poems in my English translation; 4) the 36 Russian originals; 5) notes to some of them; 6) 14 English poems of my New Yorker period; 7) a Bibliography; 8) 18 Chess problems with notes and 9) their Solutions" (*SL*, 464). In the actual edition of *Poems and Problems*, the number of Russian poems is 39 rather than 36.

during my youth” (*PP*, 13). It is with the awareness of a mature writer that he glances back at his career as a poet and divides it in the introduction to *Poems and Problems* into several “stages,” supplementing each stage with a brief commentary:

[A]n initial one of passionate and commonplace love verses (not represented in this edition); a period reflecting utter distrust of the so-called October Revolution; a period (reaching well into the 1920s) of a kind of private curatorship, aimed at preserving nostalgic retrospections and developing Byzantine imagery [...]; a period lasting another decade or so during which I set myself to illustrate the principle of making a short poem contain a plot and tell a story (this in a way expressed my impatience with the dreary drone of the anemic “Paris School” of émigré poetry); and finally, in the late thirties, and especially in the following decades, a sudden liberation from self-imposed shackles, resulting both in a sparser output and in a belatedly discovered robust style. (*PP*, 13-14)

And it is with the awareness of an experienced translator of poetry that Nabokov confesses that “[s]electing poems for this volume proved less difficult than translating them” (*PP*, 14). In introductions to the translations of his Russian novels and in forewords to his translations of other authors, Nabokov often explained his translation strategies. Similarly, in the introduction to *Poems and Problems*, he devotes a page to the English translations of the thirty-nine Russian poems.

The poet starts by contemplating the benefits of literal translation, a methodology that in 1969 Nabokov had already been practicing “for the last ten years” (*ibid.*). In particular, he claims that to translate a Russian poem literally can be an “honest and delightful procedure, when the text is a recognized masterpiece, whose every detail must be faithfully rendered in English” (*ibid.*). The literal approach can therefore be seen as a manifestation of Nabokov’s respect for the artistic qualities of Russian classics, as well as his attempt to preserve and carry these qualities across the language barrier.

Self-translation, however, has characteristics that distinguish it from standard translation. By wondering “What about faithfully englishing one’s own verse, written half a century or a quarter a century ago?” (*PP*, 14) Nabokov asks whether literalism should still be considered a suitable strategy for a task of self-translation. He then sums up some psychological implications of his experience with self-translation applied to poetry.

The theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1 has shown that self-translation has often been described in ambiguous terms by authors who practiced it, an ambiguity that derives from the enriching and yet at times complicated condition of a writer's bilingualism. Nabokov, however, went through most of the "bilingual" inner turmoil in the years of his uneasy but ultimately successful switch to English: as he lamented in several writings and interviews,¹⁴⁰ the detachment from his beloved Russian tongue was painful and yet necessary (this theme emerges in some compositions included in *Poems and Problems*). If one looks at Nabokov's bilingualism from the viewpoint of the cycle described by Elizabeth K. Beaujour (1989), like other bilingual authors, Nabokov went through the phase of concern for linguistic purity,¹⁴¹ and experienced self-translation as an important step on the path towards the acceptance of the "polylinguistic matrix" in his life and art.

Nabokov's poetic production, however, was not fully affected by the language switch. As Jane Grayson pointed out (1977: 10), Nabokov's last original work in Russian was published in 1942 ("Ultima Thule"), but he did not cease writing poetry in Russian after that year. It was therefore in verse that he found the liberty to write in Russian again.

Thus, in 1969, and in the specific case of *Poems and Problems*, the task of translating a significant number of his early verse was perhaps more likely to become a source of

¹⁴⁰ See for instance, the essay "On a Book Entitled Lolita," where Nabokov confesses: "My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody's concern, is that I had to abandon my natural language, my natural idiom, my rich, infinitely rich and docile Russian tongue, for a second-rate brand of English" (*AnL*: 316). He compared the language switch to "learning anew to handle things after losing seven or eight fingers in an explosion" (*SO*, 54). Nabokov betrayed even more emotion when in a 1942 letter to his wife he tried to describe the pains of his language switch: "On the way a lightning bolt of undefined inspiration ran right through me – a passionate desire to write – and to write in Russian. And yet I can't. I don't think anyone who has never experienced this feeling can really understand its torment, its tragedy. In this sense the English language is an illusion and an ersatz. In my usual condition, i.e. busy with butterflies, translations, or academic writing, I myself don't fully register the whole grief and bitterness of my situation" (qtd. in Boyd 1991: 52).

¹⁴¹ "My fear of losing or corrupting, through alien influence, the only thing I had salvaged from Russia – her language – became positively morbid and considerably more harassing than the fear I was to experience decades later of my never being able to bring my English prose anywhere close to the level of my Russian" (*SM*, 265).

uncomfortable psychological reactions. To work on this collection meant not only to sum up a lifetime of poetry, but also to open a “Pandora’s box” of old texts: self-translation, as pointed out by translation theorists, is first and foremost an act of *rewriting* one’s own work in another language. Hence, in the case of old poems, the self-translator re-read them with the taste and experience of a mature author. This could explain why Nabokov’s uncompromising literalism may have vacillated on *Poems and Problems*. In the introduction he admits that he “had to fight a vague embarrassment; one cannot help squirming and wincing; one feels rather like a potentate swearing allegiance to his own self or a conscientious priest blessing his own bathwater” (*PP*, 14).

One can sense the poet-translator’s inner tension between these lines, deriving from the duality of his task as, simultaneously, an author *and* a translator. This tension, however, in Nabokov’s case is quickly resolved in favor of the translator: “if one contemplates for one wild moment, the possibility of paraphrasing and improving one’s old verse, a horrid sense of falsification makes one scamper back and cling like a baby ape to rugged fidelity” (*ibid.*). Therefore, he resisted the temptation to “cheat” by improving his old texts. The English texts should be faithful reflections created by an impartial interpreter rather than newer versions, influenced by the poet’s current literary taste.

The translator’s impartiality may, however, be not completely inflexible. Nabokov admits that there was a “little compromise” he accepted when translating his poems, namely, “whenever possible” he welcomed “rhyme, or its shadow” (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, he concludes that he “never twisted the tail of a line for the sake of consonance; and the original measure has not been kept if readjustments of sense had to be made for its sake” (*ibid.*). Hence, between extending the life of an old poem and attempting to faithfully replicate it as a finite object with the tools of a new language, Nabokov claims to have chosen the latter option.

In the 1969 letter Nabokov “implored” his editor to consider the author’s request to print the “Cyrillic weirdies” along with the English translations. Nabokov justifies his

demand for an *en face* bilingual edition by defining it as a “more scholarly and compendious” option because the Russian texts “will take less place in a verso position while satisfying the poignant demands of pedantic purity” (*SL*, 464).

As noted in Chapter 1, bilingual collections of self-translated poetry are a common phenomenon in the publishing market: they broaden the book’s target audience while reasserting the importance of the poems’ bilingual existence. In his letter to Frank Tayler Nabokov points out that the presence of the Russian texts “in that position would [surely] attract at least as many Russian readers (in New York and in Moscow) as they might repulse monolingual flippers” (*SL*, 464).

It is known that Nabokov intended to publish his *Eugene Onegin* interlinearly, with each line of the translation positioned below the transliterated original (Boyd 2011: 217). With *Poems and Problems*, Nabokov was prepared to scare off some monolingual readers for the sake of a truly bilingual publication. He therefore addressed primarily the American readers who already knew some Russian, in addition to the Russian readers in the United States, many of whom were likely to be bilingual, and Russian readers in Moscow (who, in all probability, were expected to receive a copy smuggled over the Soviet border). Hence, by printing his poems in a bilingual edition, Nabokov intended to enlarge and improve his audience, while also producing a more scholarly poetic publication.

Julia Trubikhina (2018) finds some parallels between Nabokov’s introductions and the manifestos of the Avant-garde age: they both draw attention to the future and generate a future by addressing a specific audience. The manifestos’ touch of antagonism and the outline of a program of action are important features that Nabokov’s translator’s forewords share. By refusing — often angrily — a translation methodology and laying out the strategy he resolutely advocates for, Nabokov engages with his readers through the paratextual space, trying to prepare them for what he is offering. Therefore, the American reader of the introduction to *Poems and Problems* would in all likelihood have expected a sequence of fairly literal translations made in the spirit of Nabokov’s *Eugene Onegin*.

The communicative relationship that Nabokov establishes with his readers is not always totally in line with his forewords to his works. This chapter is devoted to signs of tension between the poet and the impartial scholar-translator. Nabokov's bilingual poems are examined from the viewpoints of prosody, meter, rhyme, and semantic and syntactic features. Moreover, Nabokov's strategy in transposing cultural and intertextual elements is discussed in this chapter. The author's notes, as well as punctuation and structure are also taken into account.

4.2 Prosody: Measure, Rhyme, Alliteration

4.2.1 Meter

The Russian section of *Poems and Problems* contains some translations that are equimetric to their Russian counterparts, but also many non-equimetric translations. The latter category includes poems with regular meter that, however, is different from that of the Russian text, and translations written in free verse or with a rhythmic undersong

The Russian poems, a selection of texts that covers half a century of Nabokov's poetic production, from 1917 ("Дождь пролетел") to 1967 ("С севера Севера"), display some variety in terms of meter and measure: iambic trimeters, tetrameters, pentameters and hexameters, but also anapaestic trimeters and tetrameters. One poem is written in amphibrachic trimeters and dactylic trimeters. There is also a long poem written in three different meters, including dactyls, and three poems do not display any traditional metrical scheme.

Bearing in mind Nabokov's statement that "the original measure has not been kept if readjustments of sense had to be made" (*PP*, 14), the present section studies his solutions to the issue of meter. In addition to the 1969 edition of *Poems and Problems*, my sources include the 1969 typescript of the book with the author's holograph annotations, and a

1962 Italian edition of Nabokov's poetry (*Poesie*) that anticipated *Poems and Problems* and was fully authorized and reviewed by the author.¹⁴²

4.2.1.1 Measure and Message

If poetry is a harmonic union of form and matter, sometimes this union does not merely express the author's search for aesthetic balance; rather, the metrical frame actually becomes an integral part of its message. The selection of Russian poems included in *Poems and Problems* contains a series of "meta-poetic" texts where the reflection on such themes as poetic inspiration or the moral aspect of a poet's work is supported by the poem's meter.

For example, "От счастья влюбленному не спится" (rendered in English as "For Happiness the Lover Cannot Sleep," *PP*, 48-49), published in *Rul'* in 1928, is a meta-poetic soliloquy of sixteen lines, fifteen of which are iambic pentameters. The poem's closing line is unexpectedly short of a syllable. As a result, the text leaves the reader with a feeling of suspension that matches and enhances the expressive power of its message:

От счастья влюбленному не спится;
стучат часы; купцу седому снится
в червонном небе вычерченный кран,
спускающийся медленно над трюмом;
мерещится изгнанникам угрюмым
в цвет юности окрашенный туман.

В волненье повседневности прекрасной,
где б ни был я, одним я обуян,
одно зовет и мучит ежечасно:

на освещенном острове стола
граненый мрак чернильницы открытой,
и белый лист, и лампы свет, забытый
под куполом зеленого стекла.

И поперек листа полупустого
мое перо, как черная стрела,
и недописанное слово. (*PP*, 48)

For happiness the lover cannot sleep;
the clock ticktacks; the gray-haired merchant fancies
in vermeil skies a silhouetted crane,
into a hold its cargo slowly sinking.
To gloomy exiles there appears miraged
a mist, which youth with its own hue has tinted.

Amidst the agitation and the beauty
of daily life, one image everywhere
haunts me incessantly, torments and claims me:

Upon the bright-lit island of the desk
the somber facets of the open inkstand
and the white sheet of paper, and the lamp's
unswitched-off light beneath its green glass dome.

And left athwart the still half-empty page,
my pen like a black arrow, and the word
I did not finish writing. (*PP*, 49)

¹⁴² The Italian translators' introduction claims that Nabokov authorized the translations of both his Russian and American poems. He "wished them to appear *en face* with the original text, and personally took care of each version's most scrupulous literalism, at the expense of rhyme and even of some attempts of rhythmic equivalence" (*Poesie*, 8). The Russian poems were translated by Alberto Pescetto.

The English version of this poem is mostly equilinear and equimetric to its Russian counterpart. Both texts are divided into four stanzas: the first and longest introduces a wide and dynamic image that can be reminiscent of moments of cosmic synchronization. In the following stanzas, the speaker “zooms in” on himself, on a static image of his own writing desk that accompanies him throughout his everyday life; the closing stanza further focuses on the poet’s desk, where a black pen and an unfinished word are captured against a white sheet of paper.

The poem’s deviation from the expected measure and its abrupt ending match its final image. The metrically incomplete line leaves the reader with a feeling of suspension, associated with the word in a half-empty line on the half-empty sheet of paper. The presence of meter in English is a necessary condition for the maintenance of this meta-poetic game that blurs the boundaries between an image described in the poem and the words printed on the reader’s page. The effect is even enhanced in the English version of the poem, where the closing line is an iambic trimeter, two feet shorter than all the previous lines.¹⁴³

More than ten poems in *Poems and Problems* are written in Russian iambic tetrameters, but only two maintain this measure in English. One of them is the 1931 poem “Неоконченный черновик” (translated as “An Unfinished Draft”). Nabokov’s notorious literary conflict with the authors of the émigré journal *Chisla* — also depicted, amid other works, in *Dar*¹⁴⁴ — is the central theme of this text. Just like Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, the speaker of this poem finds in Pushkin a moral and literary model that strengthens his

¹⁴³ This kind of meta-literary game was not new to Nabokov. According to Brian Boyd, at the Tenishev school, Nabokov was once given the theme “Laziness” for a composition and handed in a blank sheet, which earned him a good grade (1990: 114-15).

¹⁴⁴ An echo of this polemic can be found in the story “Lips to Lips” (1933) and a fragment from the 1931 “Iz Kalmbrudovoi poemy” (“From a Poem by Calmbrood”), where there is a parody of the same authors from *Chisla*. See also Davydov 1995: 484-85.

opposition to stylistic experimentation with an eye to fame and profit, a literary crime of which the authors Georgy Ivanov and Georgy Adamovich are openly accused:

Поэт, печалью промышляя,
твердит прекрасному: прости!
Он говорит, что жизнь земная —
слова на поднятой в пути —
откуда вырванной? — странице
(не знаем и швыряем прочь)
или пролет мгновенный птицы
через светлый зал из ночи в ночь.

Зоил (пройдоха величавый,
корыстью занятый одной)
и литератор площадной
(тревожный арендатор славы)
меня страшатся потому,
что зол я, холоден и весел,
что не служу я никому,
что жизнь и честь мою я взвесил
на пушкинских весах, и честь
осмеливаюсь предпочесть. (PP, 66)

The poet dealing in Dejection
to Beauty iterates: adieu!
He says that human days are only
words on a page picked up by you
upon your way (a page ripped out—
where from? You know not and reject it)
or from the night into the night
through a bright hall a brief bird's flight.

Zoilus (a majestic rascal,
whom only lust of gain can stir)
and Publicus, litterateur
(a nervous leaseholder of glory),
cower before me in dismay
because I'm wicked, cold, and gay,
because honor and life I weigh
on Pushkin's scales and dare prefer
honor ... (PP, 67)

Both versions of the poem are divided in two stanzas. In the Russian text, the opening stanza has eight lines, whereas the second one supplements the octave with a rhymed distich that creates a sense of asymmetry and even suspension. The suspension of an unfinished draft: the title refers to a picked up and rejected page, or, perhaps, an *objet trouvé*, but one may apply it to the poem itself. This may be especially relevant to the translation, where the feeling of incompleteness is further reinforced. While the English opening stanza mirrors the Russian text, its second part recreates the asymmetry by means of a single line. This line is remarkably short, made of a single word (“honor”) followed by an ellipsis. As a result, the translation sounds significantly more “unfinished” and ends on a keyword. The Russian text’s closing lines underscore the concept of “честь” with a punning rhyme and reiterate this word three times: “что жизнь и честь мою я взвесил / на пушкинских весах, и честь / осмеливаюсь предпочесть.” The English translation, on the other hand, finds its own way of emphasizing a central concept that represents the foundation of the speaker’s moral position. It replaces an untranslatable pun with a focal point enhanced by the disruption of meter and structure.

Given Nabokov's apparent reluctance to use regular iambic tetrameters in the English translations of his Russian poems, one may wonder why the Russian traditional meter remained intact in this particular poem. The reason behind this decision may lie in the specific relationship between measure and sense. Some of the poem's lines are humorous or satirical. By ending the poem on an assessment of the speaker's loyalty to Pushkin, as well as opting for honor rather than gain, but also by avoiding the expected rhythmic structure, Nabokov switches to a more serious and solemn tone. The abrupt, somewhat more dramatic ending of the English version, which clashes with the poem's overall metrical regularity, is an interesting alternative to the original stylistic effect.

Responding to a real-life literary and political conflict, this poem deliberately takes a specific side and uses rhetorical devices to support the speaker's position in an ongoing debate. And since the polemic involves poetic style, the meter of this poem may be more than a neutral rhythmic frame. Iambic tetrameters are first and foremost a Pushkinian measure: as Gerald Smith explains in his study of Nabokov and Russian verse, Russian iambic tetrameter is a "thematically neutral, all-purpose formal resource," but, more importantly, in Nabokov's literary circle it was "an ideologically semanticized" measure (1991: 281). Formal experimentation was commonly associated with left-leaning émigré artists, many of whom ended up returning to Soviet Russia. Nabokov, on the other hand, could never come to terms with the Soviet regime, or any other totalitarianism. In the Russian émigré circles of his time, the choice of a traditional poetic form was likely to be understood as taking a stand. Smith concludes that, in Nabokov's case, traditional form pointed at his "nostalgia for a time before the spirit of innovation had changed Russian poetry and Russian society" (1991: 302). Thus, to translate this poem in free verse would have meant to leave behind the structural asymmetry, the satirical tone, and the message concealed in the meter itself.

The collection contains one other poem written and translated in iambic tetrameters, (while other poems are usually transformed either into an irregular iambic undersong or

into free verse). If the title of the previous example warned the reader of the poem's dealing with, and, as it were, being, a "неоконченный" (unfinished) draft, this poem's title anticipates that the text is written in "Неправильные ямбы" (incorrect iambics):

В последний раз лиясь листьями
между воздушными перстами
и проходя перед грозой
от зелени уже настойчивой

до серебристости простой,
олива бедная, листва
искусства, плещет, и слова
лелеять бы уже не стоило,

если б не зоркие глаза
и одобрение бродяги,
если б не лилия в овраге,
если б не близкая гроза. (PP, 144)

For the last time, with leaves that flow
between the fingers of the air
and pass before the thunderstorm
from green by now importunate

into a simple silverness,
it ripples, the poor olive: foliage
of art! And it would seem that words
were now no longer worth the fondling,

had there not been a vagabond's
sharp-sightedness and approbation,
had not the gully held its lily,
had not the thunderstorm drawn near. (PP, 145)

The English text is accompanied by a note, where the translator briefly explains its unusual title:

"Irregular" (or "faulty," *nepравil'niĕ*) refers to the fact that in Russian prosody *ésli* (if) is never scudded, as for example the word *méshdu* (between) is allowed to be by an old tradition. There is no reason, however, why this other light and fluid disyllable should not be treated similarly, especially at the beginning of an iambic line. (PP, 145)

Here Nabokov is using his own prosodic terminology, such as the word "scuds" for "feet with two unstressed syllables," explained in his essay "Notes on Prosody." The idea for this meta-poetic composition may indeed have come during his late-life studies of poetry. For instance, in a passage of "Notes on Prosody," Nabokov provides a list of the Russian disyllabic words that are normally "scudded" in Russian poetry, words

which, in speech, are accented on the first syllable but in verse are made, if need be, to undergo a neutralization of accent by scudding. In Pushkin's poems, these words are: *cherez* ("across," "over"), *chtobi* ("in order to," "so that," "lest"), *dabi* ("so as to"), *ili* ("or," "either"), *mezhdú* ("between," "among"), *oto* (the extended form of *ot*, "from," as used before some words beginning with certain combinations of consonants such as *vs*), and *pered* ("before," "in front of") (NoP, 23)

This list is followed by several examples from Pushkin's work, such as *Ruslan and Lyudmila* and *Eugene Onegin*. In *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov points out, there is a passage where Pushkin "disposes consecutively three lines, each beginning with one of the six tiltable disyllables":

*Mezhdu Onéginim I mnóy,
Chtobī nasméshlivīy chitàtel',
Ili kakóy-nibud' izdàtel'...*

[the last word meaning "editor," "publisher," or "promoter"] (*NoP*, 24)

Similarly yet with innovation, in Nabokov's poem there is a triple presence of an unscuddable and yet scudded irregular anaphoric disyllable: it is not impossible that the analysis of tiltable words made for "Notes on Prosody" later found its reflection in the translation of the last quatrain of "Неправильные ямбы."

This poem involves a meta-poetic game. By deviating from an established tradition of iambic tetrameters, the measure that is synonymous with poetic norm in Russian literature, Nabokov does not so much challenge this norm as he plays a light-hearted and loving game of prosodic innovation.

The poem is a masterful exercise also of soundplay and imagery. The semantic and thematic connection with poem number 13 of the same collection ("Расстрел," written in 1927) has already been noticed by scholars (Dvinyatin 2001; Cornettone 2019). "Неправильные ямбы" is, however, a more mature poem, that relies on a harmonious combination of imagery and sound to create a tense atmosphere of silence before the storm. An expressive pattern of sound repetitions generates a contrast between placidly flowing liquid sounds recurrent in such words as "лясь," "олива," "лелеять," "лилия," and harsher consonant pairs like "st" and "br" ("листами," "перстами," "настойчивой," "простой," "стоило," "искусства," "серебристости," "одобрение бродяги," which rhymes with "овраги"). The last quatrain's unexpected rhythmic variation, preceded by an overall traditional iambic scheme, strengthens the anticipation of an approaching reversal of the current placid situation.

In the translation, an endeavor to imitate the chain of “liquid” sounds can be detected in such words as “leaves,” “flow,” “olive,” “foliage,” “gully,” and “lily.” As a result, the English version of the poem loses the semantic connection with the translation of “Расстрел,” where the text closes on the image of “racemosas” in a “ravine” (“и весь в черемухе овраг” in Russian, *PP*, 47). Therefore, in this example Nabokov privileges the aesthetic and rhythmic aspect of the single translation over a lexical connection, one of the many that link the poems of the Russian section of *Poems and Problems*.

Russian poetic tradition is relatively young, especially if compared to major European literatures. English poetry, on the other hand, is more flexible in terms of poetic meter. The “incorrectness” of the Russian iambics is an untranslatable element pertaining to the source language’s poetic tradition. In the 1969 typescript of *Poems and Problems*, the title was first rendered literally, “Incorrect Iambics,” and later corrected with a holograph note to “Irregular Iambics” (*PP* typescript, 66). This is probably because the first option made little sense when applied to English iambics. The English meter, as Cornettone notes in her analysis of this poem (2019: 134), appears somewhat irregular thanks to such long multisyllabic words as “thunderstorm,” “importunate,” “vagabond,” “sharp-sightedness,” “approbation,” most of which have at least one secondary stress. This effect is strengthened in the final version of this translation, which contains another divergence from the 1969 typescript: the first translation rendered ll. 9-10 as “had not one’s eyes been sharp, had not / one gained a vagabond’s approval.” Nabokov’s subsequent change impacts the target text both on the level of rhythm and meaning (a different attribution of “зоркие глаза”). In the second version, the passage in question contains longer words, such as “sharp-sightedness” and “approbation.” Thus, in giving up strict literalism in the translation of the poem’s title, Nabokov chose a more coherent alternative that correctly describes the target text.

If in “An Unfinished Draft” meter plays a supporting role in suggesting the literary and political position taken by the author, the poem “О правителях” (1944) is dressed up as a parody: the form of this poem – absence of regular meter, frequent enjambments,

highly variable line-length, and bizarre rhymes – is strongly reminiscent of Russian avant-garde poetry, and, in particular, of the work of Vladimir Mayakovsky. As Nabokov explains in one of the notes that accompany the English translation, the poem ends on an allusion to the author’s “late namesake” (*PP*, 133). In these final lines the speaker asserts that, had Mayakovsky lived until the 1940’s, his new verses would have rhymed with the political names of the moment, such as Churchill and Stalin:

Покойный мой тезка,
писавший стихи и в полоску,
и в клетку, на самом восходе
всесоюзно-мещанского класса,
кабы дожил до полдня,
нынче бы рифмы натягивал
на «монументален»,
на «переперчил»
и так далее. (*PP*, 130-32)

In his study *Russkaya literatura v izgnanii*, Gleb Struve described this poem as a brilliant parody of Mayakovsky’s characteristic intonation (1956: 119).

And yet, Mayakovsky’s did not align his poems to the center, and the visual structure of Nabokov’s text does not mimic the famous *lesenka* invented by Mayakovsky. The poem’s unusual central alignment – compared by Cornettone to an epitaph (2019: 222) – draws the reader’s attention to its unconventional structure, with irregular slopes generated by a sometimes brusque alternation of shorter and longer lines. The “centrality” (here, literally) of the graphic aspect of a poem is, of course, a typical attribute of avant-garde poetry. From the Italian futurists, who proclaimed a “revolution against the typographic harmony of the page” (Marinetti 1914: 143), to Dadaist artists, avant-garde poets arranged their texts in startling visual structures that challenged the old poetic tradition.

Many features of Nabokov’s pastiche – vocabulary, irregular line-length, oratorical intonation and punctuation – are maintained in English. The visual disposition of the English text, however, is not the same. No longer centered, the translation is divided into

stanzas and aligned left, appearing less symmetric, more bizarre and chaotic, perhaps slightly more resembling Mayakovsky's ladders:

If my late namesake,
who used to write verse, in rank
and in file, at the very dawn
of the Soviet Small-Bourgeois order,
 had lived till its noon (131)
he would be now finding taut rhymes
 such as "praline"
 or "air chill,"
and others of the same kind. (*PP*, 131-33)

Nabokov abandoned the idea of central alignment for the translation of this poem: in the 1962 Italian *Poesie*, the literal Italian version of "О правителях" is entirely aligned to the left. However, the translation contained in *Poems and Problems* is less of a "crib," and its visual arrangement is in tune with this. The paronomastic rhyming with Churchill and Stalin is explained in a note, but it also works independently in the target text thanks to the words "praline" and "air chill," which are non-semantic alternatives of the Russian "монументален" and "переперчил." By contrast, the Italian translation displays a literal rendering of these lines and fully relies on the note to justify the presence of two obscure words, which in Italian do not rhyme with either Churchill or Stalin.

Just like its Italian precursor, Nabokov's English version of this poem completely eschews rhyme. Mayakovsky's poetry, and Nabokov's parody of it, heavily rely on sound – phonic effects, strident sound repetitions, puns, and, very importantly, rhyme. In the Russian poem, Nabokov shows off his ability to imitate Mayakovsky's famous wordplay and unexpected rhyming, thanks to such interlinear rhymes as "под ложечкой" / "в ложе" (ll. 12/14) or imperfect rhymes with anagrams like "навыкат" and "тыквой" (ll. 41/44).

In his 1926 essay "How to make poetry?" Mayakovsky noted that he always placed "the most characteristic word at the end of the line and found a rhyme for it at any cost" (1959: 106). This approach to rhyme can be seen as a part of the tradition that sees rhyme as instrument of poetic search: for instance, Varlam Shalamov defined rhyme as "a mere

instrument, thanks to which a poem is created, the poet’s instrument of search” (2013: 40). The closing lines of Nabokov’s poem seem to make fun of the “taut” (*PP*, 133) political rhymes that recur in Mayakovsky’s work. Yet, on a formal level, the self-translation gives up this signature feature of Mayakovsky’s poetry for the sake of fidelity to meaning.

Soundplay is largely responsible for establishing the Russian poem’s rhythm. The English poem displays some effort to mimic assonances and alliterations. For instance, in Russian, Nabokov found an imperfect but interesting rhyme for “Ленины” (“колени”), that is also vaguely discernible in form of assonance in the faithful English translation (Lenins - release - knees):

толстогрудые немки и разные
людоеды, любовники, ломовики,
Иоанны, Людовики, Ленины,
все это сидело, кряхтя на эх и на ых,
упираясь локтями в колени (*PP*, 128)

utterly rotten princelings; fat-breasted
German ladies; and various
cannibals, loverboys, lumbermen,
Johns, Lewises, Lenins,
emitting stool grunts of strain and release,
propping elbows on knees. (*PP*, 129)

One can observe here the self-translator’s attempt to recreate the “l” alliteration, that characterizes these lines both in Russian and in English (“людоеды,” “любовники,” “ломовики,” “Людовики,” “Ленины” vs “ladies,” “loverboys,” “lumbermen,” “Lewises,” “Lenins”). The onomatopoeic “grunts” are, however, paraphrased in both the English self-translation and the Italian literal version.

Nabokov’s translation of this long and rather complex parody, where much is centered around such hardly translatable features as puns and rhymes, aspires to strike a balance between literalism and form. Without enjambments, alliterations, and wordplay, the spirit of Mayakovsky would not have been felt in the English version of this poem. Despite the sacrifice of rhyme, the Anglophone reader can still discern the parody on the avant-garde in Nabokov’s version and even appreciate some of the stylistic features that, by means of mocking imitation, are degraded and dismissed.

Nabokov’s short stories also contain poetic parodies. One of these poems, in the story “Tyrants Destroyed,” imitates the work of Mayakovsky. On the timeline of Nabokov’s

literary production, the composition of “О правителях,” a 1944 text that reacts not only to regime-approved Soviet literature but also to the rising leanings of the American intelligentsia towards Stalin, can be placed between two dystopian works, the short story “Истребление тиранов” (“Tyrants Destroyed”) written in 1936, and the English novel *Bend Sinister*, published in 1947. In particular, the short story — translated into English by Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with his father in 1971 — contains a poetic parody of Mayakovsky:

Хорошо-с, — а помните, граждане,
 Как хирел наш край без отца?
 Так без хмеля сильнейшая жажда
 Не создаст ни пивца, ни певца.

Вообразите, ни реп нет,
 Ни баклажанов, ни брюкв...
 Так и песня, что днесь у нас крепнет,
 Задыхалась в луковках букв.

Шли мы тропиной исторенной,
 Горькие ели грибы,
 Пока ворота истории
 Не дрогнули от колотьбы!

Пока, белизною кительной
 Сияя верным сынам,
 С улыбкой своей удивительной
 Правитель не вышел к нам! (SSoch, V: 374)

Now then, citizens,
 You remember how long
 Our land wilted without a Father?
 Thus, without hops, no matter how strong
 One’s thirst, it is rather
 Difficult, isn’t it,
 To make both the beer and the drinking song!
 Just imagine, we lacked potatoes,
 No turnips, no beets could we get:
 Thus the poem, now blooming, wasted
 In the bulbs of the alphabet!
 A well-trodden road we had taken,
 Bitter toadstools we ate,
 Until by great thumps was shaken
 History’s gate!
 Until in his trim white tunic
 Which upon us its radiance cast,
 With his wonderful smile the Ruler
 Came before his subjects at last! (Stories, 459)

Like “О правителях,” this text reenacts Mayakovsky’s declamatory intonation with its numerous questions and exclamations. And in fact, the poem is *heard* by the protagonist of this short story, when it is declaimed on the radio “by an actor’s juicy voice, replete with baritone modulations” (*Stories*, 458). Perhaps this is why the translation is an overall accurate version of the Russian text, but certainly not its copy: the English poem introduces interesting changes both on the level of meaning and form. For instance, the translation gives up the Russian poem’s largely anapaestic meter and division into stanzas, while it maintains rhyme and variable line length.

The Russian text features a rather traditional alternating rhyme scheme, which, nevertheless, contains such Mayakovskian tricks as “исторенной” / “истории.” Its English counterpart, on the other hand, creates a new and rather unusual rhyme pattern, that contains such rhyming sequences as “long,” “strong, “song”; “father,” “rather”; “citizens,” “isn’t”; “get,” “alphabet,” “ate,” “gate”; “cast,” “last.” Thus, beyond successfully recreating the parodic effect (clearly a priority), the English poem is granted its own structure, meter, and rhyme scheme.

The translations of the two parodies of Mayakovsky were made roughly in the same years, the very fact that the second poem is framed in a prose narrative appears to have granted the translator a freedom he deliberately denied himself when translating “О правителях.”

The tendency to foreground the parodic dimension of a poem was anticipated in 1941 by the translation of another political parody, in the short story “Cloud, Castle, Lake.” As noted by Maxim Shrayer (1999), this poem, a marching song, was first translated by Peter Perzoff, who prepared a literal version of the Russian text. Nabokov, however, was dissatisfied with Perzoff’s text and retranslated the song himself, restoring its trochaic meter and intensifying the political coloring of the poem by directly alluding at Nazi slogans.¹⁴⁵

However, if in 1941 one could hardly be surprised by Nabokov’s rejection of a literal translation in favor of a rhymed one, the subsequent experience with *Lolita* and “Tyrants Destroyed” shows that, as far as embedded poetry is concerned, Nabokov never really became a literalist and would let the intertextual dimension of a parodic poem’s form prevail in the target text. What is especially intriguing, however, is that all the English poems analyzed in this section aspire to strike a balance between fidelity to meaning and

¹⁴⁵ See Shrayer 1999: 135-37 for a more detailed comparison of the existing versions of this poem.

the attempt, usually quite successful if not entirely lossless, to convey the parodic or meta-poetic significance of the source text's formal features.

4.2.1.2 Measure for Measure

Poems written in iambic feet prevail in the Russian section of *Poems and Problems*. Many of them date back to the “European period” of Nabokov’s poetry (*PP*, 13), a time when he was remarkably prolific as a poet. By contrast, after 1940, the year of his emigration to the United States, Nabokov’s poetic burgeoning significantly declined: only nine out of thirty-nine Russian poems in that collection were composed in his more mature years.¹⁴⁶

Aside from “Дождь пролетел,” the first part of the Russian section contains predominantly iambic poems. A group of poems written in anapaests is found at the heart of the section, starting with “L’Inoconnue de la Seine,” and including such texts as “На закате,” “Мы с тобою так верили,” “Что за-ночь,” “Поэты,” “К России,” “Око,” and the long poems “Слава” and “Парижская поэма.” The remaining poems are written either in iambics or in free verse.

With the exception of the meta-poetic texts analyzed above, poems composed in Russian iambic tetrameters tend to be rendered in English in a more irregular iambic rhythm or in free verse. Some translations comprise lines of variable length, but nevertheless have a recognizable iambic pace. Such is the case of the poem “Что за-ночь” (1938) — two quatrains of iambic tetrameters, translated into English with a fairly regular iambic meter and with line-length from eight to twelve syllables:

¹⁴⁶ For a more detailed description of Nabokov’s different periods in versification, see Chapter 2 and Gerald Smith’s outline of Nabokov’s poetic career (1991).

Что за-ночь с памятью случилось?
Снег выпал, что-ли? Тишина.
Душа забвенью зря училась:
во сне задача решена.

Решенье чистое, простое
(о чем я думал столько лет?).
Пожалуй, и вставать не стоит:
ни тела, ни постели нет. (*PP*, 90)

What happened overnight to memory?
It must have snowed: such stillness! Of no use
Was to my soul the study of Oblivion:
that problem has been solved in sleep.

A simple, elegant solution.
(Now what have I been bothering about
so many years?) One does not see much need
in getting up: there's neither bed, nor body. (*PP*, 91)

In Russian, this brief account of a nocturnal epiphany, that in Paul Morris's words reveals "the unexpected simplicity of a solution to the restraints of time and space" (2010: 193), is composed in a very traditional four-foot iambic meter. It is a tranquil prosodic frame that suits this synthetic and yet cryptic text, imbued with a sense of mysterious revelation. The English poem, while being a faithful rendition of the Russian source, maintains this sense of harmonic mystery on the level of prosody. Its placid iambic pace contributes to recreating the poem's peaceful and serene tone. There is no rhyme, but rather a pattern of consonances, such as the sybilant "s" and "st" sounds in hushed words like "snowed," "stillness," "soul," "study," "sleep," "simple." The Russian poem has a mysterious and paradoxical conclusion that puzzles the reader, enhanced euphonicly through an echo of "тела" in "постели." In English, this sound device has turned into a correspondent "b" alliteration ("bed," "body").

In translations of longer poems, iambic rhythm tends to become increasingly irregular, and the alternation of rhythmically diverse fragments can become an expressive poetic device that marks a specific passage or image. This is the case, for example, with the translation of the 1925 poem "Мать," which alternates — in Russian — iambic hexameters with iambic tetrameters:

Смеркается. Казнен. С Голгофы отвалив,
спускается толпа, вьясь между олив,
подобно медленному змию;
и матери глядят, как под гору, в туман
увещающий уводит Иоанн
седую, страшную Марию.

Уложит спать ее и сам приляжет он,
и будет до утра подслушивать сквозь сон
ее рыдания и томленье.
Что, если у нее остался бы Христос
и плотничал, и пел? Что, если этих слез
не стоит наше искупленье?

Воскреснет Божий Сын, сияньем окружен;
у гроба, в третий день, виденье встретит жен,
вотще купивших ароматы;
светящуюся плоть ощупает Фома,
от веянья чудес земля сойдет с ума,
и будут многие распяты.

Мария, что тебе до бреда рыбарей!
Неосязаемо над горестью твоей
дни проплывают, и ни в третий,
ни в сотый, никогда не вспрянет он на зов,
твой смуглый первенец, лепивший воробьев
на солнцепеке, в Назарете. (*PP*, 32)

Night falls. He has been executed
From Golgotha the crowd descends and winds
Between the olive trees, like a slow serpent,
And mothers watch as John downhill
into the mist, with urgent words escorts
gray, haggard Mary.

To bed he'll help her, and lie down himself,
And through his slumber hear till morning
Her tossings and her sobs.
What if her son had stayed at home with her,
And carpentered and sung? What if those tears
Cost more than our redemption?

The son of God will rise, in radiance orbéd,
On the third day a vision at the tomb
Will meet the wives who bought the useless myrrh;
Thomas will feel the luminescent flesh;
The wind of miracles will drive men mad,
And many will be crucified.

Mary what are to you the fantasies
Of fishermen? Over your grief days skim
Insensibly and neither on the third
Nor hundredth, never will he heed your call
And rise, your brown firstborn who baked mud sparrows
In the hot sun, at Nazareth. (*PP*, 33)

This text belongs to a small group of “biblical” poems composed around the 1920s, that includes, among others, “Тайная вечеря” (1918), “Пасха” (1922), and “Очки Иосифа” (1923). In the introduction to *Poems and Problems*, Nabokov mentions this period of poetic production, but steadily dismisses any interest in religion on his part by stating that these poems merely express an interest in Byzantine imagery (*PP*, 13-14). His appreciation of the aesthetic aspect of the Christian scriptures was confirmed in a 1969 interview, where Nabokov included the New Testament in a list of the best and most successful works of literature (alongside Dante, Shakespeare, and Pushkin, *TWS*, 381). In addition to the New Testament, Nabokov’s poem may refer to various cultural and literary sources from the apocrypha (as pointed out by Andrey Ar’ev, 1999: 209) to the Western pictorial tradition.

The meter of the Russian text suits its dramatic content: the alternation of iambic hexameters and tetrameters allows the poet to create a dynamic and yet solemn rhythm, following an already established tradition in Russian poetry. For instance, Pushkin’s “Exegi

Monumentum” (1836) is written in quatrains of iambic hexameters that end on an iambic tetrameter.

While Nabokov’s 1943 English rendition of “Exegi Monumentum” was a close equimetric replica of Pushkin’s original, the translation of his own poem, prepared almost three decades later, loses the regular rhythmic alternation of different measures and displays a free iambic undersong that bases new prosodic features in the target text.

The English poem contains some iambic tetrameters and pentameters (ll. 4 and 5, for instance), but also a few passages, such as l. 7, where iambs are interspersed with anapaestic feet. In the Russian version of the poem, the tetrameters are highlighted by means of indentation to the right. In English, however, this indentation is only present when the lines also appear shorter than the text’s main body, such as l. 6: “gray, haggard Mary.” This line stands out both for its shortness and its repetition of grating “g” and “r” sounds that partly reproduce the emotional intensity of the Russian “седую, страшную Марию.”

The first stanza of the English version is, indeed, characterized by consonance. Ll. 2 and 4 introduce a half-rhyme and share the consonants “w” “n,” “d” (From Golgotha the crowd descends and winds / ... / and mothers watch as John downhill). Lineation here is slightly different from that of the Russian poem, where the first line sounds almost enjambed, whereas the English text ends it on a full stop, thus emphasizing the finality of “executed” before continuing the narration in a less disrupted pace.

In stanza 3 there is a temporal shift from the present to a future moment. Here, a solemn tone prophesies Christ’s resurrection on the third day after his death. In the translation, this passage is marked by a sudden switch to metric regularity: the stanza is made of three iambic pentameters and ends on an iambic tetrameter, which, combined with elevated poetic vocabulary (“in radiance orbed,” a more celestial version of “сияньем окружен”) strengthen the traditionally prophetic tone of the stanza. The prophetic “thoughts of the people” about resurrection clash with the heart-broken skepticism of

Mary, for whom there will be no return of her first-born (notice that in l. 10 the translation substitutes the only mention of “Христос” with “her son,” foregrounding the more private dimension of the life of Jesus).

The poem returns to an irregular iambic undersong in the closing sestet, which turns back to Mary’s past, to her son’s childhood in Nazareth and a more private and intimate dimension of her biography. The text ends on a moving adaptation of an image from the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, where Jesus is depicted baking twelve mud sparrows.¹⁴⁷

This example shows that Nabokov’s fairly literal approach to self-translation can result in the creation of a new prosodic frame in the target text, one that is not necessarily devoid of poetic expressivity and aesthetic features and can adapt to the target language’s poetic tradition and balance between fidelity to the original and the creation of a new formal frame. Similarly, in the translation of “Hotel Room,” a poem that was originally written in iambic tetrameters with an enclosed rhyme scheme, free verse is combined with variable line-length and a series of phonic effects that generate a new rhythm in the target text:

Не то кровать, не то скамья.
Урюмо-желтые обои.
Два стула. Зеркало кривое.
Мы входим — я и тень моя.

Окно со звоном открываем:
спадает отблеск до земли.
Ночь бездыханна. Псы вдали
тишь рассекают пестрым лаем.

Я замираю у окна,
и в черной чаше небосвода,
как золотая капля меда,
сверкает сладостно луна. (*PP*, 24)

Not quite a bed, not quite a bench.
Wallpaper: a grim yellow.
A pair of chairs. A squinty looking-glass.
We enter - my shadow and I.

We open with a vibrant sound the window:
the light’s reflection slides down to the ground.
The night is breathless. Distant dogs
With varied barks fracture the stillness.

Stirless, I stand there at the window,
and in the black bowl of the sky
Glow like a golden drop of honey
the mellow moon. (*PP*, 25)

¹⁴⁷ Richard Dillard (2000) found in this poem a possible trace of Nabokov’s religious sentiment: while Jesus was accused of breaking the Shabbath law by creating something on a holy day, the miracle of the sparrows coming alive breaks the law of nature in response. However, in Nabokov’s poem, the more important thing is probably the image of a child playing with clay.

In the typescript of *Poems and Problems*, the poem's translation had come with a brief comment that was crossed out and ultimately moved, with minor omissions, to the bibliography section: "Sebastopol, Hotel Metropole, Room 7, March 26 (= April 8) 1919 (a few days before leaving Russia for ever)" (*PP* typescript, 10). One may indeed glimpse through the calm night of these verses a sensation of approaching change and separation; but, for now, everything around the speaker is motionless and "stirless." In his analysis of the English version of this poem, Paul Morris pointed out its "haiku-like" simplicity that derives from "the contrast between the shabby, worldly setting of the hotel room and the strikingly inviting beauty of the moon and nighttime sky viewed from an open window" (2010: 142). The silent beauty of the night is conveyed in the translation, where free verse combines with sound repetition and inner rhyming, and a strong connection is drawn between l. 8, which ends on the word "stillness" and l. 9, that begins with "Stirless."

The closing lines take advantage of free verse to place emphasis on the poem's final image: by isolating the subject placed at the end of the sentence, in a very short and indented closing line, the inversion of the regular word order and alliteration zoom in on the image of the "mellow moon" — a technique similar to that of in "An Unfinished Draft" where the keyword "honor" is isolated in a short closing line. More examples of this technique can be found in the collection. For instance, in the poem "L'Inconnue de la Seine," the closing line's brief (and indented) question disrupts the three-foot pattern of the previous lines and reinforces the feeling of dissolution and suspension: "he, like me, on the edge of his bed, / in a black world long empty sits staring / at a white mask?" (*PP*, 85). Another example can be found in the English version of "Тихий шум," another poem originally written in iambic tetrameters and translated in free verse with an iambic undersong. Its English version ends on a short line with a "d" alliteration ("her deathless deep," *PP*, 61), with an effect similar to that of the closing words of "Hotel Room."

If regular iambic tetrameters are rare in Nabokov's self-translations, iambic pentameters represent the predominant regular iambic measure in the translations made

for *Poems and Problems*. Three out of five poems (“Provence,” “The Muse,” and “The Madman”), originally composed in iambic pentameters, are structured according to the same metrical scheme in English. Moreover, the only two poems composed in Russian iambic hexameters (“К свободе” and “Еще безмолвствую”) are shortened to pentameters in English. Compare, for instance the opening lines of the poem “К Свободе” (1917) with its English version, “To Liberty”:

Ты медленно бредешь по улицам бессонным;
на горестном челе нет прежнего луча,
зовущего к любви и высям озаренным.
В одной руке дрожит потухшая свеча.
(*PP*, 20)

Slowly you wander through the sleepless streets
From your sad brow gone is the former ray,
that called us toward love and shining heights.
Your trembling hand holds an extinguished taper.
(*PP*, 21)

The Russian iambic hexameters of the first type (with four accents) establish a rather slow and solemn pace with an alternating feminine and masculine rhyming and a traditional caesura after the third foot. While this meter has a rich tradition in Russian poetry, in English literature it never enjoyed particular popularity. Perhaps this explains why Nabokov transformed the target text’s meter into a more neutral (an, in English poetry, more wide-spread) blank verse, perhaps aided by the natural tendency to shorten the target text’s poetic measure in the Russian/English language pair.

The poems written in Nabokov’s “favorite anapaests” (*PP*, 111) are more likely to preserve this meter in translation. The long and complex poem “Слава” contains some of the most famous verses in Nabokov’s poetic canon; it is quoted by Véra Nabokova in her remarks on the theme of the otherworld (*Stikhi*, 1979: 3). In these rhythmic lines, the poet puts into words the music of anapaestic tetrameters as if to conceal from his reader the secret of poetic creation:

Это тайна та-та, та-та-та-та, та-та,
а точнее сказать я не вправе.
Оттого так смешна мне пустая мечта
о читателе, теле и славе. (*PP*, 110)

That main secret tra-tá-ta tra-tá-ta tra-tá—
and I must not be overexplicit;
this is why I find laughable the empty dream
about readers, and body, and glory. (*PP*, 111)

One may connect this secret with the mysterious revelation of “What Happened Overnight,” in particular, with the closing lines that deny the existence of a “bed” and a “body.” The ending of this 1942 poem, translated under the title “Fame,” leaves the reader on a dissolving anapaestic echo of “я увидел, как в зеркале, мир и себя / и другое, другое, другое,” also fully reproduced in English as “I saw mirrored, besides my own self and the world / something else, something else, something else” (*PP*, 112–13).

Some shorter poems originally written in anapaests were rendered in English with a looser rhythm. Such is the case of “Мы с тобою так верили,” that has only occasional anapaestic lines (such as the opening, “We so firmly believed in the linkage of life,” *PP*, 89), but also “L’Inconnue de la Seine” and “На закате,” both written in anapaestic trimeters and translated without a rigid metrical scheme. Nevertheless, “At Sunset” contains three regular anapaestic trimeters (ll. 4, 5 and 10), which, in a short poem of ten lines, contribute significantly to establishing the poem’s anapaestic pace.

The 1939 “Поэты” (*PP*, 92-94) consists of thirty-six lines, each starting with an iambic foot, followed by three anapaests. In the translation, however, a significant presence of iambic substitutions alters the target text’s rhythm, as in l. 10: “we would live, it seemed, and our books would grow,” *ibid.*).

The poem “К России” (1939) is characterized by a regular anapaestic meter with an alternating feminine and masculine rhyme scheme. Its translation seeks to imitate the rhythm of the original, and yet, again, contains many iambic substitutions:

Отвяжись — я тебя умоляю!
Вечер страшен, гул жизни затих.
Я беспомощен. Я умираю
от слепых наплываний твоих.

Тот, кто вольно отчизну покинул,
волен выть на вершинах о ней,
но теперь я спустился в долину,
и теперь приближаться не смей.

Навсегда я готов затаиться
и без имени жить. Я готов,
чтоб с тобой и во снах не сходиться,
отказаться от всяческих снов;

обескровить себя, искалечить,
не касаться любимейших книг,
променять на любое наречье
все, что есть у меня, — мой язык.

Но зато, о Россия, сквозь слезы,
сквозь траву двух несмежных могил,
сквозь дрожащие пятна березы,
сквозь все то, чем я смолоду жил,

дорогими слепыми глазами
не смотри на меня, пожалей,
не ищи в этой угольной яме,
не нащупывай жизни моей!

Ибо годы прошли и столетья,
и за горе, за муку, за стыд, —
поздно, поздно! — никто не ответит,
и душа никому не простит. (*PP*, 96-98)

Will you leave me alone? I implore you!
Dusk is ghastly. Life's noises subside.
I am helpless. And I am dying
Of the blind touch of your whelming tide.

He who freely abandons his country
on the heights to bewail it is free.
But now I am down in the valley
and now do not come close to me.

I'm prepared to lie hidden forever
and to live without name. I'm prepared,
lest we only in dreams come together,
all conceivable dreams to forswear;

to be drained of my blood, to be crippled,
to have done with the books I most love,
for the first available idiom
to exchange all I have: my own tongue.

But for that, through the tears, oh, Russia,
through the grass of two far-parted tombs,
through the birch tree's tremulous macules,
through all that sustained me since youth,

with your blind eyes, your dear eyes, cease looking
at me, oh, pity my soul,
do not rummage around in the coalpit,
do not grope for my life in this hole

because years have gone by and centuries,
and for sufferings, sorrow, and shame,
too late—there is no one to pardon
and no one to carry the blame. (*PP*, 97-99)

The translation is accompanied by a note where Nabokov discloses the importance of meter in this text: after a brief description of the “streamlined, rapid mechanism” of the original, he confesses that here,

[i]t was impossible to combine lilt and literality, except in some passages (only the third stanza gives a close imitation of the poem's form); and since the impetus of the original redeems its verbal vagueness, my faithful but bumpy version is not the success that a prosy cab might have been. (*PP*, 99)

This poem can be seen as exemplifying what Roman Jakobson defined the “emotional coloring” of poetic meter, i.e. the tendency to associate, in a poetic tradition, semantic meaning with a certain measure (1979: 465). The poem's content and the story of its creation match its simple and yet powerful metrical construction. This text was composed

in September 1939 as a reaction to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and represents the last time that Nabokov addressed his homeland directly in a poem (SK, 82). Both in Russian and English poetry, anapaestic rhythm generally establishes an energetic steady pace. As Jiří Levý explains, “[i]n English poetry, anapaestic and dactylic verse is, on average, faster and livelier than iambic and trochaic. These metres are therefore popular in combative (Walter Scott’s ‘Marmion’), dynamic (Robert Browning’s ‘How They Brought the Good News’) and jocular or ironic poetry” (2011: 228).

The overall maintenance of anapaestic meter in this translation could therefore be seen as an attempt to convey the emotional “impetus” of the original, a poem that represents a passionate and somewhat angry good-bye to the speaker’s homeland. A more placid and neutral meter such as iambic tetrameter would probably have not matched the poet’s intention as efficiently as these steady anapaests. However, the target text is characterized by an increased presence of disyllabic feet, which slightly disrupt and decelerate the poem’s rhythm, not devoid of “bumpy” passages (see, for instance, the sixth stanza, where an enjambment is followed by two iambs: “with your blind eyes, your dear eyes, cease looking / at me, oh, pity my soul”).

Even if the English poem does not distance itself from the Russian version in terms of meaning, some light changes introduced for the sake of meter can be observed, such as small additions and shifts. For example, the anaphoric repetition of the word “eyes” in the opening line of st. 6, is absent in the Russian text. Moreover, in the following line one may notice the appearance of the words “my soul,” which has probably been moved up from the poem’s final lines, where “поздно, поздно! — никто не ответит, / и душа никому не простит” was paraphrased as “too late—there is no one to pardon / and no one to carry the blame” (with loss of the exclamatory anaphoric repetition).

The Russian section of *Poems and Problems* includes texts that alternate different measures or meters in the same composition. As seen above, the poem “Мать,” which alternates iambic hexameters with tetrameters, was translated mostly in free verse. Elsewhere, the regular alternation of different measures was maintained in English, albeit in an altered form. For example, the 1944 short poem “Каким бы полотном” (translated under the title “No Matter How”) displays a dynamic rhythm, alternating iambic hexameters with a pentameter and a tetrameter in the first stanza, and two tetrameters in its second quatrain:

Каким бы полотном батальным ни являлась
советская сусальнейшая Русь,
какой бы жалостью душа ни наполнялась,
не поклонюсь, не примирюсь

со всею мерзостью, жестокостью и скукой
немого рабства — нет, о, нет,
еще я духом жив, еще не сыт разлукой,
увольте, я еще поэт. (*PP*, 126)

No matter how the Soviet tinsel glitters
upon the canvas of a battle piece;
no matter how the soul dissolves in pity,
I will not bend, I will not cease

loathing the filth, brutality, and boredom
of silent servitude. No, no, I shout,
my spirit is still quick, still exile-hungry,
I'm still a poet, count me out! (*PP*, 127)

As Nabokov recalled, this text was born as a small poetic improvisation in answer to a Russian literary journal that “specialized in this patriotic awe” and turned to him “with a request to cooperate and received [...] the following, rather unexpected, contribution” (SK, 86). The structure of the translation mimics the Russian text, but drops the indentation in ll. 4 and 8. It displays a regular metrical scheme that is, however, different from that of the original. Each of the English poem’s stanzas is made of three iambic pentameters and a tetrameter in the closing line. The target text therefore contains only two shorter lines, contrasting with the regular iambic pentameters that precede them. These lines represent some of the poem’s key passages. The main consequence of this operation of metrical simplification and homogenization is that the English speaker’s tone appears less nervous, less emotional. Almost as if the intensity of the emotion that can accompany an improvisation had subsided for the translator, rewriting his own poem several decades later.

The poem “Вечер на пустыре,” dedicated to Nabokov’s father (as underscored by a subheading added to the translation),¹⁴⁸ stands out in the collection for its complex polymetry. Each of the poem’s four stanzas has its own meter: the text starts out with twenty-five trochaic lines (tetrameters and pentameters), and switches to iambic tetrameters from ll. 25 to l. 38. From l. 39 to l. 58 the poem follows the melody of ternary anapaests, and ends on twelve iambic lines.

In his study on Russian poetry Mikhail Gasparov explains that in polymetric poems the alternation of different measures is usually motivated by a change of theme, emotion, focal point, and, ultimately, intonation (2001: 137). Indeed, in Nabokov’s poetry the switch between different meters makes the volta-like transitions between stanzas, themes, and emotional tonality more prominent. The opening stanza of “Evening on a Vacant Lot” introduces the present moment and the speaker’s current emotional state; the trochaic pace was roughly maintained in English with some equimetric lines, but there are also passages that escape the original meter:

Вдохновенье, розовое небо,
 черный дом с одним окном
 огненным. О, это небо,
 выпитое огненным окном!
 Загородный сор пустынный,
 сорная былинка со слезой,
 череп счастья, тонкий, длинный,
 вроде черепа борзой.
 Что со мной? Себя теряю,
 растворяюсь в воздухе, в заре;
 бормочу и обмираю
 на вечернем пустыре. (*PP*, 68)

Inspiration, rosy sky,
 black house, with a single window,
 fiery. Oh, that sky
 drunk up by the fiery window!
 Trash of solitary outskirts,
 weedy little stalk with teardrop,
 skull of happiness, long, slender,
 like the skull of a borzoi.
 What’s the matter with me? Self-lost,
 melting in the air and sunset,
 muttering and almost fainting
 on the waste at eveningtime. (*PP*, 69).

After the opening lines, the translation gains in regularity with such trochaic lines as “Trash of solitary outskirts / weedy little stalk with teardrop.” The very first lines of the target text seem to have privileged another striking stylistic effect, the tautological rhyming between “небо” / “небо” and “окном” / “окном.” Due to the rarity of similar formal

¹⁴⁸ “In Memory of V.D.N.” (*PP*, 69).

devices in Nabokov’s traditionalistic poetry, these rhymes immediately capture the reader’s attention. The rest of the Russian text features imperfect but highly expressive rhymes, that, however, are lost in the rhymeless translation.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the tautological rhyme with its somewhat unsettling poetic effect is recreated in English at the expense of the opening lines’ metrical regularity.

The following paragraph leaps back to the poet’s youth, to his first exercises in versification, described as simple but volatile. Here, iambic tetrameters become a slightly discernible iambic undersong in English, with highly variable line-length. The poem’s closing lines will return to iambs in Russian, rendered as free verse in English: the text ends on the sudden appearance of the poet’s dead father, against the background of an urban landscape at sunset. Here, images like the “fingerlike black stacks of a factory” and “a deformed tin can” clash with the memories of gentle northern nature depicted in anapaestic feet a few lines above:

Мигая, огненное око
 глядит сквозь черные персты
 фабричных труб на сорные цветы
 и на жестянку кривобокою.
 По пустырю в темнеющей пыли
 поджарый пес мелькает шерстью снежной.
 Должно быть, потерялся. Но вдали
 уж слышен свист настойчивый и нежный.
 И человек навстречу мне сквозь сумерки
 идет, зовет. Я узнаю
 походку бодрую твою.
 Не изменился ты с тех пор, как умер.
 (PP, 70, 72)

Blinking, a fiery eye looks,
 through the fingerlike black stacks
 of a factory, at weedy flowers
 and a deformed tin can.
 Across the vacant lot in darkening dust
 I glimpse a slender hound with snow-white coat.
 Lost, I presume. But in the distance sounds
 insistently and tenderly a whistling.
 And in the twilight toward me a man
 comes, calls. I recognize
 your energetic stride. You haven’t
 changed much since you died.
 (PP, 71, 73)

In English, the passage from a largely discernible poetic meter to free verse generates an evocative and emphatic effect that matches the importance of the poem’s ending. Its haunting atmosphere is recreated by combining free verse with soundplay and inner

¹⁴⁹ As pointed out by Smith, Nabokov’s traditionalist tendency to use exact rhymes in Russian gives a special prominence to the few cases when he uses less traditional rhymes, such as in the unusual opening lines of “Вечер на пустыре,” but also in such approximate rhymes as “одиночество” / “ночи” in ll. 39-41 (Smith 1991: 294; see also Scherr 1995: 613 for more information about rhyming in the Russian version of the poem).

rhyming, as, for instance in the echo between the words “hound” and “sound,” or in the rhyme between the words “stride” and “died” that connects the poem’s closing lines. The intensity of this emotional rhyme is strengthened thanks to the introduction of an enjambment (“you haven’t / changed”). Hence, the expressive tools provided by the use of free verse are skillfully employed by the translator to create a new version of the poem’s ending that reflects and complements the original version.

Compared to embedded poetry, in *Poems and Problems* the approach to meter appears more various and flexible. Each poem is unique, with its own delicate balance of form and meaning. In each poem, but also in each language, meter has a different way of interacting with the poem’s imagery and its message. A quick comparison with the truly literal “cribs” contained in the Italian edition of Nabokov’s poems confirms that the English self-translations involve attention to prosody and rhythm, so long as it does not generate omissions in the poem’s content.

The analysis conducted in this section has already involved the issue of soundplay, especially in poems translated in free verse or with a variable meter, where the chains of sound repetitions and inner rhymes become important elements of the target text’s rhythm. The following section examines the handling of other euphonic aspects of the Russian poems in Nabokov’s self-translations.

4.2.2 Euphony, Rhyme, Alliteration

In the introduction to *Poems and Problems*, Nabokov claims that rhyme “or its shadow” was the only compromise he had accepted in “faithfully englishing” his own verse (*PP*, 15). This “shadow” of rhyme manifests itself in the English versions through different strategies. These include, among others, a partial recreation of rhyme that follows only a fraction of the Russian scheme, and the placement of alliterative words in rhyming

positions. Moreover, rhyme often combines with other sound devices, such as alliteration, onomatopoeia and internal rhyming.

Of thirty-nine texts that make up the Russian section of the collection, only the translation of “Прованс” (1923) contains a full replica of the original rhyme scheme and meter:

Слоняюсь переулками без цели,
прислушиваюсь к древним временам:
при Цезаре цикады те же пели,
и то же солнце стлалось по стенам.

Поет платан, и ствол в пятнистом блеске;
поет лавчонка; можно отстранить
легко звенящий бисер занавески:
поет портной, вытягивая нить.

И женщина у круглого фонтана
поет, полощет синее белье,
и пятнами ложится тень платана
на камни, на корзину, на нее.

Как хорошо в звенящем мире этом
скользя плечом вдоль меловых оград,
быть русским заблудившимся поэтом
среди лепета латинского цикад! (PP, 26)

I wander aimlessly from lane to lane,
bending a careful ear to ancient times:
the same cicadas sang in Ceaser’s reign,
upon the walls the same sun clings and climbs.

The plane tree sings: with light its trunk is pied;
the little shop sings: delicately tings
the bead-stringed curtain that you push aside-
and, pulling on his thread the tailor sings.

And at a fountain with a rounded rim,
rinsing blue linen, sings a village girl,
and mottle shadows of the plane tree swim
over the stone, the wickerwork, and her.

What bliss it is, in this world full of song,
to brush against the chalk of walls, what bliss
to be a Russian poet lost among
cicadas trilling with a Latin lisp! (PP, 27)

In the 1979 Ardis collection, this text was published as the second part of a longer poem under the same title.¹⁵⁰ Its composition is the result of Nabokov’s 1923 summer stay in southern France,¹⁵¹ also reflected in the novel *Glory*,¹⁵² where the descriptions of French provincial life reverberate with Nabokov’s verses:

¹⁵⁰ The first part: “Как жадно, затая дыханье, / склоня колена и плеча, / напьюсь я хладного сверканья / из придорожного ключа. / И, запыленный и счастливый, / лениво развяжу в тени / евангелической оливы / сандалий узкие ремни. / Под той оливой, при дороге, бродячей радуясь судьбе, / без удивленья, без тревоги, / быть может, вспомню о тебе. / И, пеньем дум моих влекома, в лазури лиловой дня, / в знакомом платье незнакома, пройдешь ты, не узнав меня” (How greedily, holding my breath, / bowing my knees and shoulders / I will drink the cold sparkles / from the roadside spring. / And, dusty and happy, / I will untie in the shade / of an evangelical olive / my sandals’ narrow straps. / Under that olive tree, on the roadside, rejoicing in my wandering fate, / without surprise, without agitation, / perhaps I will remember you. / And, drawn to me by my singing thoughts, in the day’s lilac azure / in a familiar dress, unfamiliar, you will walk by without recognizing me, *Stikhi*, 110).

¹⁵¹ The stay lasted from May to August 1923. According to Brian Boyd’s chapter devoted to Nabokov’s stay in France, these months helped him retrieve a certain peace of mind after the engagement with Svetlana Sievert was called off: “The farm lay on flat, burgundy and milk-

The town seemed drawn in bright chalks and was sharply divided into light and shadow; it boasted numerous pastry shops. Presently the crowded houses dropped away, and the paved road between its double row of huge plane trees with flesh-colored patterns on their green trunks went flowing past vineyards. The rare people he met, such as stone breakers, schoolchildren, and country wives in black straw hats, ate him up with their eyes. [...] The sun blazed fiercely, cicadas trilled, the hot spicy smells made him dizzy [...]. (*Glory*, 160)

Not only does the episode by the stream recall the first part of “Провамс,” as published in the Ardis collection, but also the speaker’s emotional state in the fragment printed independently in *Poems and Problems*:

Suddenly he heard the cool sound of running water. No better music could exist in the world! [...] Martin got down on his knees, quenched his thirst, and heaved a deep sigh. [...] Thus, sitting on a rock and listening to the brook’s gurgling, Martin enjoyed his fill of viatic freedom from all concerns: he was a wanderer, alone and lost in a marvelous world, completely indifferent toward him, in which butterflies danced, lizards darted, and leaves glistened—the same way as they glisten in a Russian or African wood. (*ibid.*)

The stay in southern France appears to have stirred the author’s senses. The descriptions of local nature are soaked in sunlight and accompanied with intense olfactory and auditory impressions. Listening “to the brook’s gurgling,” Martin ponders on his condition as an exile, a stranger amidst foreign people. He feels happily lost in an alien natural world, where trees and insects are so different from the northern woods of his homeland, and yet, despite everything, somewhat connected to them.

In both parts of “Провамс,” the Russian poet’s wanderings through the French countryside signal his awareness of the ancient history of these places, with reminiscences of Roman and biblical times. The condition of the speaker becomes a-temporal and a-spatial: it is the sensory perception of the beauty of nature that allows the poet to transcend time and space. In particular, the fragment published in *Poems and Problems*

chocolate colored soil, bordered on one side by a low bush-clad ridge and on the other close to the fruit-market town of Solliès- Pont, fifteen kilometers from Toulon. Nabokov loved the farm day's straightforward routine: rise at six to work in the fields alongside the other laborers, all young Italians, drink cheap wine with them at midday, swim naked in the river skirting the farm, sunbathe, and return to work, stripped to the waist” (Boyd 1990: 39).

¹⁵² 1971 translation of the Russian 1932 *Podvig*

insists on the auditory. The sounds of the village and the nature around it are conveyed with the help of such devices as onomatopoeia, sound repetitions, and parallelisms. Both in Russian and English, the frame of regular iambic pentameters contains rather simple syntactic constructions characterized by the recurrence of verbs pertaining to the semantic field of sound and hearing.

The rhyme scheme alternating feminine and masculine endings was maintained in English with a few imperfect rhymes in the closing stanza (“bliss”/“lisp” and “girl”/“her”). In English, the predominance of monosyllabic and often onomatopoeic verbs, also placed in rhyming positions, endows the poem with a steady resonant rhythm (“sing,” “cling,” “climb,” “ting,” “swim” ...). Alternating rhyme, unlike enclosed rhyme, is usually associated with dynamism, and creates continuity between a poem’s stanzas. In Nabokov’s translation, the rhyme scheme becomes part of a complex chain of sound repetitions that replicate the vibrating summer atmosphere of the Russian poem. For instance, the verb “sings,” reiterated three times throughout st. 2, is at the core of a rich pattern of consonances: the word resonates in the onomatopoeic rhyme with “tings,” but also with the words “stringed,” anticipated by “clings” in the first stanza’s last line; it is taken up in st. 3 with “rinsing blue linen, sings.”

The Russian poem is rich in alliterations that run throughout the text, some creating continuity between the poem’s stanzas. For example, the first stanza opens with a repetition of the “ts” consonant in “цели,” “Цезаре,” “цикады,” “солнце,” which may onomatopoeically recall the sound made by cicadas, then turns to the “st” consonant pair in “стлалось” and “стенам,” continuing in the following stanza’s “ствол,” “пятнистом,” “отстранить.” In English, several sound repetitions are newly introduced to the target text, as, in the opening quatrain, a recurrent “l” in “aimlessly,” “lane to lane,” “careful,” “walls,” “clings and climbs.” An “s” alliteration in l. 3 harks back to the Russian “ts” — “same cicadas sang in Ceaser’s reign”; it is taken up in the following line’s “same sun” (here it matches the “s” sound of the Russian “солнце стлалось”).

An even stronger sound parallelism is present at the poem's ending, where "лепет латинский цикад" becomes "cicadas trilling with a Latin lisp." The line is a non-literal rendition that favors alliteration and semantic accretion over fidelity to original meaning. In particular, the noun "lisp" helps to mimic the sound of the Russian poem, but also echoes the previous line's "lost," thus establishing an imperfect but semantically interesting rhyme with the key word "bliss." Repeated in the translation, "what bliss" is more intense than the Russian "как хорошо," and may give rise to the suspicion that this stranded bliss may be embittered with a note of melancholy. Finally, the English poem's ending on the "l" sound matches its opening alliteration ("lane to lane"), thus enriching the text with a feeling of completeness and symmetry.

In other translations, Nabokov creates *new* pairs of rhyming words that do not follow the pattern of the source text. For instance, the English version of the first poem of the collection, "Дождь пролетел," contains lines of this type. Composed in 1917, the Russian version alternates dactylic tetrameters with amphibrachic trimeters and displays an alternating rhyme scheme with masculine and feminine endings. It is translated in free verse with a rather irregular undersong of iambs and anapaests:

Дождь пролетел и сгорел на лету.
Иду по румяной дорожке.
Иволги свищут, рябины в цвету,
белеют на ивах сережки.

Воздух живителен, влажен, душист.
Как жимолость благоухает!
Кончиком вниз наклоняется лист
и с кончика жемчуг роняет. (*PP*, 18)

The rain has flown and burnt up in flight.
I tread the red sand of a path.
Golden orioles whistle, the rowan is in bloom,
the catkins on sallows are white.

The air is refreshing, humid and sweet.
How good the caprifole smells!
Downward a leaf inclines its tip
and drops from its tip a pearl. (*PP*, 19)

The translation strikes a balance between euphony and semantic precision (the latter is especially evident in the translation of flora and fauna terms). Meter and rhyme, however, are not replicated but recreated anew in English. The pace is set with an iambic tendency, aided by a couple of lines that follow the same (or a very similar) pattern of feet. In particular, ll. 2 and 4, rhymed in Russian, do not rhyme in English, but rather share a

rhythmic parallelism: both are made of an iamb followed by two anapaests “I tread the red sand of a path” / “the catkins on sallows are white.” In such a short text, this parallelism has an impact on its overall rhythm. Moreover, the rhyme between ll. 1 and 4 (“flight” / “white”), in addition to some sound repetitions (such as “flown” – “flight”; “tread” – “read” – “sand”) creates a rhythmic cohesion in the opening quatrain.

The second stanza contains what Nabokov would have called a shadow of rhyme; it follows the alternating Russian scheme (“sweet”/ “tip”), but also has alliterations in rhyming positions of the aabb scheme (“sweet”/“smells”; “tip” / “tip” “pearl”).

This translation does not seek to imitate the sound of the original; instead, it seeks a new aesthetic balance in the target language to complement the poem’s imagery. The target text acquires rhythmic regularity thanks to the predominant use of monosyllabic words (whereas in the Russian poem there are many polysyllabic words, especially in the second stanza, e. g., “благоухает,” “наклоняется”). In the translation, some lines (ll. 1, 2, and 8) are made entirely of monosyllables, establishing a somewhat steadier rhythm than the Russian melodic dactyls and amphibrachs. Even if this short poetic text does not tell a story, the numerous verbs reflect its dynamism: everything around the poet feels alive, even the air is “живителен.” This fresh and lively atmosphere of early spring represents the poet’s youth, or, in the English version, the self-translator’s memory of it.

A poem that was translated shortly after its inception, the 1967 “С серого севера,” closes the Russian section of *Poems and Problems*. Entitled in English “From the Gray North” (the alliteration of the title inevitably lost), the poem is written in free verse in both Russian and English, except for rhyming patterns, which are different in the two versions:

С серого севера
вот пришли эти снимки.

Жизнь успела на все
погасить недоимки.
Знакомое дерево
вырастает из дымки.

Вот на Лугу шоссе.
Дом с колоннами. Оредежь.
Отовсюду почти
мне к себе до сих пор еще
удалось бы пройти.

Так, бывало, купальщикам
на приморском песке
приносится мальчиком
кое-что в кулачке.

Все, от камушка этого
с каймой фиолетовой
до стеклышка матово —
зеленоватого,
он приносит торжественно.

Вот это Батово.
Вот это Рожествено. (*PP*, 148)

From the gray North
now come these photos.

Not all its arrears
life has had time to defray.
A familiar tree reappears
out of the gray.

This is the highway to Luga.
My house with the pillars. The Oredezh.
Almost from anywhere
homeward even today
I can still find my way.

Thus, sometimes, to the bathers
on the seaside sand
a small boy will bring over
something in his clenched hand.

Everything – from a pebble
with a violet rim
to the dim greenish part of a
glass object – is festively
brought over by him.

This is Batovo.
This is Rozhestveno. (*PP*, 149)

This text was inspired by the reception of some photographs of the former Nabokov country estate, now in the Soviet Union. Its twenty-two irregular lines are divided into six stanzas, also of variable size: two distichs frame an alternating sequence of two quatrains and two quintains. The rhyme scheme is unusually complex, crossing the boundaries of each stanza, and including three rhymes that involve toponyms.

The poem is suffused with a piercing tenderness towards these very specific points on the map of Russia: it is not necessary to be familiar with Nabokov's biography to sense the speaker's affection for these distant places. In Yuri Levin's words, the toponyms resonate like an incantation in the Russian poem (Levin 1998: 328). This phonic effect is maintained and even strengthened in the English version, where, against the background of simple everyday vocabulary and brief syntactic constructions, such exotic names as "Oredezh" may surprise the anglophone reader. Even in Russian — let alone in English — matching these unusual nouns with rhyming words must have been quite a challenge.

In Russian, the river Oredezsh is imperfectly rhymed with the words “до сих пор еще.” Moreover, the river’s name reverberates with the ending of l. 5, “дерево,” which, in turn, is an imperfect but evocative rhyme for the key word “севера.” These three elements — a tree, a river, the North — suffice to evoke a Russian landscape: as Nabokov said in a 1959 interview, “my Russia is very small. A road here, a few trees there, a sky. It is a treasure chest to which one returns again and again” (*TWS*, 278). The link established by the rhyme between “Оредежь” and “до сих пор еще” brings this landscape back to life, as the speaker imagines himself wandering through these places (notice the “shch” sound taken up by the first line of the next stanza: “купальщикам”).

The poem ends on two parallel structures with two more toponyms, placed in an emphatic rhyming position at the end of each line. In Russian, these nouns participate in rich rhymes. “Батово” rhymes with “матово,” that in turn echoes with “этого,” “фиолетовой,” and “зеленоватого”; “Рождествено” rhymes movingly with “торжественно,” the boy’s “festive” act of brining over pebbles and glasses.

The translation, having given up the (probably utopian) attempt of finding an English rhyme for “Oredezsh,” has a shadow of rhyme in the closing lines: “the dim greenish part of a” reverberates with “Batovo,” while “festively” shares the central consonants (“st, “v”) with “Rozhestveno.” The latter alliteration can still be considered a translator’s luck for its parallelism with the Russian pair “торжественно” / “Рождествено.”

The Russian poem contains some regularly alternating rhymes (as, for instance, in stanzas three and four). In this respect, the English rhymes seem freer and more sporadic yet with occasional internal rhymes. For example, there is a homophonic internal rhyme in the repetition of the word “gray” (ll. 1 and 6), which first acts as an adjective, then as a noun that translates the Russian “dymka.” But “gray” also rhymes with “defray,” “today” and “my way” in stanzas three and four. Another example, in stanza 5, the rhyme between ll. 17 and 20, “rim” and “him,” that also involves an internal rhyme with “dim.” As a result, rhyme comes when the reader does not expect it: as in Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach”

(1867), it may suggest that life brings gifts and meanings but not necessarily when one expects them.

The examples analyzed so far have shown two opposite approaches to the translation of rhyme: on one hand, a full replica of the Russian text's rhyme scheme; on the other, the creation of new rhyming couples without imitating the rhyme pattern of the original poem. Another recurrent strategy consists in a partial reproduction of the original rhyme scheme in the target text. Several examples of this type can be found in the collection, including the poems "No Matter How," already analyzed above, but also "I Still Keep Mute," translated in iambic pentameters with only half of the Russian alternating rhyme scheme (ll. 2-4, and 6-8), and "Oculus," written and translated in anapaestic trimeters, where another alternating rhyme scheme is rendered only in part (ll. 2/4; 6/8; 10/12; 14/16; 18/20).

In longer poems, a heterogeneous approach to the rendition of rhyme can be observed. For example, in "The Paris Poem" Nabokov follows partly — but less consistently than in shorter texts — the alternating rhyme scheme of the Russian original:

От кочующих, праздно плутающих
уползаю — и вот привстаю,
и уже я лечу, и на тающих
рифмы нет в моем новом раю.

Потому-то я вправе по чину
к вам, бряцая, в палаты войти.
Хорошо. Понимаю причину —
но их надо, их надо спасти.

Хоть бы вы призадумались, хоть бы
согласились взглянуть. А пока
остаюсь с привидением (подпись
неразборчива: ночь, облака). (*PP*, 114)

From those wandering, those idly straying,
I now crawl away, and now rise,
and I'm flying at last—and "dissolving"
has no rhyme in my new paradise.

That is how by rank I'm entitled
with loud clangor to enter your hall.
Very well. I'm aware of the reason—
but they must be rescued all!

You at least might reflect, you at least might
condescend to glance briefly—Meanwhile
I remain your specterful (signature
illegible. Night. Cloudy sky). (*PP*, 115)

These quatrains (stanzas four, five and six) represent only a small fragment of a complex text first published in Russian in 1943. As scholars now agree, the inception of this poem dates back to 1937, the years of Nabokov's intense work on *Dar* (Leving 2011: 229). This poem shares many core themes with "Fame," including exile, the absence of an addressee in an exiled writer's work, the relationship between past and present. It is so rich

in intertextual references that Omri Ronen once compared it to Akhmatova's "Poem without a Hero" for being another finalizing summary of the Silver Age of Russian poetry (2000: 113).

This fragment exemplifies Nabokov's irregular rendition of rhyme in the target text. In stanza four, rhyme is recaptured in part: the masculine rhymes are present, but only a shadow of the feminine rhymes remains. Feminine rhymes are abandoned in the following stanza (only feminine endings remain), which only displays a masculine rhyme between "hall" and "all," mirroring the Russian text. The third stanza gives up traditional rhyme altogether, but plays with sound repetitions and internal rhyming: the anaphoric verb "might" rhymes internally with "night," reverberating also with the [ai] diphthong of "meanwhile" and "sky."

In other passages of this long poem, rhyme seems to dissolve completely, and even anapaestic meter fades away. In the following fragment an intricate soundplay replaces the rhythm of the target text:

Посмотрев на часы и сквозь час
дно и камушки мельком увидя,
он оделся и вышел. У нас
это дно называлось: Овидий
откормлен (от «Carmina»). Муть
и комки в голове после черной
стихотворной работы. Чуть-чуть
моросит, и на улице черной
без звездочки муругая муть.
Но поэмы не будет: нам некуда
с ним идти. По ночам он гулял.
Не любил он ходить к человеку,
а хорошего зверя не знал. (PP, 116)

Having looked at his watch and glimpsed
through the hour its pebble-strewn bottom,
he dressed and went out. He and I
dubbed that bottom: "Ovidius
crammed with carmina." Mist
and clods in the head after hideous
verse-making labor. A slight
drizzle outside, and above the black street
not the faintest star in the marron mist.
But there will be no poem: We've nowhere
to go. At night he would ramble.
He did not like visiting people
and did not know any nice animal. (PP, 117)

The only rhyme in this fragment is a bilingual pairing with "Ovidius"; the rhyme with this name was, however, moved from the position it previously occupied in the Russian text. The pun between "откормлен" and "Carmina" was recreated as "crammed with carmina." In the Italian edition of Nabokov's poems, this pun had been sacrificed (along with rhyme and meter), but a note explains its meaning: "Ovidius means here any poet.

The pun is built on the coincidence between the Russian words *korm* (food), *otkormlen* (well-fed, fat) and Ovidius' *Carmina*. The idea that the poet has sufficiently practiced his daily poetic thought is implicit" (*Poesie*, 72).

The examples analyzed so far suggest that Nabokov's introductory commitment to literalism in the translation of his own poems should not be viewed as absolute. His attempt to find a rhyming word for "Ovidius" must have been a challenge that, in the end, required a slight semantic shift. Indeed, "hideous" is a less metaphoric way of describing the poet's labor than "чёрный." Rather than a dreadful state of mind, the Russian adjective describes a gloomy mood. Its etymology, semantically related to the word "черновик," may also suggest that the poet was working hard on a draft.

In Russian, this fragment contains a tautological rhyme that reiterates the words "муть" and "чёрный," but switches their attribution from the poet's mind to the weather outside. In English, this effect is lost, and only the repetition of "mist" was maintained in the emphatic position at the line's end.

One may notice that "mist" is not the most obvious rendition of "муть" (in other poems such as "For Happiness the Lover Cannot Sleep" [l. 6] or "The Poets" [l. 27]) Nabokov used "mist" to translate the more general noun "туман"). The Russian word "муть" comes from the semantic field of liquids, where it is used to describe muddiness, but it also conveys a more general idea of hazy darkness.¹⁵³ Its translation as "mist" works especially well on the level of sound, for it mimics the alliteration contained in the Russian poem: the unusual semantic pair "муругая муть" becomes in English a "marron mist." Here the alliteration stands out as the translator's priority. The Russian word "муругий" describes a brownish tint that is normally applied to dogs and probably hints at the "nice

¹⁵³ In Dal's dictionary, "муть" can be found in the entry on the verb "мутить," i.e. "Мутить, мутнуть, мучивать (см. также мучить) жидкое, лишать чистоты и сквознины, делать что мутным, взмутить и возмущать; взбалтывать осадок в жидкости"; the noun is defined as "нечистая, грязная жижа; тусклое стекло, туманный воздух, смутность в мыслях и пр."

animal” mentioned a few lines below.¹⁵⁴ In English, this semantic connection was lost (the French word “marron” is related to chestnuts), but the translation imitates the original text both from the viewpoint of sound and in the choice of an uncommon synonym of “brown.”

It seems that Nabokov’s semantic choices were partly driven by an attempt to mimic the alliteration of the original text – a phenomenon that, had it been isolated, could have been dismissed as random coincidence. However, the impact of sound on the process of semantic selection, already observed in the translation of poetry in *Dar* and *Lolita*, is not uncommon in *Poems and Problems*.

Some examples of *imitative alliteration* already emerged from the previous examples, including the poems “On Rulers” and “Provence,” where the closing line “cicadas trilling with a Latin lisp” is a non-literal but euphonic translation of “среди лепета латинского цикад.” This recreation of the “l” alliteration in “Latin lisp” required the addition of another word, “trilling,” that both reinforces the repetition of the liquid consonant and intensifies the onomatopoeic dimension of the poem.

In “The Paris Poem” there is another example of imitative phonemic translation that, again, involves the noun “mist.” In the Russian text, the word “мутъ” was paired with its cognate “омутъ,” indicating a deep pool:

А вверху — там неважные вещи.
Без конца. Без конца. Только муть.
Мертвый в омуте месяц мерещится.
Неужели я тоже? Забудь. (*PP*, 120)

Overhead—matters there are less pretty.
Without end. Without end. Just a mist.
A dead moon phantasmed in its millpool.
Can it be that I too—? Dismissed. (*PP*, 121)

The English version loses the inner rhyming between “мутъ” and “омутъ,” but mimics the “m” alliteration that resonates in the third line of this fragment (“мутъ,” “мертвый,”

¹⁵⁴ The bizarre use of this adjective may have been inspired by Andrey Bely. The word is present in 19th century Russian literature in its traditional “canine” semantic context. In Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, for instance, it is included in a very Gogolian list of Nozdryov’s dogs. Bely, however, took this word a step further in both his prose and poetry: for instance in the 1921 poem “Leto” he used it to describe a poisonous mushroom: “Над пересушенным листом / И над муругим мухомором...” (“Above an overdried leaf / and a brown toadstool,” Bely 2006: 195).

“омуте месяц мерещится”). By rendering “омут” as “millpool,” and placing the word at the line’s end, the translator strengthens the recurrence of “m” in the target text, in line with “mist,” “moon,” and “phantasmed” (but also “dismissed,” which rhymes with “mist”). A synonym of millpond, millpool denotes an artificial pool of calm water, as in the saying “as calm as a millpond,” that partly reminds one of the Russian “в тихом омуте черти водятся.”¹⁵⁵ The image of a moon “phantasmed” in a millpond is, however, more tranquil than the Russian “мертвый в омуте месяц”: “омут” is, too, by definition a calm pool, but its waters are natural, deep, and often unclear (“мутные”), and, as such, suggest the likelihood of hidden danger. This atmosphere is in tune with the poem’s rendering of the sense of dirt and darkness in the description of Paris at night.

Another instance of imitative approach to the translation of alliteration can be found in the poem “The Madman,” the English version of the Russian 1933 “Безумец,” whose ll. 17-20 read as follows:

Когда луну я балую балладой,
волнуются деревья за оградой,
вне очереди торопясь попасть
в мои стихи. (PP, 74)

When I with balladry blandish the moon
the trees beyond the gate grow agitated
as they endeavor out of turn to get
into my verse. (PP, 75)

This rather comical passage of the madman’s soliloquy, written and translated in iambic pentameters, depicts an artistic, but ultimately *poshlyi*, dialogue between the poet and some anthropomorphized natural elements. The poet is engaged in the act of composing verses to the moon, but he feels as if the trees — as they hear his “balladry” — grew impatient to enter his verses.

The collocation “balladry blandish” betrays the translator’s effort to mimic the musical and almost onomatopoeic effect of the original text, where a very similar consonance is present in “балую балладой.” This is achieved by means of a non-literal semantic choice and a shift in the neutral word order. The choice of “blandish” over other

¹⁵⁵ Literally, in a quiet pool devils live. The closest English version may be “still waters run deep.”

possible synonyms does not alter the denotations of these lines, and yet it generates a subtle difference in connotation. Both versions of the poem betray the speaker's arrogance, but in English the madman appears, if possible, even haughtier. This is due to the idea of flattery contained in the verb "blandish," which somewhat belittles the recipient of the madman's "ballad." Ultimately, in the English poem the comical effect of the madman's soliloquy increases.

Nabokov's poetry shares with his prose a constant alertness of senses: a rich presence of lights, colors, sounds, smells enlivens many texts of *Poems and Problems*. In particular, in several compositions the auditory dimension involves onomatopoeic words, a rhetorical figure that blurs the boundaries between signifier and signified. As observed by Lévy, "[t]he sounds of a language acquire actual 'meaning' when some sound occurring in nature is imitated [...]. If elements of such onomatopoeic words are repeated in verse, their meaning is recalled, and they become carriers of meaning" (1991: 269). Each language has, of course, its own ways of conveying the sounds of nature or any other auditory impression. Ultimately, onomatopoeia is a poetic device that is strictly related to the phonetics of the source language.

The analysis of "Provence" has already shown that Nabokov could recreate the vivid atmosphere of a summer day with the use of some English onomatopoeic words. More examples are scattered throughout the collection, but two texts in particular, "Тихий шум" and "Снег," are characterized by a richly expressive relationship between onomatopoeia and the poems' central images. The latter poem, translated in English under the title "Snow," is a nostalgic and apparently simple text where sound plays a central role. If in "Provence" the sound of the cicadas built a bridge across different eras, here the poet's memory holds on to a specific sound before starting a journey towards Russia and his childhood:

О, этот звук! По снегу —
скрип, скрип, скрип —
в валенках кто-то идет.

Толстый крученный лед
остриями вниз с крыши повис.
Снег скрипуч и блестящ.
(О, этот звук!)

Салазки сзади не тащатся —
сами бегут, в пятки бьют.

Сяду и съеду
по крутому, по ровному:
валенки врозь,
держусь за веревочку.

Отходя ко сну,
всякий раз думаю:
может быть, удосужится
меня посетить
тепло одетое, неуклюжее
детство мое. (PP, 62)

Oh, that sound! Across snow—
creak, creak, creak:
somebody walking in long boots of felt.

Stout, spirally twisted ice,
sharp points inverted, hangs from the eaves.
The snow is crumpy and shiny.
(Oh, that sound!)

My hand sled behind me, far from dragging,
seems to run by itself: it knocks at my heels.

I settle upon it and coast
down the steep, down the smooth:
felt boots straddled,
I hold on to the string.

Whenever I'm falling asleep,
I cannot help think:
Maybe you will find a moment
to visit me,
my warmly muffled up, clumsy
childhood. (PP, 63)

Both texts are composed in free verse with variable line-length. In his introduction to Nabokov's *Selected Poems* (2012), Thomas Karshan points to the role of sound in this poetic evocation of a childhood memory.¹⁵⁶ However, in drawing the inevitable connection between this poem and Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's "*Stikhi*," Karshan asserts that they both "can easily come across as immature and even mawkish," but "by their studied unsophistication they are a defiant actualization of the naïf, that aesthetic ideal of wholeness untroubled by the complex fluttering of the external world" (2012: ix). Yet Grigory Utgof, who analyzes the Russian versions of Nabokov's poems, points out the differences between the texts written for Fyodor and "Снег." In particular, he draws a parallel with Fyodor's "Влезть на помост облитый блеском..." and notes that the poem composed for the protagonist of *Dar* betrays an intentional design. This design is expressed through an imitative style crafted purposefully for a fictional young poet. Nabokov's "own" text, on the other hand, is profoundly personal. In Utgof's view, free verse

¹⁵⁶ "The sound inspires the Proustian memory of a childhood sled on which he can coast back through the lost years to revisit "my warmly muffled up, clumsy / childhood" (Karshan 2012: ix).

provides this poem with an a-temporal and non-spatial dimension for staging a private and yet relatable childhood memory.

Starting with the very first lines — the poem begins quite abruptly, almost in medias res — the speaker focuses on sound. In Russian, the steps in the snow are reproduced through the anaphoric repetition of the word “скрип” that is reminiscent of children’s basic onomatopoeic language. The apparently naïf use of this onomatopoeia is in fact highly poetic and permits, within the space of a few brief lines, to transport the speaker, and the reader along with him, into a child’s mind. Vocabulary and syntax are in tune with this: simple, fragmented, the poem appears to be following the thoughts of a child. The absence of meter in both texts supports this impression. It is the onomatopoeic second line that effects the transition from the present to the past, from Berlin to Russia. This may explain why in l. 7 the exclamation “Oh that sound!” is reiterated in brackets: the poet’s adult voice is now an interference from the future into the time and space of his own childhood.

The translation renders l. 2 with an onomatopoeic English word that sounds natural in the target language and, at the same time, mimics the sound of the original poem. In the Russian version of one of Nabokov’s most famous short stories, “Spring in Fialta” (1936), the same triple anaphoric repetition of “скрип” renders the sound of steps in the snow. Interestingly, here too the onomatopoeia participates in the evocation of a memory, the moment when Victor first met and kissed Nina in the winter of 1917:

но воспоминание только тогда приходит в действие, когда мы уже возвращаемся в освещенный дом, ступая гуськом по узкой тропе среди сумрачных сугробов с тем скрип-скрип-скрипом, который, бывало, служил единственной темой зимней неразговорчивой ночи. (*SSoch*, I: 566)

This episode combines some ominous details (a cross in the snow, the burning windows, the fall of a torch) with moments of shared happiness and leisure. The sound of the steps is particularly intense, because the “скрип” is heard in the darkness of a night, when the environment is hushed and visibility limited.

The story was translated in 1955 by Nabokov and Peter Pertzoff. In the English text, however, the onomatopoeia is rendered in a different way:

My memory revives only on the way back to the brightly symmetrical mansion toward which we tramped in single file along a narrow furrow between snowbanks, with that crunch-crunch-crunch which is the only comment that a taciturn winter night makes upon humans. (*Stories*, 417)

The translation recreates the sound device, but does not mimic the Russian text's sound. By contrast, the self-translated poem partly revives the sound of the original. Moreover, where the Russian text uses a short form of the adjective “скрипучий,” that derives from the noun “скрип,” the English poem expands the poem's vocabulary by the adjective “crumpy.” This semantic choice stays true to the onomatopoeic effect of the original, while enriching the sensory dimension of the target text, where “crumpy” conveys a feeling of friable freshly fallen snow.

Overall, the translation retains the source text's alliterativeness, as in the insistence on “s” and “st” sounds (in Russian: “Толстый,” “остриями,” “блестящ,” echoed in English: “Stout,” “twisted,” “coast,” “steep,” “straddled,” “string”). In the absence of a traditional rhyme scheme, the Russian poem displays imperfect rhymes that may appear random, as if naturally flowing along the poem's rhythm: “идет” / “лед” “блестящ” / “тащатся,”; an emotional rhyme closes the poem: “удосужится” / “неуклюжее.”

The poem ends melancholically on a brief choriambic line (“детство мое”). No less emphatically, the English version ends on an even shorter line, made of a single word — “childhood.” However, the translation fails to reproduce the Russian imperfect rhymes, except in some echoes between the words “asleep” and “help think,” preceded by “string” in the previous stanza. An interesting difference occurs here: in English, the speaker addresses his childhood directly (“you”), as if personifying the distant memories, already concretized in this poem through the memory of a sound.

The poem “Тихий шум,” composed in iambic tetrameters with an alternating feminine rhyme scheme, is a nocturnal soliloquy devoted to an experience of contact with

the speaker's homeland. This contact is established through a series of auditory perceptions, such as the sound of the sea-waves entering the speaker's window at nighttime. The episode described in the poem is evocative of Arnold's "Dover Beach": in an attempt to peer into the future beyond the window of his hotel room, the Victorian poet heard between the waves' onomatopoeic and intimidating "grating roar" the vacillation of religious certainties. In "Soft Sound," Nabokov — also standing at night by the window of his hotel room — listens to the "sound of seawaves breathing upon land," but captures something from his past, the gentle and distant "murmuring" of Russian woods and Russian poets.

The Russian text is a remarkable example of Nabokov's ability to depict a spiritual and emotional state through words that imitate the sounds of nature: the English "sound of seawaves" is a weaker version of a highly expressive "шум моря, дышащий на сушу" (l. 6, *PP*, 59). Nevertheless, the translation at times recreates the enchanted atmosphere of the original, e.g.:

Весь день невнятен шум морской,
но вот проходит день незванный,
позванивая, как пустой
стакан на полочке стеклянной.

И вновь в бессонной тишине
открой окно свое пошире,
и с морем ты наедине
в огромном и спокойном мире.

Не моря шум — в тиши ночной
иное слышно мне гуденье:
шум тихий родины моей,
ее дыханье и биенье. (*PP*, 58)

Daylong the murmur of the sea is muted,
but the unbidden day now passes
(tinkling as does an empty
tumbler on a glass shelf);

and once again amidst the sleepless hush
open your window, wider, wider,
and with the sea you are alone
in the enormous and calm world.

Not the sea's sound... In the still night
I hear a different reverberation:
the soft sound of my native land,
her respiration and pulsation. (*PP*, 59)

The English text rises to the challenge of reproducing auditory impressions by means of evocative words like "murmur," "tinkling / tumbler," "hush." In the third quatrain, the sibilant "s" alliteration is again used to replace the hushed fricative "sh" repetition of the Russian source. This alliteration is also present in the poem's English title, "Soft Sound," a free rendition of the Russian "Тихий шум." According to Cornettone, the translation

strengthens its synaesthetic dimension by means of expansion of sensorial perceptions, as in the anthropomorphizing of the sea's murmuring. In her view, this non-literal rendition of the title creates a "continuity between discontinuous units – the adjective 'soft' being primarily attributed to palpable items and only by extension to sounds" (2019: 113-14). Yet the semantic choices made in both the title and body of "Soft Sound" suggest fidelity not only to the poem's form but to its overall sense. In particular, the vocabulary of this translation recalls a passage of Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* (Ch. 8):

Как часто по скалам Кавказа
Она Ленорой, при луне,
Со мной скакала на коне!
Как часто по брегам Тавриды
Она меня во мгле ночной
Водила слушать шум морской,
Немолчный шопот Нереиды
(Pushkin 1950, V: 167)

How often on Caucasia's crags,
Lenorelike, by the moon,
with me she'd gallop on a steed!
How often on the shores of Tauris
she in the murk of night
led me to listen the sound of the sea,
Nereid's unceasing murmur
(*EO R*, 283)

In this poetic description of inspiration, the speaker envisions his muse accompanying him on a nocturnal journey towards the "shores of Tauris" where he listens to the – literally – "noise of the sea" ("шум морской"). The waves' splashing sound is here conveyed through the mythological metaphor of the nymphs' "unceasing murmur." The semantic parallels are obvious, and it is not impossible that Nabokov's work on the translation of this fragment found its reflection in "Soft Sound," where the same vocabulary is used for a similar scenery.

In the commentary to the revised edition of *Eugene Onegin* (1975), Nabokov ponders on the translation of the Russian noun "шум," and comes to the conclusion that its most obvious English counterpart "noise" fails to render the evocativeness of the original word:

Very often, as in the case of *shum*, the obvious translation, "noise," is absurdly incapable of following the Russian word through a contextual maze where a Russian's ear can hear versatile *shum* echo all sorts of humming, murmuring, sighing sounds that the word "noise" would simply drown. (qtd. in Shvabrin 2019: 300)

In moments like this, Nabokov's theory of literal translation appears somewhat controversial. Stanislav Shvabrin even sees it as bound to remain in the world of ideas (2019: 299). "Soft Sound" may not be a literal rendition of "Тихий шум," but it certainly anticipates and describes the poem's atmosphere more faithfully than a more literal title such "silent noise." Thus, both "Soft Sound" and the fragment from *Eugene Onegin's* Chapter 8 show that in Nabokov's bilingual mind the concept of faithful translation was more complex than suggested by his apparently rigid literalist doctrine.

4.2.3 Conclusion

While numerous examples of new English alliterations can be found in the bilingual section of *Poems and Problems*, the search for imitative alliterations and onomatopoeias (what André Lefevere calls phonemic translation) marks Nabokov's translation strategy in many poems. As a result of this process, a closer and more dynamic relationship develops between source and target text.

In his 1975 book on the strategies of poetry translation, Lefevere defines phonemic translation as a translation that "attempts to reproduce the SL sound in the TL while at the same time producing an acceptable paraphrase of the sense" (24). Lefevere admits that "although this works moderately well in the translation of onomatopoeia, the overall result is clumsy and often devoid of sense altogether" (1975: 23). This, however, is not the case with Nabokov's self-translations, because his phonemic translation underscores key words or alliterative semantic pairs without distorting the clarity of the target text.

According to Alexander Ullmann (2018), translation scholars often see sound as merely "ornamental to sense" (44). However, especially in homophonic translations, sound can in fact become an important point of connection between source and target text. In Ullmann's view, translation can be seen as first and foremost a meta-translatory process, that "stages the meeting of two or more languages or semiotic systems as an ideologically

marked event” (45). This perspective appears especially suitable for self-translation, a hybrid phenomenon that encompasses original writing and translation, in which sound can become a direct bridge between two different manifestations of the poet’s authorial intention.

Instances of occasional phonemic translation already emerged in the analysis of embedded self-translated poetry (especially in *Lolita*, but also in *Dar*). Similarly, in his practice as a translator of other poets, Nabokov attended to the issue of sound. For example, in a 1941 letter sent to Edmund Wilson to accompany a translation from Pushkin’s 1830 little tragedy “The Miserly Knight,” Nabokov wrote: “This time I have tried to follow Pushkin’s rhythm as closely as possible. Even mimicking some of the sounds. And the so-called alliteratio puschkiniana” (*NWL*, 51).

To confirm the importance that Nabokov attached to alliteration and onomatopoeia when translating Pushkin, one can continue by quoting a radio talk he gave on the BBC thirteen years later, in 1954. On this occasion, Nabokov read his English version of Pushkin’s poem “Вновь я посетил” (1835):

“So old a sound – the sougning of their crests” ... Here, incidentally, to interrupt my version for an instant, I have tried to match Pushkinian alliteration – “znakómim shúmom shóroh ih vershín menyá privétstvoval ...” or in my version: “So old a sound – the sougning of their crests” (*VV*, 409).

Nabokov paused in his reading to underscore the rendering of a “sh” alliteration with a repetition of the sibilant “s.” If the 1941 letter to Wilson can be attributed to Nabokov’s pre-literalist period, marked by the essay “The Art of Translation” written the same year, in 1954 he was already working on *Eugene Onegin*, the pillar of his literal methodology explained in the 1955 essay “Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English,” where he famously asserted that “[t]he clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase” (*PT*, 71). And yet, in the radio talk he did not dismiss his interest in the recreation of expressive alliteration.

The faithful literalist never diverted Nabokov's attention away from the sound of poetry. Nevertheless, in the text of *Eugene Onegin* Nabokov did not reproduce the numerous examples of alliteration in Pushkin's text. Instead, he expressed his admiration for Pushkin's use of alliteration in the commentary. For instance, he points out a "marvelous fourfold alliteration based on the *cha* sound, which, with Pushkin, so often shimmers in passages of intense emotion" (*EO*, II: 173), before transliterating Pushkin's line from a drafted fragment so as to share its sound with the reader.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the translation of stanza XXXIII of Chapter 1 — also thoroughly analyzed in "Problems of Translation" — is complemented with a transliteration of the Russian text that highlights the "beautifully onomatopoeic alliterations" (*EO*, II: 135-36) of "Бегущим бурной чередой / С любовью лечь к ее ногам" (Pushkin 1950, V: 24).¹⁵⁸ Yet, in the translation these sound effects are sacrificed altogether.

As Shvabrin points out, at this stage of Nabokov's work, "the hidden machinery of literary artifice is more precious to him than the text's relationship with extra-textual reality" (2019: 296). Indeed, both in "Problems of Translation" and in *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov unfolds the rich literary background of the poetic image of waves caressing a woman's feet. The Anglophone reader is thus helped to understand this background thanks to a faithful translation and the commentary that supplements it.¹⁵⁹

Self-translation, however, is a different matter. Nabokov's intention to approach the translation of his own poems with a scholar's impartiality vacillates when faced with the rendition of such vibrating passages as, in "Принцу Качурину," "Воображаю щебетанье

¹⁵⁷ "Ya stàl vziràt' egò ochàmi, | S ego pechàl'nìmi rechàmi | Moi slovà zvuchàli v làd," (*EO*, II: 173) and translated as "I started looking with his eyes, / with his cheerless discourses / my words would sound in unison" (*EO*, II: 172).

¹⁵⁸ "Begùshchim bürnoy cheredòyu | S lyubov'yu lèch k eyò nogàm" translated as "Running with turbulent succession with love to lie down at her feet" (*EO*, II: 135).

¹⁵⁹ See also "Problems of Translation": "Russian readers discern in the original here two sets of beautifully onomatopoeic alliterations: *begushchim burnoy*...which renders the turbulent rush of the surf, and *s lyubóv'yu lech*—the liquid lisp of the waves dying in adoration at the lady's feet. Whomsoever the recollected feet belonged to [...] the only relevant fact here is that these waves come from Lafontaine through Bogdanovich" (PT, 82).

/ в шестидесяти девяти / верстах от города, от зданья, / где запинаясь взаперти” (*PP*, 136). Here the speaker — visiting Soviet Russia on the advice of an imaginary friend — dreams of escaping St. Petersburg on a train. Even if the poet is only daydreaming, in these lines the reader can almost hear the rustle and twittering of the countryside with the birds’ chirping. In a translation made especially for Edmund Wilson, published in 1992 by Gennady Barabtarlo, Nabokov provides a literal rendition of this passage, accompanied with a parenthetical comment that marks the onomatopoeic alliteration present in the original text:

I imagine the twittering going on at a distance of sixty nine versts from the town (Leningrad), from this house where I stutter behind locked doors (this strophe contains the promised outburst of birds, rendered by *shchebetan'e v shestidesiati deviati verstakh*). (TPK, 32)

The self-translation published in *Poems and Problems* diverges from the prosaic version prepared for Wilson:

I imagine the twitter
at a distance of fifty
miles from the city,
from the house where, shut in, I stutter. (*PP*, 137)

Here, l. 3 ends on the word “city” instead of “house,” and the distance between Leningrad and the countryside house is shorter than in the original version.¹⁶⁰ Hence, in order to recreate a trace of the “outburst of birds,” Nabokov gave up literalism, roughly domesticated the target text,¹⁶¹ and placed a sequence of words in rhyming positions that reinforce the onomatopoeic “twitter.”

Meter, rhyme, and alliteration are all ingredients of what can be termed a poem’s rhythmic structure. Yuri Lotman defined it as the cyclical repetition of different elements placed in the same position. A repetition that is dialogic by its nature, due to its ability to reveal differences between similar elements and similarities between elements that differ

¹⁶⁰ Sixty-nine versts equals to forty-five miles.

¹⁶¹ In *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov kept the Russian “verst” and converted the unit of length in the commentary. For instance, in Chapter VI, 4: “Five versts from Krasnogórie, / Lenski’s estate, there lives” is explained in the commentary as “Three miles from Fairhill” (*EO*, III: 6).

(1994: 92). Self-translation is intrinsically dialogic too. In a bilingual text, made of two parts that complement each other and interact with each other, this dialogue is not only conducted at the level of content, a poem's images and concepts. It can also be a very audible conversation between the sounds of two poems and two languages.

Nabokov's attention to sound in poetry translation, but also in prose and poetry in general, can be seen as an integral part of his literary personality. On a neurological level, it may be related to his bilingualism and *audition colorée*, which may have made his approach to language even more complex and self-conscious. According to Elizabeth K. Beajour, Nabokov's special ability to see colors in letters was always intimately linked to sound (1989: 35). This combination of vision and hearing turns into a cross-linguistic synaesthetic palette in the mind of a bilingual author. When asked about the difference in usage between his three languages, Nabokov answered that this was a matter of "nuances":

If you take framboise in French, for example, it's a scarlet color, a very red color. In English, the word raspberry is rather dull, with perhaps a little brown or violet. A rather cold color. In Russian, it's a burst of light, malinovie; the word has associations of brilliance, of gaiety, of ringing bells. How can you translate that? (*TWS*, 284)

This special attention to sound may be inherited from the Russian Silver Age, which, despite Nabokov's reluctance to admit it, played a prominent role in the maturation of his literary personality. Andrey Bely described language as "the sound of space," and claimed that

through sound, a world is created anew. In this world, I feel like the creator of a reality; then, I begin to name objects, that is, to recreate them for myself. [...] the process of naming spatial and temporal phenomena is a process of incantation; every word is a spell; by uttering the name of a phenomenon, I put a spell on it, and, in essence, I conquer it. (Bely 1994: 228)

Continuing his reflection on the magical properties of language, Bely turns to its onomatopoeic constituent and provides the example of the Russian word *grom* ("thunder"): "by attributing the name *grom* to the scary sound of thunder, I create a sound

that imitates thunder (grrr); by creating this sound, it is as if I began to recreate thunder” (ibid.).

While this is a typically symbolist view, some of its elements may have influenced — perhaps indirectly or unconsciously — Nabokov’s experience of poetic language. In a review of Bunin’s poetry, Nabokov wrote that “capturing this harmony of light in nature, the poet transforms it into a harmony of sound, as if keeping the same order, observing the same sequence” (*TWS*, 86) — he praises the direct relationship between theme and sound.

In “An Unfinished Draft” his vision of the writer as a creator of autonomous worlds converges with the image of life as a text: “He says that human days are only / words on a page picked up by you” (the human days are a non-literal translation of “жизнь земная,” earthly life, *PP*, 67). This encounter between poetic word and “real” world can happen thanks to the sound of language.

4.3 Syntax and Punctuation

Nabokov’s translations do not display significant structural alterations and, in the majority of cases, the English poems maintain the same quantity of lines and stanzas as their Russian sources. One exception has already been observed in the analysis of the long parodic poem “On Rulers,” whose English version, unlike its Russian text is divided into stanzas. The longest poems in the collection, “Fame” and “The Paris Poem,” are likewise divided into shorter stanzas. In addition, “The Paris Poem” has been split into numbered parts, which enhance this long poetic narration’s sense of organization.

One poem, “Irregular Iambics,” has undergone an opposite transformation: it is divided into three quatrains in Russian, but its English version constitutes a verse paragraph of twelve lines. This alteration comes with an important syntactic change. In the Russian poem, a long and complex sentence with several subordinate clauses runs throughout the quatrains, creating a continuity that goes beyond the poem’s graphic

division into stanzas. The English text, however, is split into shorter sentences, presenting a syntactic choice that adapts the poem to the target language and makes it more user-friendly. In the Russian text there is an interesting contrast between the continuity of a very long sentence and its visual separation into three equal parts. In English, on the other hand, there is graphic continuity – twelve consecutive lines, but syntactically the poem is more fragmented.

The other poems of the collection reproduce faithfully the stanzaic structure of their Russian sources, with an obvious striving for equilinearity. The translations of *Poems and Problems* are indebted to the line-by-line methodology that Nabokov worked out in his “literalist” period marked by the project on *Eugene Onegin*. Nabokov’s approach to the structure and content of a poem’s self-translation may clearly emerge from comparing three samples of poetry: one from his “pre-literalist” period, when translation was still an “art” for Nabokov, as professed in his essay “The Art of Translation” (1941); a passage from *Eugene Onegin*; and a text from *Poems and Problems*.

As an example of the early practice, one may take Lermontov’s classic poem “Сон” (“The Dream”), which had a considerable impact on Nabokov¹⁶²:

В полдневный жар в долине Дагестана
С свинцом в груди лежал недвижим я;
Глубокая еще дымилась рана,
По капле кровь точилась моя.

Лежал один я на песке долины;
Уступы скал теснились кругом,
И солнце жгло их желтые вершины
И жгло меня -- но спал я мертвым сном.

И снился мне сияющий огнями
Вечерний пир в родимой стороне.
Меж юных жен, увенчанных цветами,
Шел разговор веселый обо мне.

Но в разговор веселый не вступая,
Сидела там задумчиво одна,
И в грустный сон душа ее младая
Бог знает чем была погружена;

I dreamt that with a bullet in my side
in a hot gorge of Daghestan I lay.
Deep was the wound and steaming, and the tide
of my life-blood ebbed drop by drop away.

Alone I lay amid a silent maze
of desert sand and bare cliffs rising steep,
their tawny summits burning in the blaze
that burned me too; but lifeless was my sleep.

And in a dream I saw the candle-flame
of a gay supper in the land I knew;
young women crowned with flowers... And my name
on their light lips hither and thither flew.

But one of them sat pensively apart,
not joining in the light-lipped gossiping,
and there alone, God knows what made her heart,
her young heart dream of such a hidden thing....

¹⁶² It is likely to have directly influenced the device of the “triple dream” in the poem “The Dream” in *Poems and Problems*.

И снилась ей долина Дагестана;
Знакомый труп лежал в долине той;
В его груди, дымясь, чернела рана,
И кровь лилась хладеющей струей.
(Lermontov 2014: 349)

For in her dream she saw a gorge, somewhere in
Daghestan, and knew the man who lay
there on the sand, the dead man, unaware
of steaming wound and blood ebbing away.
(*PLT*, 42)

This translation is an excellent case of what Nabokov would later label “paraphrastic approach.”¹⁶³ Each stanza is a rather loose paraphrase of the Russian counterpart, containing additions (the “maze” of desert sand, the “candles” at the supper not mentioned in Lermontov), substitutions (the name on the girls’ “light lips” and “gossiping” instead of “разговор,” conversation) and even some omissions (“полдневный жар” points at a hot “midday,” but Nabokov’s translation only renders the “hot” weather).

This does not mean that the translation fails to retain the atmosphere and the story of the original poem. Nabokov’s version recreates the poem in English by a combination of meter, rhyme, euphony, and imagery. Lermontov’s closing quatrain contains an ambiguous word, “знакомый,” which in Russian can be interpreted as an adjective, “familiar,” or as a noun, “acquaintance.” Nabokov’s translation disambiguates the original, omitting what he defined a “solecism” that — he feared — could make the poem ridiculous to an anglophone reader.¹⁶⁴ Thus, as Shvabrin notes, “If his rendition of the poem’s closing quatrain cannot be justified as a faithful rendition of the original, it is due to the translator’s unequivocally expressed desire to improve the original by ‘omitting’ the purported solecism” (2019: 221).

Ultimately, this example shows that Nabokov’s earlier “free” methodology not only produces an autonomous poem in the target language but also takes the liberty to improve

¹⁶³ Nabokov defines the paraphrastic approach in the foreword to *Eugene Onegin* as “offering a free version of the original, with omissions and additions prompted by the exigencies of form, the conventions attributed to the consumer, and the translator’s ignorance. Some paraphrases may possess the charm of stylish diction and idiomatic conciseness, but no scholar should succumb to stylishness and no reader be fooled by it” (*EO*, I: vii-viii).

¹⁶⁴ As Nabokov explains in his article “The Lermontov Mirage,” Lermontov’s expression ‘the familiar corpse’ (‘znakomyi trup’) “probably meant ‘the corpse of the young woman’s good acquaintance.’ This ‘familiar corpse’ or ‘well-known body’ was unfortunately produced not merely as a phenomenon of bad grammar, but because in the poem itself the dead and the living got so hopelessly mixed” (LM: 34).

what the translator deemed an embarrassing flaw of the source. This correction rejects a slavish following of the source text, while also paying tribute to its author.

Yet, as he translated more Russian classics, and read translations available on the American market, Nabokov's admiration for Russian poetry began to manifest itself through a completely opposite approach to translation, which culminated in his work on *Eugene Onegin*. Pushkin's novel in verse contains another account of a dream that became a classic in Russian literature, Tatyana's dream in Chapter 5. Here are the first two stanzas devoted to its description, with Nabokov's 1975 translation:

И снится чудный сон Татьяне.
Ей снится, будто бы она
Идёт по снеговой поляне,
Печальной мглой окружена;
В сугробах снежных перед нею
Шумит, клубит волной своею
Кипучий, тёмный и седой
Поток, не скованный зимой;
Две жёрдочки, склеены льдиной,
Дрожащий, гибельный мосток,
Положены через поток;
И пред шумящею пучиной,
Недоумения полна,
Остановилась она.

Как на досадную разлуку,
Татьяна ропщет на ручей;
Не видит никого, кто руку
С той стороны подал бы ей;
Но вдруг сугроб зашевелился,
И кто ж из-под него явился?
Большой, взъерошенный медведь;
Татьяна ах! а он реветь,
И лапу с острыми когтями
Ей протянул; она скрепясь
Дрожащей ручкой опёрлась
И боязливými шагами
Перебралась через ручей;
Пошла – и что ж? медведь за ней!
(Pushkin 1950, V: 104)

And dreams a wondrous dream Tatiana.
She dreams that she
over a snowy plain is walking,
surrounded by sad murk.
Before her, in the snowdrifts,
dins, undulates its wave
a churning, dark, and hoary
torrent, not chained by winter;
two thin poles, glued together by a piece of ice
(a shaky, perilous footbridge),
are laid across the torrent;
and in front of the dinning deep,
full of perplexity,
she stopped.

As at a vexing separation,
Tatiana murmurs at the brook:
sees nobody who might a hand
offer her from the other side.
But suddenly a snowdrift stirred,
and who appeared from under it?
A large bear with a ruffled coat;
Tatiana uttered "Ach!" and he went roaring
and a paw with sharp claws
stretched out to her. Nerving herself,
she leaned on it with trembling hand
and with apprehensive steps
worked her way across the brook;
walked on – and what then? The bear followed her.
(EO R, 208-09)

The translation is now rhymeless, written in free verse (but not without an iambic undersong: “And dreams a wondrous dream Tatiana. / She dreams that she / over a snowy plain is walking”). It is quite perfectly equilinear. The English text acquires a foreign flavor when the translator calques the Russian free word order, placing the subject after the verb

(as in the opening line) or the object before the verb (the bear “a paw with sharp claws / stretched out to her”). Brian Boyd finds these frequent “wrenchings of English word order” so harsh that he suspects that Nabokov was pursuing “awkwardness for awkwardness’ sake” and deliberately translated Pushkin “out of Russian rather than into English” (1991: 334).

Yet, Nabokov’s idea of literalism is, in *Eugene Onegin*, complicated by equilinearity and exotic word order, as well as by rhythmic undersongs. For instance, in such lines as “As at a vexing separation, / Tatiana murmurs at the brook” Nabokov intentionally recreated the iambic meter of the original text. According to Dolinin, thanks to these melodic passages “the novice in the realm of Russian language and literature also can catch a glimpse of Pushkin’s art through these chinks in the wall of the clumsy English” (1995: 124). Furthermore, not all line breaks in *Eugene Onegin* mirror the Russian text, and punctuation is also subject to change: Nabokov’s idea of literal translation is not about rendering “the basic meaning of words (and their order),” something “a machine can do under the direction of an intelligent bilinguist” (*EO*, I: VIII). Rather, within the space of each line, Nabokov rewrites the Russian text as faithfully as possible in terms of vocabulary, strives to recreate the iambic rhythm, and uses punctuation to overcome syntactic obstacles, when, for example, he introduces brackets to preserve the original line order without paraphrasing the passage: “two thin poles, glued together by a piece of ice / (a shaky, perilous small bridge).”

Above I argued that in terms of formal features such as meter and rhyme, Nabokov’s self-translations in *Poems and Problems* are heterogenous: some are equimetric; others display a meter that is different from that of the original; and many poems are written in free verse. Yet they are predominantly equilinear and follow a line-by-line approach that sometimes, as in *Eugene Onegin*, results in a calque of the Russian syntax. Let us look, for instance, at the opening stanzas of “To Prince S. M. Kachurin,” that contain an allusion to Lermontov’s “The Dream”:

Качурин, твой совет я принял
и вот уж третий день живу
в музейной обстановке, в синей
гостиной с видом на Неву.

Священником американским
твой бедный друг переодет,
и всем долинам дагестанским
я шлю завистливый привет.

От холода, от перебоев
в подложном паспорте, не сплю:
исследователям обоев
лилии и лианы шлю. (*PP*, 134)

Kachurin, your advice I've accepted
and here I am, living for the third day
in a museumist setup: a blue
drawing room with a view on the Neva.

As an American clergyman
your poor friend is disguised,
and to all the Daghestan valleys
I send envious greetings.

Because of the cold, and the palpitations
of a false passport, I cannot sleep.
To wallpaper investigators
lianas and lilies I send. (*PP*, 135)

In this poem, whose imaginary speaker has entered Soviet Russia under a false name, insomnia becomes an excuse to send “envious greetings” to the author of “The Dream” (the allusion — less obvious for the American reader — is pointed out in a note to the translation). The English poem is perfectly specular in respect to the Russian text. Russian syntax, however, does not share the rigor of the target language. Thus, in order to maintain equilinearity, Nabokov introduced some alterations in the punctuation of the target text (in ll. 3-4, and ll. 10-11) that shorten it and simplify its syntax. Nevertheless, the English poem is a perfect calque of the Russian source. Such structures as “your advice I’ve accepted” and “As an American clergyman your poor friend is disguised” or “lianas and lilies I send” do not sound incorrect in the context of a poetic composition, but their syntax bears a foreign flavor. The result is similar to what in his analysis of *Eugene Onegin* Dolinin discussed as “a defamiliarizing aesthetic effect”:

By breaking the customary order of words and reshuffling the syntagms, Nabokov also aims at a peculiar— “defamiliarizing”— aesthetic effect: he tries to do away with the division of a poetic text into phrases characteristic of the English tradition, and instead shifts the emphasis to a single line to be scanned and perceived as a unit of poetic utterance — in Tynianov’s terminology a “dense poetic row” within which words, yoked together by sound-play and meter, change or modify their meanings. (Dolinin 1995: 122)

The emphasis on the integrity of a single line prevails in many translations of *Poems and Problems*. This approach becomes especially obvious in such texts as “The Formula,” “At Sunset,” “Hotel Room,” or “I Like That Mountain.” The latter, a poem originally

written in iambic tetrameters, is translated in free verse with variable line-length, as can be seen from the opening stanzas:

Люблю я гору в шубе черной
лесов еловых, потому
что в темноте чужбины горной
я ближе к дому моему.

Как не узнать той хвои плотной
и как с ума мне не сойти
хотя б от ягоды болотной,
заголубевшей на пути? (PP, 34)

I like that mountain in its black pelisse
Of fir forests - because
In the gloom of a strange mountain country
I am closer to home.

How should I not know those dense needles,
And how should I not lose my mind
At the mere sight of that peatbog berry
Showing blue along my way? (PP, 35)

Each of these quatrains contains one main clause accompanied by a coordinate clause, the former introducing the situation and the latter conveying its emotional charge. The English text, as in the previous example, follows the content of the Russian poem line by line. As a result, ll. 3 and 4 have strikingly different lengths, which makes the rhythm of the translation more tense and irregular. A specular structure, however, does not imply a lack of minor variations that can be ascribed – in this particular case – to disambiguation rather than departure from the original text.

Thus, the source text's title (and opening line) "люблю я гору" requires an addition in English – an article, a possessive phrase, or a pointer. The Russian title suggests that the speaker likes mountains in general, because they remind him of his native land. The English text, however, underscores a particular mountain, as if the speaker were pointing at it.

In other equilinear translations, minor changes in punctuation impact the emotional tone of the target text. For instance, the translation of "В паю" ("The Paradise"), another iambic poem rendered in English free verse, is fairly literal but displays minor changes in punctuation:

Моя душа, за смертью дальней
твой образ виден мне вот так:
натуралист провинциальный,
в раю потерянный чудак.

Там в роще дремлет ангел дикий,
полупавлинье существо.
Ты любознательно потыкай
зеленым зонтиком в него,

соображая, как сначала
о нем напишешь ты статью,
потом... но только нет журнала
и нет читателей в раю.

И ты стоишь, еще не веря
немому горю своему:
об этом синем сонном звере
кому расскажешь ты, кому?

Где мир и названные розы,
музей и птичьи чучела?
И смотришь, смотришь ты сквозь слезы
на безымянные крыла. (*PP*, 44)

My soul, beyond distant death
your image I see like this:
a provincial naturalist,
an eccentric lost in paradise.

There, in a glade, a wild angel slumbers,
a semi-pavonian creature.
Poke at it curiously
with your green umbrella,

speculating how, first of all,
you will write a paper on it,
then—But there are no learned journals,
nor any readers in paradise!

And there you stand, not yet believing
your wordless woe.
About that blue somnolent animal
whom will you tell, whom?

Where is the world and the labeled roses,
the museum and the stuffed birds?
And you look and look through your tears
at those unnamable wings. (*PP*, 45)

This translation is meticulously precise. The syntactic structures follow the Russian source closely. In the 1969 typescript of *Poems and Problems*, l. 5 was translated as “In a glade, there a wild angel slumbers” (*PP* typescript, 19), but it was changed, with a holograph annotation, into the current version, which adheres more closely to the Russian word order. On the level of content only minor alterations can be observed: a small addition that clarifies the scientific nature of the journals, and punctuation changes such as an exclamation mark at the end of the third quatrain. As a result of this alteration, the speaker’s voice, addressing his own soul, stands out more vigorously and emotionally. According to Nikolay Bogomolov’s definition, rhyme can be seen as an “accumulator of poetic energy” (1995: 117). The addition of an exclamation mark may thus be an attempt to compensate for the loss of rhyme and heighten the emotional upsurge of the translation, in accordance with that of the corresponding Russian passage, where the frustration of the provincial naturalist is about to reach its peak.

More examples of altered punctuation can be found in *Poems and Problems*. For instance, punctuation is used to intensify the emotional tonality of “Evening on a Vacant Lot”:

Но, переписанные начисто,
лишась мгновенно волшебства,
бессильно друг за друга прячутся
отяжелевшие слова.

Молодое мое одиночество
среди ночных, неподвижных ветвей;
(*PP*, 69)

But when transcribed in a fair copy,
deprived of magic instantly,
how helplessly behind each other
the leaden-weighted words would hide!

My young loneliness
in the night among motionless boughs!
(*PP*, 71)

The English version of these lines transforms the Russian placid and melancholic nominal sentence into an emotional invocation of a distant youth. The exclamatory tone continues in the following lines, where punctuation introduces a change in the syntactic structure of the English version of the poem:

над рекой — изумление ночи,
отраженное полностью в ней;
и сиреневый цвет, бледный баловень
этих первых неопытных стоп,
освещенный луной небывалой
в полутрауре парковых троп;
и теперь увеличенный памятью,
и прочнее, и краше вдвойне,
старый дом, и бессмертное пламя
керосиновой лампы в окне (*PP*, 70)

The amazement of night over the river,
which reflects it in full;
and lilac bloom, the pale darling
of my first inexperienced numbers,
with that fabulous moonlight upon it!
And the paths of the park in half-mourning,
and—enlarged at present by memory,
twice as solid and beautiful now,
the old house, and the deathless flame
of the kerosene lamp in the window (*PP*, 71)

Here, another exclamation was added to the target text, which, however, does not correspond to a full stop in the Russian poem, and, therefore, splits a sentence into two. As a result, the passage gains in clarity and enhances the image of the moonlight, transformed into a nominal structure ending on an exclamation mark. Moreover, in the English poem, the paths of the park no longer represent the location of the lilac bloom, but become the subject of the following nominal sentence, which in Russian was limited to the evocation of the old house. The shift in meaning is small, but shorter syntactic constructions intensify the expressive power of this passage in English.

Some translations introduce parenthetical phrases that, while not requiring deviation from the equilinear structure, lighten the poem’s syntax. The Russian poems themselves display a significant presence of parentheses, which are also widely used in Nabokov’s novels. Enclosed in parentheses one can find details or clarifications, but also asides that address the reader in the author’s voice. In English, addition of parentheses can be observed, for example, in the poem “On Rulers”:

В самом деле, нельзя же нам с горя
 поступить, как чиновный Китай,
 кучу лишних веков присчитавший
 к истории скромной своей,
 от этого, впрочем, не ставшей
 ни лучше, ни веселей. (PP, 130)

Does our plight really force us to do
 what did bureaucratic Cathay
 that with heaps of superfluous centuries
 augmented her limited history
 (which, however, hardly became
 either better or merrier)? (PP, 131)

Here the introduction of parentheses separates between two relative clauses and helps to turn this passage into a rhetorical question, which strengthens the tone of oration in this parody of Vladimir Mayakovsky. The addition of parentheses can be found in other poems too, including “Soft Sound” (ll. 11-12), “How I Love You” (ll. 30-31), “Fame” (ll. 7-8), “The Paris Poem” (l. 10), “To Prince S. M. Kachurin” (ll. 13-15). The frequent use of this device may derive from Nabokov’s experience with *Eugene Onegin*, where parentheses can be found among the most frequent alterations of the original punctuation.¹⁶⁵ The addition of parentheses suits the target language – English is averse to long sentences, unless they are well-structured 18th century periods – and enriches the translation with a new stylistic element by creating the impression of “asides.”

Nabokov’s overall handling of syntax and punctuation is consistent with his introductory claims of faithfulness and is more reminiscent of his literalist *Onegin* methodology than of the translations made in the 1940s. Yet in *Poems and Problems* there

¹⁶⁵ See Tatiana’s dream discussed above. See also, for instance, the exclamation in parenthesis in Chapter 6: Pushkin’s “и французам / Достался в плен: драгой залог! / Новейший Регул, чести бог, / ГОТОВЫЙ ВНОВЬ предаться узам” (Pushkin 1950, V: 121) is rendered as “and to the French / fell prisoner (prized hostage!) — /a modern Regulus, the god of honor” (EO R, 229).

are minor cases of paraphrase – not of the whole poem but of a few lines at a time, as in

“No Matter How”:

Каким бы полотном батальным ни являлась
советская сусальнейшая Русь,
какой бы жалостью душа ни наполнялась,
не поклонюсь, не примирюсь

со всею мерзостью, жестокостью и скукой
немого рабства — нет, о, нет,
еще я духом жив, еще не сыт разлукой,
увольте, я еще поэт. (PP, 126)

No matter how the Soviet tinsel glitters
upon the canvas of a battle piece;
no matter how the soul dissolves in pity,
I will not bend, I will not cease

loathing the filth, brutality, and boredom
of silent servitude. No, no, I shout,
my spirit is still quick, still exile-hungry,
I'm still a poet, count me out! (PP, 127)

This poem was composed in 1943, a moment when the Soviet Union was already winning victories over Hitler forces; it is, therefore, a rather subversive text. The opening lines of the Russian poem can be rendered literally as “No matter in what battle canvas appears / the Soviet most tinsel-golden *Rus'*.” Here, Soviet is an attribute of *Rus'*, the archaic name of Russia. The English poem, on the other hand, is a slightly paraphrased rendition of the original: the subject of the sentence is placed in the first line, so as to follow the natural word order of the target language. The translation compares the Soviet Union to a glittering tinsel on a bigger canvas of a battle, while making no mention altogether of the word *Rus'* or Russia. While this may be one of the very few instances of complete loss of a lexical item in *Poems and Problems*, the absence of Russia in the English version of this poem may be a deliberate choice: Russia no longer existed, and the Soviet Union had very little to share with the country Nabokov grew up in.

Minor semantic and syntactic deviations can be found in this translation, such as a period in l. 6, followed by the addition of a new element. The Russian interjection “o” (oh) was substituted by a stronger expression, “I shout,” that vaguely echoes the sound of the Russian line’s ending in “o нет” (*o-nyet*). Despite these changes, the poem’s content has not been dramatically altered, and the amount of paraphrased lines is limited, especially if one compares it with the rhymed translation of Lermontov.

Thus, while many translations — especially those in free verse — partly calque the Russian syntax, other texts present instances of syntactic streamlining and paraphrased

passages that generate semantic alterations. Yet, even in the former group of poems, harsh distortions of the English word order are uncommon – by contrast, in *Eugene Onegin* one can find such “grotesque” (Boyd 1991: 336) structures as “you, of whom drunk I used to be” (*EO R*, 219). Word order in *Eugene Onegin* is aimed at moving the target reader towards the source text, and, according to Boyd, allows the reader to study Pushkin’s poetry as if it were through “the lenses of a microscope” (1991: 336). The syntax of Nabokov’s self-translations, on the other hand, while occasionally retaining a Russian flavor, offers a significantly higher degree of readability. As a result, translations acquire some autonomy from their Russian source, while at the same time maintaining their bond with the original, especially through a predominantly specular equilinear structure.

4.4 Grammatical and Semantic Changes

4.4.1 Grammar and Connotations

Nabokov never completely abandoned the agenda of “making a short poem contain a plot and tell a story” (*PP*, 14). Even his mature poems, composed in the United States, often tell stories: they contain characters, dialogues, real-life journeys, or imaginary wanderings through memory and dreams.

Stories imply the presence of narrative mechanisms, such as narrative voice, focalization and a chronotope. The translations of Nabokov’s narrative poems sometimes involve the alteration of such grammatical categories as tense or person, which triggers alterations in the poem’s narrative techniques. For instance, in the English version of “СНИМОК” (“The Snapshot”), the verbs of an entire stanza are switched from the present to the past tense:

На пляже в полдень лиловатый,
 в морском каникулярном раю
 снимал купальщик полосатый
 свою счастливую семью.
 И замирает мальчик голый,
 и улыбается жена,
 в горячий свет, в песок веселый,
 как в серебро, погружена.
 И полосатым человеком
 направлен в солнечный песок,
 мигнул и щелкнул черным веком
 фотографический глазок. (*PP*, 40)

Upon the beach at violet-blue noon,
 in a vacational Elysium
 a striped bather took
 a picture of his happy family.
 And very still stood his small naked boy,
 and his wife smiled,
 in ardent light, in sandy bliss
 plunged as in silver.
 And by the striped man
 directed at the sunny sand
 blinked with a click of its black eyelid
 the camera's ocellus. (*PP*, 41)

The Russian poem alternates three different tenses: the first verb of this passage, “снимал,” is imperfective and in past tense, creating distance between the narrator and the story; subsequently, the poem switches to the present tense, with verbs like “замирает” and “улыбается,” that maintain the imperfective aspect, but stage the action in, as it were, the current moment, representing a series of simultaneous events going on as if in front of the reader’s eyes: the boy is standing still, his mother is smiling, the man is preparing to take a picture. The imperfective aspect, combined with the present tense, conveys the idea of an ongoing and unfinished action, as if these lines were describing not only the pose of the people but also the picture itself: this temporal endlessness is the essence of photography, which “immortalizes” brief moments of real life.

The narration then switches back to past tense, but now the perfective aspect replaces the imperfective verbs of the opening lines. The line “мигнул и щелкнул черным веком” (literally “blinked and clicked with a black eyelid”) conveys the rapidity that characterizes the work of the camera. This passage underscores photography’s mechanical nature, as opposite to poetry, a slow handwritten artform dictated by imagination and thought. The use of different tenses and aspects may express Nabokov’s ambivalence about photography.¹⁶⁶ When asked in an interview about the possibility of making art on a film, Nabokov replied: “I don’t think I care; all I know is that my creative mind is concerned

¹⁶⁶ His skeptical attitude to photography can also be perceived in the poem “The Madman,” whose protagonist is a mad poet and a “street photographer in laic life” (*PP*, 75).

only with written words, and not with photographed things shot and killed by a camera” (*TWS*, 326).

In the translation of “Снимок,” however, a significant narrative simplification can be observed. Gone are the shifts from past to present and back to the past tense: in English, the whole passage is rewritten in past simple. Here, the desire to recreate a linear narration may have prevailed over an attempt to retain the subtle shades of difference that are quickly and almost imperceptibly conveyed by Russian verbs thanks to their imperfective and perfective aspects. As a result, the connotations of the preservation of the image in a photograph appear weakened in the translation.

Another simplification, this time involving the poem’s narrative voice, can be found in “The Paris Poem.” Here, a switch from autodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration is removed from the translation in favor of a purely autodiegetic one:

И покуда глядел он на месяц,
синеватый, как кровоподтек,
раздался где-то в дальнем предместье
паровозный щемящий свисток.

Лист бумаги, громадный и чистый,
стал вытаскивать он из себя:
лист был больше него и неистовствовал,
завиваясь в трубу и скрипя.

И борьба показалась запутанной,
безысходной: я, черная мгла,
я, огни и вот эта минута —
и вот эта минута прошла.

Но как знать, может быть, бесконечно
драгоценная она, и потом
пожалее, что бесчеловечно
обошелся я с этим листом.

Что-нибудь мне, быть может, напели
эти камни и дальний свисток.

И, пошарив по темной панели,
он нашел свой измятый листок.
(*PP*, 120-22)

And while I looked at the crescent
as blue as a bruise, there came
from a distant suburb, the whistle
—heartrending sound!—of a train.

A huge clean sheet of paper I started
to extract from myself. The sheet
was bigger than me and frenetically
it rolled up in a funnel and creaked.

And the struggle began to seem muddled,
unresolvable: I, the black sky,
I, the lights, and the present minute—
“and the present minute went by.

But who knows—perhaps, it was priceless
and perhaps I’d regret some day
having treated that sheet of paper
in such an inhuman way.

Perhaps something to me they incanted—
those stones and that whistle afar?

And on the sidewalk groping, my crumpled
scrap of paper I found in the dark.
(*PP*, 121-23)

In Russian, the first two quatrains of this passage are written in the third person (literally: “And while he looked at the crescent moon, as blue as a bruise” and “A sheet of

paper, huge and clean, he started to extract from himself: the sheet was bigger than himself”), the third and fourth stanza switch to first-person narration, as in English, and the closing lines are again heterodiegetic (“he found his crumbled scrap of paper”).

The use of only the third person in the translation may point at the fact that these switches are not actual passages from one narrator to another, but rather a game of narrative voices. The manner in which this occurs is reminiscent of the switches from “I” to “he” that characterize the complex narrative structure of *Dar*, as well as other works by Nabokov, such as the story “Recruiting” (1935). Hence, in this example, the change does not depend on the grammatical differences between source and target languages but is a deliberate stylistic choice. In the Russian poem, the switch from autodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration happens gradually, anticipating the poem’s closing, where, in both versions of the text, an autodiegetic narrator introduces the metaphor of life as a text or a texture that can be folded to transcend the boundaries of time and space (see also the discussion of the “carpet” metaphor in 3.3.2.2).

Another grammatical change is made in the closing lines of “Snow.” As noticed, Nabokov often places a keyword or an intense image in a poem’s closing line. The self-translations not only strive to retain this effect, but tend to enhance it by isolating an important concept as a single word at the poem’s end. The poem “Снег” follows this pattern by ending the text on a very short line, “детство мое” (my childhood):

Отходя ко сну,
всякий раз думаю:
может быть, удосужится
меня посетить
тепло одетое, неуклюжее
детство мое. (*PP*, 62)

Whenever I’m falling asleep,
I cannot help think:
Maybe you will find a moment
to visit me,
my warmly muffled up, clumsy
childhood. (*PP*, 63)

The subject of the Russian poem’s last sentence is placed at its very end of the poem: the speaker hopes that his childhood will “удосужится” (manage, condescend, or take the trouble) to visit him (in a dream). In English, with its rigid word order, Nabokov maintains equilinearity and ends the poem on the word “childhood” by transforming the sentence

into an apostrophe, in which the speaker addresses his childhood directly and invites it to pay him a visit. The personification of childhood, effected in the Russian text by the verb “удосужится,” is continued in the English poem. By establishing a brief dialogic moment between the poet and his personified childhood, the translation imitates the way children sometimes address imaginary beings and make wishes before falling asleep: a return to childhood is thus brought about for a moment through poetry rather than a dream.

While Nabokov’s translations hardly ever lose lexical items, they contain numerous substitutions of words with more or less exact synonyms in the target language. For instance, in “Мать” (“The Mother”) the expression “бред рыбаей” (l. 19: “Мария, что тебе до бреда рыбаей?” *PP*, 32) is characterized by a resounding repetition of “b” and “r” consonants. In English, however, the line was rendered with a softer but still alliterative “fantasies of fishermen” (“Mary, what are to you the fantasies / of fishermen?” *PP* 33). The noun “fantasies” has more positive semantic connotations than the Russian “бред,” which can be rendered as “gibberish” but can also denote delirium from high fever, and therefore is semantically related to the idea of illness. The lexical modification seems to have been elicited by the author’s reluctance to give up the striking alliteration altogether.

Elsewhere, the target text is enriched with the help of new alliterations despite the resulting semantic change. For example, in “Каким бы полотном,” the expression “немое рабство” does not carry any special sound repetitions (“не поклонюсь, не примирюсь / со всею мерзостью, жестокостью и скукой / немого рабства,” *PP*, 126). Nevertheless, in English this expression is rendered with an alliterative phrase, “silent servitude”: “I will not bend I will not cease / loathing the filth, brutality, and boredom / of silent servitude” (*PP*, 127). Here, too, semantic intensity diminishes in the translation: had the English version been literal, the speaker would have referred to something like the “mute slavery” of the soviet regime, an expression that would convey desolate hopelessness.

Quite a number of lexical choices tends to specification. For example, in the 1969 typescript of another poem, “How I Love You,” the adjective “немой” (mute) was also

translated by Nabokov as “silent” (*PP* typescript, 33), but subsequently changed into the less ambiguous “mute” in the final version of the English text: “В луче вечернем повисая, / она толчется без конца, / как бы игрушка золотая / в руках немого продавца” (*PP*, 80) became in English “hanging up in an evening sunbeam, / their swarmlet ceaselessly jiggles, / reminding one of a golden toy / in the hands of a mute peddler” (*PP*, 81). Here the choice of “peddler” over the more general “seller,” which is the English for “продавец,” disambiguates the source text. In addition to the translation of “свеча” (candle) as “taper” in “To Liberty” (see the section on archaic words below), another instance of lexical specification can be found in the poem “On Rulers,” where the general noun “автомобиль” (car) is rendered in the corresponding English line as “convertible,” a more specific type of vehicle (l. 47, *PP*, 130-31).

As observed in the analysis of “No Matter How,” line-by-line approach can be sporadically substituted by paraphrase, generating a series of lexical alterations across lines. A similar process occurs in “The Paris Poem,” where the description of the night in the city contains a series of semantic and grammatical changes:

<p>С ЭТИМ КАМНЕМ НОЧНЫМ ПОРОДНИТЬСЯ, ПИТЬ ИЗВОЗЧИЧЬЕ ЭТО ВИНО... Трясогузками ходят блудницы, и на русском Парнасе темно. (<i>PP</i>, 118)</p>	<p>To be one with this stone which is one with the night, to drink this red wine, which the cabby drinks. And the whores, they walk as the wagtails walk, And the Russian Parnassus in darkness sinks. (<i>PP</i>, 119)</p>
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The literal translation of the first two lines would have been “to become kin with this nocturnal stone / to drink this wine of the cabbies,” yet Nabokov adds to the syntactic parallelism between the first and the second lines by introducing a relative clause in the quatrain’s opening line, parallel to the first clause. As a result, the poem represents the speaker’s wish to merge with the night *through* his union with a stone (notice also the addition of a specifying detail about the wine in the second line). The Parisian night, depicted in rather repulsive terms, is rendered even more abyssal in the quatrain’s closing, changed from “и на русском Парнасе темно” (“and it is dark in the Russian Parnassus”)

into “the Russian Parnassus in darkness sinks.” While this alteration has probably been made for the sake of rhyme (“sinks” / “drinks”), it also contributes to deepening the poem’s gloomy atmosphere.

In this example, Nabokov’s claim that he “never twisted the tail of a line” (*PP*, 14) for the sake of consonance appears too absolute: the lines sometimes do take a slightly different direction from the original. Thus, in “The Paris Poem,” “инженер лет пятидесяти” (an engineer about 50 years old) became “civil engineer aged fifty-three” to retain the rhyme with “rue Pierre Loti” (ll. 33-36; *PP*, 116-17). Nabokov’s translation does not contradict the original, yet it is not a literal rendition and it introduces a change for the sake of rhyme rather than reason.

Similarly, in the closing poem of the collection, “From the Gray North,” Nabokov translates the lines “знакомое дерево / вырастает из дымки” as “a familiar tree reappears / out of the gray” (ll. 4-5; *PP*, 148-49) where “reappears” rhymes with line three of the target text (“not all its arrears / life has had time to defray,” *ibid.*), but is not a literal rendition of “вырастает” (grows). The English poem shifts the meaning of this passage slightly, underscoring the speaker’s imaginary act of return to the countryside where he spent his youth, while he sees a familiar tree emerging out of the fog. A metonymy enriches the target text here, with the color gray replacing the mist (дымка), rhyming with “defray” and echoing the poem’s title.

Semantic changes in *Poems and Problems* may have other reasons as well. In “What Is the Evil Deed,” for instance, a semantic divergence does not appear to be motivated by considerations of euphony but is associated with alternative versions of the original. This poem is devoted to a public theme, the fate of Nabokov’s work in Russia:

Какое сделал я дурное дело,
и я ли развратитель и злодей.
я, заставляющий мечтать мир целый
о бедной девочке моей?

О, знаю я, меня боятся люди,
и жгут таких, как я, за волшебство,
и, как от яда в полом изумруде,
мрут от искусства моего.

Но как забавно, что в конце абзаца,
корректору и веку вопреки,
тень русской ветки будет колебаться
на мраморе моей руки. (PP, 146)

What is the evil deed I have committed?
Seducer, criminal—is this the word
for me who set the entire world a-dreaming
of my poor little girl?

Oh, I know well that I am feared by people:
They burn the likes of me for wizard wiles
and as of poison in a hollow smaragd
of my art die.

Amusing, though, that at the last indention,
despite proofreaders and my age’s ban,
a Russian branch’s shadow shall be playing
upon the marble of my hand. (PP, 147)

This text — composed around Christmas in San-Remo, 1959 — continues the Russian tradition of poetic monuments, whose pillars include classic poems by Derzhavin and Pushkin. In the twentieth century, Valeriy Bryusov and Vladislav Khodasevich composed poems in this tradition.¹⁶⁷ If Bryusov’s “monumentum” still followed Pushkin’s classical example (1912), Khodasevich (1928) fills his poem with a bitter irony, a feeling of approaching end of an era, but also of the beginning of something new: “Во мне конец, во мне начало. / Мной совершённое так мало! / Но всё ж я прочное звено: / Мне это счастье дано”¹⁶⁸ (Khodasevich 1983, II: 111). In these lines, Khodasevich sees himself as a part of the Russian poetic tradition, showcasing his faith in the glory of the Russian poets of the past as a source of hope for the future. Despite all the historical turmoil, there will be a new Russia, and this Russia has a chance to become great: “В России новой, но великой, / Поставят идол мой двуликий / На перекрестке двух дорог, / Где время, ветер и песок”¹⁶⁹ (ibid.)

Like Khodasevich, Nabokov writes from the perspective of an émigré poet and foretells a return to Russia in the shape of a monument. However, Nabokov — who in the foreword to *The Gift* remarked that “[i]t is fascinating to imagine the regime under which

¹⁶⁷ For more information about the relationship between Nabokov’s poem and the tradition of literary monuments, see Boris Katz’s 1999 article “‘Exegi Monumentum’ Vladimira Nabokova.”

¹⁶⁸ “The end is in me, the beginning is in me. / So little I have achieved! / But still I am a strong ring: / This happiness is given to me.”

¹⁶⁹ “In a new, but great Russia / They will place my two-faced idol / At the crossroads of two roads, / Where there is time, wind and sand...”

Dar may be read in Russia” (*G*, 9) — did not share Khodasevich’s optimism about the future of his native land. In the poem, he imagines how *despite* the bans and censorship of his work, a “Russian branch” will one day play upon the marble of his hand, or, metonymically, on the text of *Lolita*.

The branch on a marble hand echoes two passages of the meta-literary story “Recruiting,” which both opens and ends on the image of a linden branch, or rather its shadow. In the opening, a linden branch’s shadow seems to be erasing a hardly visible Russian name on a gravestone; in the closing, the same shadow “anooints” the veins of an old man’s hand, before landing on the narrator’s “representative” and his forehead, as if erasing and dismantling him too (*Stories*, 405).¹⁷⁰

The image of a tree branch recurs in other poems of the collection, including the stanza about the poet’s youth in “Evening on a Vacant Lot,”¹⁷¹ but also the closing lines of “How I Love You,” where the speaker addresses his native land and his past: “Stand motionless under the flowering branch, / inhale—what a spreading, what flowing — / Close your eyes, and diminish, and stealthily / into the eternal pass through” (*PP*, 81).

A branch covered in flowers returns in “Fame,” in the passage where the speaker’s frightening double attempts to intimidate the exiled poet by raising the issue of émigré literature and its audience:

¹⁷⁰ This story, as pointed out by Leona Toker (1986), anticipates *Pnin* with the narrative device of an apparently omniscient narrator that later turns out to be intradiegetic. In “Recruiting” this transformation involves the linden tree: not only is the narrator erased under its branch, but he does not seem to notice the connection between the linden tree of the story’s opening and its final image, the former being an “imagined” one, and the latter an “actual” tree. Leona Toker observes that the “representative’s taking over of the old man’s place on the bench symbolically prefigures [...] the ending of *Pnin*” (1986: 467).

¹⁷¹ Молодое мое одиночество / среди ночных, неподвижных ветвей; / над рекой — изумление ночи, / отраженное полностью в ней; [...] дальний ветер, воздушный гонец, / все шумней проникающий в чашу, / наклоняющий ветвь наконец,” (*PP*, 70) and in English: “My young loneliness / in the night among motionless boughs! / The amazement of night over the river, / which reflects it in full; [...] and in sleep the nearing of bliss, / a far breeze, an aerial envoy / with increasing noise penetrating dense woods, / inclining a branch at last” (*PP*, 71).

«твои бедные книги, — сказал он развязно, безнадежно растают в изгнание. Увы, эти триста листов беллетристики праздной разлетятся — но у настоящей листвы есть куда упадать, есть земля, есть Россия, есть тропа вся в лиловой кленовой крови, есть порог, где слоятся тузы золотые, есть канавы — а бедные книги твои, без земли, без тропы, без канав, без порога, опадут в пустоте, где ты вырастил ветвь, как базарный факир, то есть не без подлога, и недолго ей в дымчатом воздухе цвести. (PP, 106)

“Your poor books,” he breezily said, “will finish by hopelessly fading in exile. Alas, those two thousand leaves of frivolous fiction will be scattered; but genuine foliage has

a place where to fall: there’s the soil, there’s Russia, there’s a path drenched by maples in violet blood, there’s a threshold where lie overlapping gold aces, there are ditches; but your unfortunate books

without soil, without path, without ditch, without threshold, will be shed in a void where you brought forth a branch, as bazaar fakirs do (that is, not without faking), and not long will it bloom in the smoke-colored air. (PP, 107)

The branch in bloom here represents the writer’s work, which stems out of nowhere because it is not attached to the main tree, to its trunk. The readers of *Poems and Problems* may compare the image of the path described here with the opening poem (“Иду по румяной дорожке” / “I tread the red sand of a path,” PP, 18-19), where the path is wet after a spring rain and surrounded by spring flowers and young leaves. By contrast, in “Fame,” the park’s paths appear “drenched by maples in violet blood,” an autumnal image that echoes Humbert Humbert’s poem about the “Enchanted Hunters.” However, if in *Lolita* the maple trees were associated with shades of red, here they become violet, a color that was synonymous with evil for many poets, from Baudelaire to Bely, and hints at real-life bloodshed. These maple leaves can be interpreted as a metaphor for literature produced in the Soviet Union, where Russian soil is drenched in blood, turning this passage into an accusation against writers who serve a totalitarian regime. Thus, rather than reaching a compromise with a dictatorship, the speaker would prefer to grow his branch like a “bazaar fakir,” in a lonely void.

By contrast, in “What Is the Evil Deed,” the image of the branch is victorious, acknowledging the poet’s literary merit. In the closing lines of “Fame” the speaker transcended the importance of fame because he had found “something else, something else, something else” (PP, 113). Here, somewhat like in Khodasevich’s *topos* of the monument, a mature author, who has already acquired recognition, demonstrates awareness of his stature. Nabokov, however, envisions his posthumous fame not in his

poetry, but in the novel *Lolita*. The speaker of this poem, a parody on Pasternak's Nobel poem,¹⁷² antagonizes numerous readers by the substitution of Pasternak's "beauty of my land" with "my poor girl."

In English, the rhetorical question of the first stanza is split into two questions. There is a semantic divergence between the poems' second lines: the Russian text uses the noun "развратитель," whose root, "разврат," is a word that has strongly negative connotations meaning "depravity," "corruption," "moral decadence," and is usually found in contexts of sexually immoral behaviour. Nabokov's translation as "seducer" is somewhat lighter: its best Russian analogue is "соблазнитель," and, while seduction is an act that contains the idea of leading someone astray, it does not necessarily imply the victim's moral and physical corruption.

Before *Poems and Problems*, the Russian "Какое сделал я дурное дело" was first printed in a collection in the 1962 Italian *Poesie*, where l. 5 contains a colon: "О, знаю я: меня боятся люди" (*Poesie*, 72). A few years later, its English self-translation – very similar to the one later published in *Poems and Problems* – came out in Vladimir Markov's 1966 anthology of *Modern Russian Poetry* (1966: 842). The same translation is present in the 1969 typescript of *Poems and Problems* (68). Here another important divergence from the Russian text can be found: l. 5 is translated as "Oh, well I know that people do not love me" instead of "I am feared by people."

These semantic changes derive from an alternative Russian version of "Какое сделал я дурное дело," written by Nabokov in 1963 on the end-leaf of Dieter Zimmer's bibliography of his works.¹⁷³ This version, dated 26 December, is accompanied with a misquoted epigraph from Pasternak¹⁷⁴ and a dedication to Nabokov's son ("Митюше," to

¹⁷² Pasternak's poem is as follows: "Что же сделал я за пакость, / Я убийца и злодей? / Я весь мир заставил плакать / Над красой земли моей" (Pasternak 1961, III: 108).

¹⁷³ I am grateful to Daniel Sirgeyev of the Memorial Estate Rozhdestveno for sharing the picture of the manuscript with me.

¹⁷⁴ "Я заставивший мир целый плакать над красую родины моей. Пастернак"

Mityusha). In addition to some differences in punctuation (a colon in l. 5, probably inherited from the Italian edition, and an ellipsis in the closing line), the poem contains two lexical departures from the original 1959 version. Both these alterations are reflected in the poem’s self-translation as it was printed in Markov’s anthology and in the typescript of *Poems and Problems*. Compare the 1963 version of the Russian poem’s opening stanzas with the first English translation:

Какое сделал я дурное дело,
и я ли соблазнитель и злодей -
я, заставляющий мечтать мир целый
о бедной девочке моей?

О, знаю я: меня не любят люди,
и жгут таких как я за волшебство,
и, как от яда в полном изумруде,
мрут от искусства моего!

(Nabokov 1963a)

What is the evil deed I have committed?
Seducer, criminal—is this the word
for me who set the entire world a-dreaming
of my poor little girl?

Oh, well I know that people do not love me:
They burn the likes of me for wizard wiles
and as of poison in a hollow smaragd
of my art die.

(Nabokov 1966: 479)

Thus, the word “seducer” in the final version of the self-translation printed in *Poems and Problems* originates from the 1963 Russian text, where, probably following Nabokov’s passion for alliterations, “боятся люди” of l. 5 spontaneously turned into a more euphonic “не любят люди.” Though *Poems and Problems* contains the 1959 version of the Russian text, first published in 1961 in *Vozdushnye puti*, its self-translation still bears the traces of this textual evolution.

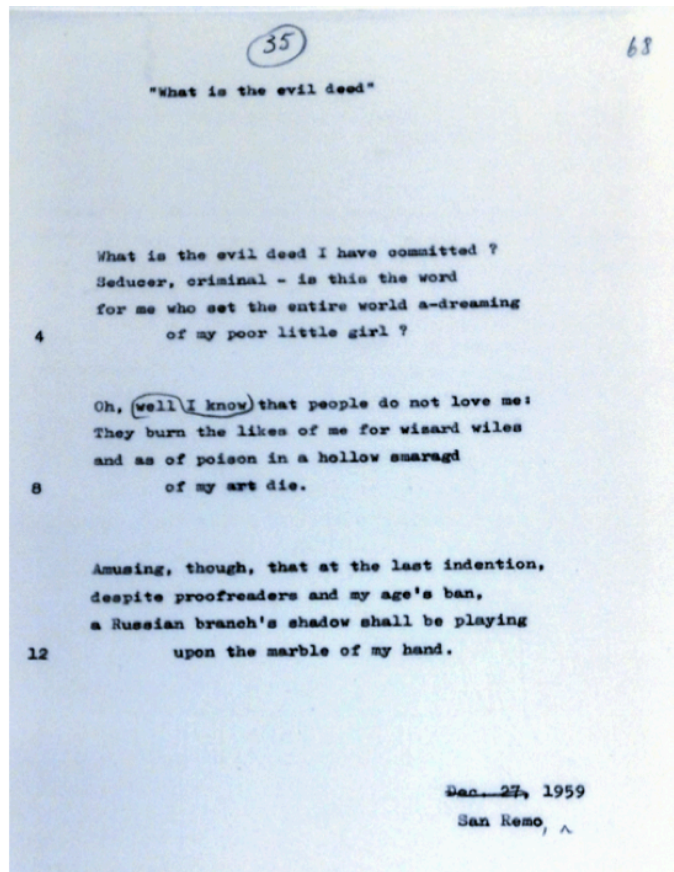
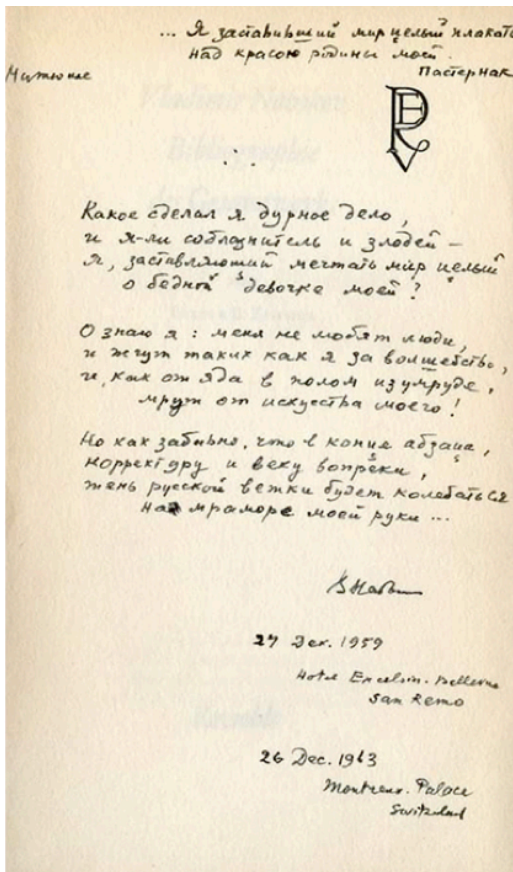


Fig. 4

Manuscript of the 1963 version of “Какое сделал я дурное дело” (left) and the 1969 typescript of “What Is the Evil Deed” (right).

The present section has shown that the English versions of Nabokov’s poems can diverge from the Russian texts both in terms of grammar, where a tendency is towards streamlining, and in terms of vocabulary, where semantic changes seem to have different motivations. The following pages examine the self-translations of *Poems and Problems* in terms of poetic register, specific vocabulary, such as botanical and cultural references, and intertextual elements.

4.4.2 Semantic Precision: Nature, Plants, Butterflies

The examples analyzed so far show that even if many translations tend to be equilinear and faithful, more or less significant lexical divergences, mainly involving the semantic structure of the chosen words, can be observed in English versions of Nabokov’s poems.

There is, however, one lexical category that is always treated with utmost care, regardless of the poem's meter and sound: the names of plants and insects.

Images of nature, especially Russian nature, recur throughout the collection, in “a combination of Russian nostalgia and mementoes of important events in Nabokov's life” (Johnson 1991: 313). With the exception of “The Rain Has Flown,” whose original version was composed prior to emigration, Nabokov's poetry often returns to the poet's native land, the paths of the park in his country estate with its flowers, trees, and butterflies. It is as if the words of his poetry were “an aerial viaduct” (*PP*, 105) that allows the exiled poet to travel back in time and space.

The self-translations render the denotations of these items of flora and fauna with great precision, sometimes even substituting general nouns with the name of a definite species. After the publication of *Poems and Problems*, Nabokov was criticized for excessive accuracy in the naming of plants, which generated — according to the reviewer John Skow — awkwardness in the target text. Writing about “The Rain Has Flown,” Skow observes that

[c]aprifole is a lovely word. If anything it is a shade too lovely, something to be tasted, rolled over the tongue, chewed lightly, savored and then, perhaps, not swallowed but spit discreetly into a tub of clean shavings. But what does it mean? (Skow 1971: 66)

Nabokov replied with a letter printed in *Time* on July 5 1971: “People writing about words should never use dictionaries that ‘come to hand’ (‘an old Webster's,’ or the practically useless Random House compilation)” (*SL*, 490). Combining the precision of a scientist with his rich experience as a bilingual translator, Nabokov went on to explain that

Oldish (1957) unabridged Webster *does* list “caprifole” and this happens to be the only *exact* translation of Russian *zhimolost'* (the *Lonicera* of science), since the usual term honeysuckle is also applied to a number of sweetsmelling plants belonging to other genera (*Banksia*, *Azalea*, etc.). (*SL*, 490)

The poem “Дождь пролетел” / “The Rain Has Flown” does indeed contain a series of very precise references to plants — in addition to “жимолость” / “caprifole,” there are “рябина” (“rowan”), “ивы” (“sallows”), and to birds — “иволги” rendered with semantic

and scientific precision as “golden orioles” (*PP*, 18-19). In this poem, nature is experienced by the young speaker with the full alertness of senses: the smells, the colors, the sounds come together to form a bucolic setting that shapes the speaker’s aesthetic experience. The plants are an integral part of this space, and it is to these specific trees and flowers that the poet will return in his mature work.

If one places the Russian poems of the collection on Nabokov’s biographical timeline, one can see that the poet’s mind begins to wander towards Russia starting with the 1925 poem “Люблю я горы” (“I Like That Mountain”), where the “black pelisse of fir forests,” their “dense needles,” the “peatbog berry showing blue” (“болотная ягода” in Russian) take the poet back to the “tokens, treasured since childhood” of his “northern plain” (*PP*, 34-35). This is only one of the many ways in which the poet attempts to return to Russia: sounds, dreams, daydreams, recollections, imaginary dialogues, and photographs transport him to these images in poems like “Soft Sound,” “Evening on a Vacant Lot,” “How I Love You,” “At Sunset,” “The Poets,” “To Russia,” “Fame,” “The Paris Poem,” “To Prince S. M. Kachurin,” and “From the Gray North.” In many of these texts, trees — or their parts, such as trunks and branches — are particularly prominent. There are birch-trees (“To Prince S. M. Kachurin,” l. 55), the “tremulous macules” their leaves produce in the sun (“To Russia,” l. 19), and the noise of their branches outside a window on a rainy night (“Fame,” l. 71), but also maples, as already observed in the poem “Fame,” and lindens with their summer “fragrance, so heady” (“How I Love You,” l. 3) and their “extravagant greenery” (“The Paris Poem,” l. 131).

In addition to those already mentioned in “The Rain Has Flown,” flowers include “сиреневый цвет,” in English the “lilac bloom, the pale darling” evoked as an attribute of the speaker’s early verse in “Evening on a Vacant Lot” (l. 43, *PP*, 70-71). Two different kinds of flowers are set in an “овраг,” a ravine. In “Irregular Iambics” the word “овраг” is euphonicly rendered as “gully” so as to echo the name of the flower that blooms in the poem’s closing lines, a “lily” (“если б не лилия в овраге / если б не близкая гроза”; in

English: “had not the gully held its lily / had not the thunderstorm drawn near,” *PP*, 144-45). In another poem, “The Execution,” the speaker travels to Russia in his dream and is led to a “ravine” to be executed: here too the poem closes on the image of an “овпар” – “Россия, звезды, ночь расстрела / и весь в черемухе овпар” (*PP*, 46) rendered in English as “Russia, the stars, the night of execution / and full of racemosas the ravine!” (*PP*, 47) In this poem, Nabokov makes use of his own vocabulary coined for the translation of *Eugene Onegin*; to the English version of “Расстрел” he adds a meta-translatory note that briefly explains this peculiar semantic choice: “‘Racemosa’ is the name I use for the Russian *cheryomuha*, the ‘racemose old-world bird cherry,’ *Padus racemosa* Schneider (see my commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, vol. 3, p. 11)” (*PP*, 47). Hence, in this text, the translation of “черемуха” establishes a moment of semantic continuity between Nabokov’s self-translations and his translations of other poets, a common lexical space between his *Eugene Onegin* and his own Russian poetry in English.

In a section of his essay “The Servile Path” devoted to the “Problems of Flora,” Nabokov lamented that his students were unable to identify the names of trees outside the classroom windows: “some hesitantly suggested it might be an oak, others were silent; one, a girl, said she guessed it was a shade tree. The translator, when tackling botanical names in his author, should try to be more precise” (2013: 103). One could interpret this particular “botanical” precision as a part of Nabokov’s “literalist” method. However, this attention to plants’ nomenclature had already manifested itself in Nabokov’s early non-literal translations. A good example can be found in his 1944 English version of Pushkin’s “Анчар” (1828), which Nabokov entitled “The Upas Tree (*Antiaris toxicaria*, Lesch. 1810).” As Shvabrin explains, “Nabokov made the actual plant’s taxonomical Latin name part of the title – along with a reference to the author of its original scientific description, Jean-Baptiste Leschenault de La Tour (1773–1826)” (2019: 211). The botanical precision of this title showcases the translator’s scientific attention to the poisonous tree, whose image

lies at the heart of Pushkin's allegoric poem about the dangerous outcomes of absolute power.

Similarly, the names of the insects that inhabit Nabokov's poems are retained with fidelity and care in the English translations, with a tendency towards specification. As seen above, the trilling of cicadas in "Provence" can almost be heard by the reader of both onomatopoeic versions of the poem. In "At Sunset" the colloquial form "майский жук," which perfectly corresponds to the English "Maybug," is rendered with the more scientific form "chafer" (*PP*, 86-87). Moreover, in "How I Love You," "бабочка," a general butterfly, becomes a more specific "geometrid" moth on a "lichened trunk":

Ужель нельзя там притулиться
и нет там темного угла,
где темнота могла бы слиться
с иероглифами крыла?

Так бабочка не шевелится
пластом на плесени ствола. (*PP*, 80-82)

I wonder, is there nowhere a place there,
to lie low—some dark nook
where the darkness might merge
with a wing's cryptic markings?

(A geometrid thus does not stir
spread flat on a lichened trunk.) (*PP*, 79-81)

Here several changes have occurred. The "hieroglyph," which implies the presence of a language, a text that can be interpreted (the Egyptian hieroglyphs had already been deciphered), becomes "cryptic markings" in English, perhaps a less poetic, but more scientific and even enigmatic definition of a butterfly's pattern on wings. The image of the butterfly on a trunk is now enclosed in brackets, which disrupt the regular flow of the poetic narration and may seem to be uttered in the narrator's current voice, as opposite to the monologue directed by the speaker to his double, "my mad one, my mad one!" (*PP*, 79).

The image of the Geometrid moth sleeping on a tree trunk echoes the closing lines of Fyodor's poem about butterflies: "I shall not fail, though, to detect / The four lovely gauze wings / Of the softest Geometrid moth in the world / Spread flat on a mottled pale birch trunk" (*G*, 36). Hence, it is possible to assume that the same image or memory may have found its reflection in three poetic compositions: in Fyodor's collection about childhood, where the English version translates with scientific precision the Russian "пяденица," in

Nabokov's own 1935 Russian poem, and, finally and more vividly in its English self-translation.

In *The Gift*, a similar butterfly appears in a fictional scientific article, entitled “*Austautia simonoides* n. sp., a Geometrid Moth Mimicking a Small Parnassius” (*G*, 115). The name of the species is invented; the title of the article has been proved by Dieter Zimmer to be scientifically absurd (2001: 111-12). Dolinin saw in this scientific joke an allusion to the underlying mimicry of its purported author (the master “Geometer”), who pretends to be a “Parnassian” of a different genus (2019 173).

Apollo butterflies, whose scientific genus is *Parnassius*, recur in Nabokov's oeuvre. In *Poems and Problems* a missed “Apollo” is evoked in the lines devoted to the speaker's childhood in “Fame” (*PP*, 104-105). The *Parnassius mnemosyne* appears both in *Speak, Memory*¹⁷⁵ and *Dar*. In the novel, its common name “Black Apollo” is mentioned in the episode where Fyodor's father recites Pushkin's poem (see section 3.2.2.3, *G*, 110). Here, the narrator puns on the twofold meaning of the word “Apollo,” a Greek god and a species of butterflies, but the *Parnissius mnemosyne* also participates in wordplay with Zina's name, when Fyodor addresses Zina as “half-Mnemosyne” in his longest poem (see also Dolinin's comments 2019: 168).

Given Nabokov's profound knowledge of the scientific denominations of butterflies, and his taste for punning with them, one may assume that the bizarre expression “парнасский самодержец”¹⁷⁶ (*PP*, 74) used in the 1933 poem “Безумец” (“The Madman”) to introduce its main character — a mad poet-king — may have been inspired by the scientific name of a particular Apollo butterfly, the *Parnassius autocrator*. This butterfly

¹⁷⁵ The butterfly is recalled in relation to the story of Polenka, the coachman's daughter with whom young Nabokov had an “ocular relationship”: “One June day, the year when she and I were both thirteen, on the banks of the Oredezh, I was engaged in collecting some so-called Parnassians—*Parnassius mnemosyne*, to be exact — strange butterflies of ancient lineage, with rustling, glazed, semitransparent wings and catkin-like flossy abdomens” (*SM*, 210-11).

¹⁷⁶ “В миру фотограф уличный, теперь же / царь и поэт, парнасский самодержец / (который год сидящий взаперти)” (*PP*, 74).

was discovered in Central Asia in 1911 by Andrey Avinoff, who named it “autocrator” to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Romanoff house. The famous entomologist, whose surname appears in *Dar*, would later become an acquaintance and associate of Nabokov’s at the Carnegie Museum. The possibility that the source of inspiration behind this line comes from the *Parnassius autocrator* becomes especially visible in the English translation of the poem, where the madman is defined a “Parnassian autocrat”: “A street photographer in laic life, / now poet, king, Parnassian autocrat / (since quite a time kept under lock and key)” (*PP*, 75).

While the natural environment characteristic of his native land prevails in Nabokov’s Russian poems, some texts are devoted to the depiction of the nature of other lands, to landscapes where the exiled poet wanders but never really feels at home. As Nabokov pointed out in his early essay on Cambridge, a foreign natural environment leaves the observer indifferent because he has not devoted enough time to it, has not dwelled in it, and, therefore, does not yet love it:

One needs to gaze at it persistently to begin to feel it and love it, whereas at first something of the greenhouse wafts from the unfamiliar trees, and all the birds seem as if on springs, and the sunset looks no better than a rather dry watercolor. (*TWS*, 3)

In *Poems and Problems*, the agenda of poems devoted to foreign nature seems to be, ultimately, to analyze the poet’s connection with his native land. In “Provence,” the speaker tries to immerse himself in the foreign sounds of southern France but still feels Russian: “what bliss / To be a Russian poet lost among / Cicadas trilling with a Latin lisp!” (*PP*, 27). In “I Like That Mountain” the alpine nature reminds the speaker of Russia, and he wonders: “Shall we not climb thus / The slopes of paradise, at the hour of death, / Meeting all the loved things / That in life elevated us?” (*PP*, 35). In this poem, a metaphoric parallelism between exile and death is established. This metaphoric nostalgia for one’s native land affects also Nabokov’s visions of the otherworld, which, no matter how paradisiac (“The Paradise”) or “omnipotent” (“Oculus”) it may seem, will always be foreign and lack the earthly familiar things, landscapes and plants. Thus, in “The Paradise,” the

speaker imagines his soul “beyond distant death” as a provincial naturalist who meets a strange “wild angel,” a “semi-pavonian creature” (*PP*, 45). After an initial wave of excitement, however, the naturalist bursts into tears because he cannot share his discovery with the scientific community in an academic journal or a museum. Similarly, in “Fame,” the émigré writer fears that people will not read his works blooming on a solitary branch, whereas the works of the official Soviet authors have “a place where to fall,” the Russian soil (*PP*, 107).

Taxonomical precision with regard to plants and insects is thus both a characteristic of Nabokov’s poetic style¹⁷⁷ and a constant trait of his work as a translator and self-translator of poetry. In the examples analyzed in this section, the English texts not only faithfully retain the precise references to plants and insects but also tend to introduce more scientific terminology. However, this particular semantic category goes beyond the evolution of Nabokov’s development in the field of translation, and should be appreciated for itself as well as for its function in the poetic expression of the theme of exile.

4.4.3 Translation of Archaisms

“No Matter How” contains one of the few instances of omission that can be found in *Poems and Problems*, the loss of the archaic name of Russia, *Rus’*. While complete omission of lexical items is indeed unusual in Nabokov’s self-translations, semantic generalization of archaic forms of Russian words occurs more frequently.

In terms of vocabulary and register, Nabokov’s Russian poems contain a layer of archaic or obsolete words that contribute to elevating the poem’s tone. For instance, there is category of obsolete words that indicate body parts: brow, neck, finger, eye... These

¹⁷⁷ References to precise butterflies can be found in the English section of *Poems and Problems* too. In the poem “Emerald,” a common Peacock moth makes an appearance (*PP*, 171), but even its title, according to Zimmer, may be a reference to an entry in *Geometra Papilionaria* (see the e-guide on Nabokov’s butterfly, <http://www.dezimmer.net/eGuide/Lep2.1-F-K.htm>, accessed September 15, 2020).

nouns are hardly ever used in spoken language (or even in literary prose), but are rather common features of the Russian poetic register.

However, the English translations of Nabokov's poems do not render these lexical items with comparable obsolete or elevated diction in the target language. The second poem in the collection, "К Свободе," contains a poetic synonym of "brow," "чело." This word is in tune with the emotional pathos of the poem, a text that expresses the frustrated disenchantment of the Russian *intelligentsia* after the revolution had turned out to be a disaster. The poem is centered around a personification of Liberty as an angel with a broken wing, whom the speaker addresses through an apostrophe: "Ты медленно бредешь по улицам бессонным / на горестном челе нет прежнего луча / зовущего к любви и высям озаренным" (*PP*, 20). The translation of these lines renders the poetic "чело" with the synecdoche "brow": "Slowly you wander through the sleepless streets / From your sad brow gone is the former ray, / that called us toward love and shining heights" (*PP*, 21). In this particular poem, however, the loss of an elevated word does not impact the target text's atmosphere significantly: its inverted word order and its blank verse, which in the English poetic tradition is reserved for elevated subject matter, maintain the solemn tone of the original. Moreover, in the lines that follow, there is an opposite kind of lexical substitution: a general word is substituted by a more specific poetic synonym in English: in ll. 4-5 ("В одной руке дрожит потухшая свеча. / Крыло подбитое по трупам волоча," *PP*, 20) the noun "свеча" (candle) is substituted by "taper" ("Your trembling hand holds an extinguished taper. / Dragging your broken wing over dead men," *PP*, 21). On the one hand, "taper" fits the poem's euphony and adds to the repetition of "t" in "trembling" and "extinguished." On the other, this word intensifies the expressive power of the image: according to the OED, in early times tapers were "used chiefly for devotional or penitential purposes," while to the modern ear the word conveys a feeling of a fragile and feeble light. Moreover, the religious connotations of this word suit the solemn tone of the original poem and its central theme.

If in “To Liberty,” the use of the noun “taper” compensates for the loss of the archaic register in “brow,” elsewhere elements of Russian elevated or poetic vocabulary are given up. In the opening stanzas of “The Paris Poem,” the Russian expression “ужасные выи” is translated as “ghastly necks.” “Выя” is an obsolete and poetic synonym of neck, which can hardly be rendered with a single word in English, since even the King James Bible has “stiffnecked people” for the Russian “жестоковыйный” (Exodus 32:9). In the second line of the Russian version of “Irregular Iambics,” the poetic image of the wind passing between the olive’s branches is elegantly conveyed with the help of an obsolete synonym of “пальцы” (fingers) in the expression “воздушными перстами” (*PP*, 144). In English, the corresponding line is more prosaic and slightly bizarre – “For the last time, with leaves that flow / between the fingers of the air” (*PP*, 145) – as opposed to the Russian text, where the poetic word “перстами” evokes Pushkin’s and Lermontov’s verse.

A series of archaic words revolves around the semantic field of eyes and vision. The noun “очи,” plural of “око,” is a typical poetic synonym of eyes, but — with the exception of the poem “Око,” where the eye is a metaphysical “colossal oculus,” in *Poems and Problems* “очи” is simply rendered as “eyes” (e.g., in “The Poets,” *PP*, 92-93, and “On Rulers,” *PP*, 130-31). Moreover, in “The Snapshot” the noun “соглядатай,” a bookish word indicating someone who observes other people in secret, is rendered as “spy.” This may be the most literal English substitute that Nabokov was able to find for the peculiar Russian word: in the foreword to his Russian novel with the same title, Nabokov explains that “соглядатай” is “an ancient military term meaning ‘spy’ or ‘watcher’” (*Eye*, i). However, he confesses that neither of these words “extends as flexibly as the Russian word. After toying with ‘emissary’ and ‘gladiator,’ I gave up trying to blend sound and sense, and contented myself with matching the ‘eye’ at the end of the long stalk” (*ibid.*). In his poem, Nabokov chose the word “spy,” a more faithful rendition that, at the same time, mimics the [ai] sound of the original. Yet, the archaic touch of the Russian word is left behind.

Another example of an archaism can be found in the fourth stanza of “К кн. С. М.

Качурину”:

Но спит, на канапе устроясь,
коленки приложив к стене
и завернувшись в плед по пояс,
толмач, приставленный ко мне. (PP, 134)

But *he* sleeps (curled up on a canapé,
knees snugly pressed to the wall,
in a plaid rug wrapped up to the waist)
—the interpreter I’ve been assigned. (PP, 135)

In this quatrain, which, aided by the introduction of parentheses, faithfully calques the Russian syntax, two alterations on the level of content can be observed. The addition of the adverb “snugly” adds a specification to the image of the sleeping person, whose untroubled comfort clashes with the speaker’s restless insomnia. Moreover, in the Russian l.4 there is an obsolete Slavic word, “толмач,” once used for interpreters at important diplomatic negotiations.¹⁷⁸ This peculiar semantic choice ultimately expresses the speaker’s bitter irony: a Russian émigré disguised as an American needs no interpreter in the Soviet Union. This “interpreter” is actually an agent who deprives the speaker of his freedom. In English, however, the more neutral “interpreter” weakens the speaker’s sarcasm.

The poem “Герб” (“The Blazon”) contains the noun “стремнина” (PP, 30), which in spoken language denotes a rapid stream, but in poetic vocabulary indicates an abyss or a steep rocky cliff. In the description of Tatiana’s dream (“Дороги нет; кусты, стремнины / Мятелью все занесены,” Pushkin 1950, V: 105), Nabokov translated this word as “precipice” (EO, 209). In *Poems and Problems*, however, he opted for a more geological register by choosing the word “chasm,” that conveys the idea of an abyss, and, in the metaphorical sense of this term, an unbridgeable rupture between the speaker and his native land:

Лишь отошла земля родная,
в соленой тьмедохнул норд-ост,
как меч алмазный, обнажая
среди облаков стремнину звезд. (PP, 30)

As soon as my native land had receded
In the briny dark the northeaster stuck,
Like a sword of diamond revealing
Among the clouds a chasm of stars. (PP, 31)

¹⁷⁸ In Ozhegov’s dictionary “Толмач” is defined as an oral translator of a conversation or an interpreter at negotiations.

Many of Russian archaic or literary variants of common modern words (such as “перст” or “толмач”) do not have direct semantic analogues in the target language. Yet, in the translation of *Eugene Onegin* Nabokov displayed a special attention to the register and the etymology of Pushkin’s vocabulary, trying to retain the presence of Gallicisms and obsolete Russian forms in his translation.

This problem is raised in the commentary to Ch. 6, when the translator wonders: “Should obsolete or otherwise unusual forms of Russian be rendered by unusual forms of English?” (*EO*, III: 63). The reflection is prompted by the archaic word “младость,” which is “молодость” (youth) in modern usage. These short forms, associated with poetic immaturity at the end of Nabokov’s short story “Torpid Smoke,” were quite commonplace in the poetry of Pushkin’s time: in Ch 6, stanza XLIV, Pushkin jokes about the trite rhyme between the archaic “младость” and the modern “сладость” (sweetness) in the lines “Мечты, мечты! Где ваша сладость? / Где вечная к ней рифма ‘младость’?” (Pushkin 1950, V: 138, in Nabokov’s rendition: “Dreams, dreams! Where is your dulcitude? Where is (its stock rhyme) juventude?” *EO R*, 247). In a note to these lines, Nabokov confesses that he could not resist the temptation of rendering these obsolete forms as “dulcitude” and “juventude,” despite the fact that this rhyme never “cropped up commonly in English poetry as *sladost’ – mladost’* did in Pushkin’s day” (*EO*, III: 63). He therefore admits that it “might have been wiser to render the terminals as “sweetness” and “youth” and explain the situation in a note” (*ibid.*).

Nabokov’s attention to the subtleties of Pushkin’s language and its game of registers sometimes cost him criticism and sarcastic comments. In Brian Boyd’s view, “[o]ne of the great strengths of Nabokov’s commentary is his alertness to pre-Pushkinian intonations in French and English poetry of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.” However, Boyd acknowledges that sometimes Nabokov placed into the text of the translation “an association that would have been better confined to the commentary” (1991: 330). Dolinin agrees that the result of these semantic efforts was often that Nabokov “overplayed the

strangeness of the original word and, as a result, turned a stylistic nuance into a loud splash” (1995: 120).

The translations made for *Poems and Problems* show that as a self-translator of poetry Nabokov drew from his experience with *Eugene Onegin*. However, the lexical stratum of archaic words was managed without the scholarly precision that characterized his rendition of Pushkin’s novel in verse. With his own poetry, Nabokov’s approach to the translation of elevated vocabulary is more reminiscent of his pre-literalist period, when he produced paraphrased poetic translations: for instance, in his version of Lermontov’s “The Dream,” the archaic form “младая” (“И в грустный сон душа ее младая / Бог знает чем была погружена,” Lermontov 2014: 349) is rendered with the general modern English adjective “young”: “and there alone, God knows what made her heart, her young heart / dream of such a hidden thing” (*PLT*, 42). Seen in this perspective, the English versions of Nabokov’s own poems appear as texts that are intended to be read rather than studied under a microscope.

4.4.4 Cultural Differences and Self-translation: Objects, Feelings, Literature

Culturally specific elements have always represented a challenge for translators and often became central parameters in the history of academic studies of translation. The Russian poems included in *Poems and Problems* contain some lexical items that represent everyday objects or abstract concepts that are unique to Russian language and culture. Furthermore, they often contain allusions to and quotations from Russian authors whom Nabokov admired, as well as parodies of poets whose work he appreciated less.

The English poems do not display a uniform approach to the translation of these challenging details, and, apart from rare cases when a Russian word is directly transliterated within the text, three main translation strategies can be observed: short

paraphrase or addition of explanatory words directly within the text; substitution with analogues that are understandable in the target language; clarifying explanation in the notes attached to the translation.

As far as elements of Russian culture and everyday life are concerned, the translation strategy can vary according to the characteristics of the single poem, or even of the single line – as when the Russian unit *versta* was converted into miles in the translation of “К кн. С. М. Качурину” (PP, 136-37). While this may appear as an instance of domesticating approach to translation, in the very same poem a reference to a Russian four-seat carriage, the *tarantass*, was not substituted with an English word. When the speaker imagines how he would “to go off to the country” (PP, 137), leaving the “interpreter” and Petersburg behind, he describes a “фартук тарантасный / в дрожащих ручейках,” (PP, 138) rendered in English as “the tarantass with its leathern lap cover / crossed by trembling trickles” (PP, 139). Here Nabokov maintained the Russian name of the carriage, and even explained, within the same line, the term “фартук” (usually meaning “apron”) so as to render the features of this part of a *tarantass*.

Another example of bringing the foreign details of the source text closer to the target reader can be found in “Fame,” in the quatrain devoted to the image of the Soviet writer who refuses to emigrate and accepts to coexist with the regime:

И виденье: на родине. Мастер. Надменность.
Непреклонность. Но тронуть не смеют. Порой
перевод иль отрывок. Поклонники. Ценность
европейская. Дача в Алуште. Герой.
(PP, 108)

And a vision: you are in your country. Great writer.
Proud. Unyielding. But no one dares touch you. At times,
A translation or fragment. Admirers. All Europe
Esteems you. A villa near Yalta. A hero.
(PP, 109)

In this passage, an element of Russian lifestyle, the summer house *dacha* (perhaps a less exotic word than *tarantass*) appears domesticated into a more international “villa.” Moreover, the city of Alushta was replaced by a more vague geographical indication, “near Yalta,” which does not exactly “domesticate” the passage but certainly aids the American

reader. Yalta is indeed a more famous city of the Crimean peninsula, stage of the 1945 conference and a recurrent setting in Russian literary works.

In other cases, words that describe Russian things or untranslatable concepts are paraphrased with the use of English words directly within the text. For instance, in the poem “Снег,” there are references to Russian everyday objects that normally accompany a Russian child’s winter:

О, этот звук! По снегу —
скрип, скрип, скрип —
в валенках кто-то идет.

[...]

Салазки сзади не тащатся —
сами бегут, в пятки бьют.
(PP, 62)

Oh, that sound! Across snow—
creak, creak, creak:
somebody walking in long boots of felt.

[...]

My hand sled behind me, far from dragging,
seems to run by itself: it knocks at my heels.
(PP, 63)

The poem mentions *valenki*, Russian winter boots made of wool felt, and *salazki*, a special kind of sled that was used by children to ride down icy slopes (although, in contemporary Russian, this is perceived as a somewhat old-fashioned word, generally replaced by *sanki*, the diminutive of *sani*, sled). Conveying the exact meaning of these Russian objects, Nabokov extended the lines’ length in order to paraphrase *valenki* as “long boots of felt.” The noun *salazki* was rendered as “hand sled,” so as to avoid the semantic ambiguity with *sani*, the large sled that was used as a means of transportation in winter. A similar method can be observed in the translation of some typically Russian abstract concepts, such as *toskà* and *néga* in the Russian versions of the poems “The Blazon” and “Fame.”

In his practice as a poetry translator, Nabokov already had to deal with the untranslatability of *toska*. The word *toska* recurs in *Eugene Onegin* and is defined in Dal’s dictionary as “oppression of the spirit, yearning of the soul, agonizing sadness.” In Chapter 1 of *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov rendered this noun with “ache”: Pushkin’s line “опять тоска, опять любовь” (Pushkin 1950, V: 24) became “again the ache, again the love!” (*EO R*, 110).

The translation is accompanied with a note, where the commentator analyzes the concept of *toska* and explains what he left behind by choosing the short word “ache”:

8 / the ache / *toskà*: No single word in English renders all the shades of *toska*. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. In particular cases it may be the desire for somebody or something specific, nostalgia, lovesickness. At the lowest level it grades into ennui, boredom, *skuka*. The adjective *toskliviy* is translatable as “dismal,” “dreary.” (*EO*, II: 141)

Toska belongs to what Nabokov described as “the vocabulary of ennui” (*EO*, II: 156), which includes also *skuka* (boredom) and *khandra* (another untranslatable noun, often used as a more colloquial synonym of *toska*). In another context, in the description of Tatiana’s infatuation with Onegin, *toska* is translated with the use of a different word, “anguish”:

Давно её воображенье,
Сгорая негой и тоской,
Алкало пищи роковой;
Давно сердечное томленье
Теснило ей младую грудь;
Душа ждала... кого-нибудь
(Pushkin 1950, V: 58)

Long since had her imagination, consumed
with mollitude and yearning, craved for the
fatal food;
long since had the heart's languishment
constrained her youthful bosom;
her soul waited – for somebody.
(*EO R*, 152)

In this passage, the noun “anguish” captures the young heroine’s emotional torment, coupled oxymoronically with a word that usually has positive connotations, *nega*, and anticipating *tomlen’e*, another “Russian” state, here rendered as “languishment,” thus highlighting its similarity with *toska*. A note to this passage explains the meaning of *nega*, another near-lapidary concept: according to Nabokov, both *nega* and *toska*

belong to the vaguely evocative type of romantic locution, so frequent in *EO* and so difficult to render by exact English words. *Nega* ranges from “mollitude” (Fr. *mollesse*), i.e. soft luxuriousness, “dulcitude,” through various shades of amorous pensiveness, *douce paresse*, and sensual tenderness to outright voluptuousness (Fr. *volupté*.)” (*EO*, II: 337)

Both in this note and in a previous one,¹⁷⁹ Nabokov underscores the connection between Pushkin's poetic language and French poetry. His preference for the rendition of *nega* as "mollitude" (alternatives include "voluptuousness" and "dulcitude") is therefore aimed at recreating the French atmosphere of the original; he sacrifices readability, as in his approach to Pushkin's archaic register. However, these excesses in Nabokov's fidelity were not always successful: as Brian Boyd points out, mollitude is not an efficient rendition of *nega*, since the Russian word had already lost its foreign sound by the time Pushkin's audience was reading *Eugene Onegin* (1991: 333).¹⁸⁰

Regardless of the different synonyms that Nabokov used to describe the same Russian concepts, his strategy appears mainly coherent: he attempts to capture an untranslatable concept with a single English word, and supports his translation — inevitably incomplete — with an explanation in the commentary. According to Boyd, this is a manifestation of Nabokov's intention to maintain "Absolute fidelity," which "presupposes that a perfect one-to-one correspondence can be found between the words of the Russian original and the available lexicon of English, when no such match is often possible" (1991: 331). What really helps Nabokov in *Eugene Onegin* is the space provided by the commentary, where he discusses the word's etymology and use, but also provides additional paraphrase and synonyms that complement the translation.

In his pre-literalist period, Nabokov faced the problem of untranslatable concepts in a different way. He interpreted and paraphrased the whole passage, trying to recreate the general atmosphere and mood of the original. For instance, in the translation of Tyutchev's "Сумерки" (1835), the lines "Мотылька полет незримый / Слышен в воздухе ночном..."

¹⁷⁹ "In using *nega*, Pushkin and his constellation were trying to render the French poetical formulas *paraisse volupteuse*, *mollesse*, *molles delices*, etc., which the English Arcadians had already turned into 'soft delights'" (*EO*, II: 186).

¹⁸⁰ "Nabokov's desire to record within the translation Gallic overtones as well as the primary Russian tone can distort his literalism by turning a plain Russian word into an English freak. He repeatedly translates *nega* ('pure comfort' grading into 'sweet bliss'), a favorite among Russian Romantic poets, short and easily rhymed, into the archaic 'mollitude'" (Boyd 1991: 333).

/ Час тоски невыразимой!.. / Всё во мне, и я во всем!” (Tyutchev 2002: 159) were rendered as “In the dusk I hear the humming / of a moth I cannot see. / Whence is this oppression coming? / I’m in all, and all’s in me” (*PLT*, 53).

Here, “oppression” not only fits the target text’s meter and euphony, but also reflects the speaker’s feeling of agitation and anticipates the “obliteration” that comes at the end of the poem. However, what really helps Nabokov to attain a good correspondence with the original is an efficient paraphrase: the transformation of the exclamation “час тоски невыразимый!” into a question directed at no one in particular: “Whence is this oppression coming?” captures precisely the nature of *toska*, a state that often overwhelms one unexpectedly and, apparently, without a reason.

In his self-translations, Nabokov approaches the rendition of these same words in a third way. In *Poems and Problems*, both *nega* and *toska* are rendered in English by combining two words, a noun and an adjective, that help to enclose the concept within the compact space of a poetic line. Thus, in the 1925 poem “The Blazon” *toska* becomes “yearning ache”:

Мою тоску, воспоминанья
клянусь я царственно беречь
с тех пор, как принял герб изгнанья:
на черном поле звездный меч. (*PP*, 30)

My yearning ache, my recollections
I swear to preserve with royal care
Ever since I adopted the blazon of exile:
On a field of sable a starry sword. (*PP*, 31)

The nostalgic state of *toska* is often paired with *rodina*, native land. The poem evokes a crucial moment, when the poet is bidding farewell to Russia while leaving Sevastopol on a steamer (in April 1919). Thus, *toska* is not a purely negative emotion here but rather something that the speaker swears to “preserve with royal care.” This painful but precious melancholy is a tribute to the poet’s youth — hence the adjective “yearning,” that denotes both a desire and the speaker’s future longing for his native land.

The translation is not accompanied by any note, which denies the target reader the opportunity to discover the many shades of *toska*, or, perhaps, even relies on the reader’s knowledge of Nabokov’s *Eugene Onegin*. At the same time, within the space of the target

text, Nabokov abandons the attempt to render this broad abstract concept by means of a single English word.

Similarly, *nega* is translated with the help of two words in the second quatrain of “To the Muse”:

Я помню твой приход: растущий звон,
волнение, неведомое миру.
Луна сквозь ветки тронула балкон,
и пала тень, похожая на лиру.

Мне, юному, для неги плеч твоих
казался ямб одеждой слишком грубой.
Но был певуч неправильный мой стих
и улыбался рифмой краснотубой.
(PP, 56)

Your coming I recall: a growing vibrance,
an agitation to the world unknown.
The moon through branches touched the balcony
and there a shadow, lyriform, was thrown.

To me, a youth, the iamb seemed a garb
too rude for the soft languor of your shoulders;
but my imperfect line had tunefulness
and with the red lips of its rhyme it smiled.
(PP, 57)

The speaker of this poem addresses the muse through an apostrophe: in the opening lines she is but a sound or a shadow, while in the second quatrain she materializes and acquires a metaphoric human body, with shoulders that the poet is eager to cover with the texture of his verse. Here, the speaker confesses that he rejected the iamb — “a garb too rude” for the *nega*, the “soft languor,” of the Muse’s shoulders. In this poem, the word *nega* is therefore used to portray feminine tender shoulders, but also to describe metonymically the muse’s traditionally capricious relationship with the poet. All these shades of meaning are contained in the Russian *nega*, which denotes both a lavish “state of complete contentment” (Dal’s definition) and a “passionate *tomlenie*” (Ozhegov’s dictionary). Nabokov’s rendition of this word as “soft languor” captures the passive melancholy that sometimes accompanies the absolute comfort of *nega*.

In both these examples, the translator reached a compromise between the strategies he previously used to render in English these important but untranslatable Russian poetic words. Nabokov did not paraphrase the whole passage, but neither did he add explanatory notes to the translation. Instead, he tried to capture with the help of two rather brief words the atmosphere of the original directly within the English text, leaving the monolingual

American reader unaware of the existence of these cultural categories. Ultimately, readability prevails over elucidation of the Russian source and its cultural specificity.

As far as intertextual elements are concerned, the strategy of *Poems and Problems* differs considerably from the approach observed in the self-translations of poetry embedded in *Dar*. In the collection of his own poetry, Nabokov takes full advantage of the space provided by the notes to highlight and explain references to Russian literature.

Intertextuality can be seen as language within language, a code that must be shared by the sender of the message and its recipient. Translation of intertextual references is therefore a matter of decisions to be made by the translator: he or she must decide what allusions can be taken for granted and what needs to be decoded due to excessive specificity or importance for the overall text.

In *Poems and Problems*, one can observe various types of literary references, from basic mentions of famous poets, to specific allusions and hidden quotations from Russian poetry. In “Тихий шум” (“Soft Sound”), for instance, Pushkin’s verse is heard by the speaker through the sound of the seawaves and becomes a synecdoche for Russian literature and Russian language: “Therein blend all the shades of voices / so dear, so quickly interrupted / and melodies of Pushkin’s verse / and sighs of a remembered pine wood” (*PP*, 61). The logical steps from Pushkin to Russian language are taken spontaneously by the reader of the source text, perhaps less so by the American reader. Yet, the self-translator — at this level — relies on the target reader’s knowledge of the basics of Russian literary culture and does not provide the poem with an explanatory note.

Another mention of Pushkin is a little more complex: in the 1931 poem “Неоконченный черновик” (“An Unfinished Draft”) the expression “пушкинские весы” (“Pushkin’s scale,” *PP* 66-67) becomes a metaphoric touchstone of true poetry in the context of a literary conflict. The average American reader would be unaware of the existence of Georgy Ivanov and Georgy Adamovich hinted at in the poem, as well as of

their criticism of Pushkin. However, if target readers know that Pushkin can be an epitome of ethics and artistic genius for any Russian poet, they can interpret the English version of the poem in a more abstract way, as an invective against poets who “deal” with their art in order to pursue glory and money. This interpretation, less historic and more universal, may explain why such Russian abstract nouns as “печаль” and “прекрасное” are written in English with a capital letter, “Dejection” and “Beauty” (ibid.).

Nabokov could have added a note to the translation, so as to explain the story of the literary conflict that took place in the Russian émigré circles (see pp. 238-40 above). Yet, its absence may speak for the self-translator’s satisfaction with a less specific but not uninteresting interpretive level of this poem. In 1970, when *Poems and Problems* was published, an ironic barb against two Russian émigré authors had already become history; by contrast, satiric criticism of experimental and utilitarian poetry is timeless, as well as the speaker’s appreciation of Pushkin’s verse, highlighted by the use of iambic tetrameter in both versions of the poem.

Some other translations in the collection are accompanied by notes that clarify and thus help to preserve intertextual elements. For instance, the poem “Слава” / “Fame” contains a reference to Gogol’s character Akakiy Akakievich:

Есть вещи, вещи,
которые... даже... (Акакий Акакиевич
любил, если помните, «плевелы речи»,
и он, как Наречье, мой гость восковой)
(*PP*, 102)

There are matters, matters,
which, so to speak, even ... (Akakiy Akakievich
had a weakness, if you remember, for “weed words,”
and he’s like an Adverb, my waxy guest)
(*PP*, 103)

The protagonist of Gogol’s “The Overcoat” (1844) is evoked in the description of the poet’s frightening double, whom Nabokov described as a “sort of devil, resemblant to a waxy figure” (SK, 86). His speech is fragmentary and bumpy, reminiscent of Akakiy Akakievich, who spoke in prepositions, adverbs, and meaningless bits of phrases. In the

poem, this idiolect is described with a reference to the New Testament parable of weeds among the wheat.¹⁸¹

In his lecture on Gogol's "The Overcoat," Nabokov explains that Akakiy Akakievich, with his disjointed speech, his tiptoeing and virtual invisibility at work, was more ghostly when he was alive, and more human after his death, when St. Petersburg finally noticed him, and his speech became articulate (*LRL*, 59). Similarly, the weird figure in "Fame" is an eerie Doppelgänger who "tempts a free poet with various material rewards" (*SK*, 86). To truly understand this connection, the target reader must be acquainted with Gogol's short story, and so Nabokov provides basic information about it in a note to the translation:

Line 12/ *Akakiy Akakievich*. The hero of Gogol's *Shinel'* (The Carrick) whose speech was interspersed with more or less meaningless accessory words. (*PP*, 113)

In this note, the translator reveals the source of a bizarre name, without, however, unfolding the whole meaning of the intertextual reference: he gives the target reader a lead to explore the connection between Nabokov's poem and Gogol's text. One may notice here the strange translation of the Russian word "шинель" as "carrick," a word that Nabokov had previously used in his *Lectures on Literature* (*LL*, 251). This term is so unusual that even the OED has no entry on "carrick" as a synonym for "overcoat," but "carrick" can be found in more specific sources. In *Lectures on Russian Literature*, Nabokov defines *shinel'* as a "deep-caped, ample-sleeved furred carrick", and, in the commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, he adds that carrick is "the English homecoming from France of une karrick (derived from Garrick - the English actor David Garrick, 1717-79)" (*EO*, II: 70-71). Thus, as in the case of *racemosa* in "The Execution," the word "carrick" creates a point of contact between Nabokov's work as a translator of Russian literature and the translation of his own poetry.

¹⁸¹ In the Russian original there is the middle rhyme between "речи" and "наречие"; in the translation there is a "w" alliteration in "weakness," "weed words," and "waxy."

The poem “Fame” also contains a veiled allusion to Pushkin’s 1836 “Exegi Monumentum” in ll. 75-76:

Нет, никто никогда на просторе великом
ни одной не помянет страницы твоей:
ныне дикий пребудет в неведение диком,
друг степей для тебя не забудет степей.
(*PP*, 108)

No, never will anyone in the great spaces
make mention of even one page of your work;
the now savage will dwell in his savage ignorance,
friends of steppes won’t forget their steppes for your sake.
(*PP*, 109)

In the introduction to the public reading of the Russian version of this poem, Nabokov pointed at this allusion but did not disclose its location: “Those who remember Pushkin’s “Exegi Monumentum” will notice a small paraphrase at some point” (SK, 86). In one of the notes that accompany the English version, however, he makes the allusion fully accessible to the target reader by pointing at the source’s title and by providing its English translation. Compare Nabokov’s translation in the note with Pushkin’s original text:

Слух обо мне пройдет по всей Руси великой,
И назовет меня всяк сущий в ней язык,
И гордый внук славян, и финн, и ныне дикой
Тунгус, и друг степей калмык.
(Pushkin 1930 III: 376)

Tidings of me will cross the whole great Rus,
and name me will each tribe existing there:
Proud scion of Slavs, and Finn, and the now savage
Tungus, and — friend of steppes — the Kalmuck.
(*PP*, 113)

Here, Nabokov gives a literal line-to-line version and ignores his own rhymed translation made in 1943, where the same stanza read as follows:

Throughout great Rus' my echoes will extend,
and all will name me, all tongues in her use:
the Slavs' proud heir, the Finn, the Kalmuk, friend of steppes,
yet the untamed Tunguz. (*PLT*, 9)

The rhymed translation differs from the literal made for *Poems and Problems* mainly in terms of syntax: it certainly sounds more “English” in comparison with the more recent version, where the word order calques Pushkin’s text. Although this particular passage is a felicitous combination of fidelity, meter and rhyme, some alterations can be observed in the non-literal version. Yet its partial deviation from the structure and the vocabulary of the original would have obscured the connection between the hypotext and Nabokov’s pastiche. For instance, the word savage — which represents one of the central elements of the allusion — is rendered through the synonym “untamed” and is no longer found in the

emphatic position at the end of the line. Thus, the literal version of “Exegi Monumentum” made for *Poems and Problems* shows that a scholarly approach to translation is indeed more helpful to preserve and explain the intertextual mechanism. Similarly, as mentioned above, in “К кн. С. М. Качурину,” l. 7 (“и всем долинам дагестанским”) alludes at Lermontov’s poem “The Dream.” In a note to his translation, Nabokov overlooks his earlier rendition of Lermontov’s text, and provides a new literal translation of the opening line.¹⁸²

The long piece “Парижская поэма” / “The Paris Poem” is accompanied by five notes, three of which are explanations of literary allusions to Nekrasov, Pushkin, and Gogol’. The first note not only provides the translation of the allusion’s source with a transliteration of the original Russian line, but also accommodates a few words on Nekrasov, described by Nabokov as “a famous poet who successfully transcended, in a few great poems, the journalist in him, who wrote topical jingles” (*PP*, 125). Similarly, in the fifth note to “The Paris Poem,” Nabokov reveals an allusion to Gogol’s *A Terrible Vengeance*, describing it as a “wretchedly corny tale,” and providing the transcription of the Russian line of “Парижская поэма,” the transliteration of Gogol’s text, and its literal translation.¹⁸³

Лл. 25-26 of “Парижская поэма” (“Так он думал без воли, без веса, / сам в себя, как наследник, летя,” *PP*, 116) bear an allusion to a famous line from *Eugene Onegin*, disclosed in the third note that accompanies the translation of the poem. Here Nabokov provides his own 1975 version of the opening lines of Pushkin’s novel in verse,¹⁸⁴ so that one can easily compare the hypotext with the allusion contained in the self-translation: “Thus he thought without willing it, weightless, / while into himself, like an heir, he flew” (*PP*, 117).

¹⁸² “Line 7/ Daghestan. Alludes to Lermontov’s famous poem beginning: ‘At noontime, in a dale of Daghestan’” (*PP*, 141).

¹⁸³ *Chuden noch’yu Parizh*. An imitation of a hyperbolic passage in Gogol’s *A Terrible Vengeance* (a wretchedly corny tale) which begins *Chuden Dnepr pri tihoy pogode*, “wondrous is the Dnepr in windless weather” (*PP*, 125).

¹⁸⁴ “Thus a young scapegrace thought / with posters flying in the dust / by the most lofty will of Zeus / the heir of all his relatives” (*EO R*, 96; *PP*, 125).

The study of poetry in *Dar / The Gift* has shown that in rendering Fyodor's allusions to *Eugene Onegin* Nabokov may have also referred to his own translation of Pushkin's novel in verse, but in *Poems and Problems* the intertextual relationship becomes explicit.

The notes to the English poems also contain general cultural information, such as an elucidation about cigarette "gills" in "Fame":

Who, some autumn night, who, tell us, please, in the backwoods
of Russia, by lamplight, in his overcoat,
amidst cigarette gills, miscellaneous sawdust,
and other illumed indiscernibles
on the table a sample of *your* prose will open. (*PP*, 107)

In a note to these lines, Nabokov explains the cultural associations that arise in the Russian reader's mind when he or she reads the (quite ironic) description of an *intelligent's* room: "An unswept floor in a cold room strewn all over with the tubes of discarded cigarette butts used to be a typical platform for the meditations of a hard-up Russian enthusiast in the idealistic past" (*PP*, 113). Another note to this poem illustrates the expression "co-ortographical brethen" by pointing out the existence of the new Russian orthography introduced in 1917, but ignored by émigré publications (*ibid.*). Similarly, two notes to "On Rulers" provide historical information about the "evil Tartar prince Mamay" and Stalin's infamous statement "Life has grown better, comrades, life has grown merrier!" (*PP*, 133).

The presence of Russian culture, history and literature is thus made accessible to the Anglophone reader of the Russian section of *Poems and Problems*. The English versions of Nabokov's poems strike a balance between readability and maintenance of the Russian cultural and literary elements. Yet the translator does not set the preservation of *cosas de Russia* within the space of the target text as a primary goal; he occasionally domesticates certain culturally specific terms, such as *dacha* or *versty*, and paraphrases them in more general terms, as in the case with *valenki*. On the other hand, intertextuality, the relationship between Nabokov's poems and their Russian hypotexts, is approached with greater consistency and retained with the help of the commentary. A relevant proportion of

the notes attached to the translations is devoted to a detailed explanation of literary references, but also clarifies certain cultural and historical details of the Russian poems.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Nabokov's approach to the translation of vocabulary appears multi-leveled and flexible, yet certain tendencies can be distinguished. In terms of structure, the English poems are predominantly equilinear to their Russian counterparts. On this large-scale level, the translation methodology is reminiscent of the line-by-line structural approach followed by Nabokov in his *Eugene Onegin*. Instances of paraphrase are sporadic and often limited to a few lines, and yet their presence is meaningful because it is accompanied by a number of semantic alterations.

Within the space of each line, semantic fidelity to the original is not consistent. Some lexical categories, such as the botanical names of plants or insects, are always translated with precision and can be seen as a constant feature in Nabokov's practice as a translator. Several categories of syntactic and semantic alterations can, arguably, be traced back to a pursuit of clarity and readability, while other departures from semantic precision are attributable to the search for euphony. As a result, the English poems never dramatically distort the original poem, but they do acquire some poetic features of their own.

The presence of notes may recall Nabokov's use of commentary in *Eugene Onegin*. However, in addition to rhythmic, poetic, literary, and historical elucidations, there are notes that could only have been produced by a self-translator. For instance, in some comments Nabokov recalls how the composition of certain poems occurred ("The Rain Has Flown"). Especially in the case of early poems, the mature poet sometimes offers a justification of the faults of his youthful verse, as in the note attached to the poem "The Liberty":

The main – and, indeed, only – interest of these lines resides in their revealing the disappointment of the intelligentsia, who had welcomed the liberal Revolution of the spring of 1917 and was distressed by the Bolshevist reactionary insurrection in the autumn of the same year. The fact of that reactionary regime having now survived for more than half a century adds a prophetic touch to a young poet’s conventional poem. (*PP*, 21)

In this note, the self-translator’s detachment from his own early poetic voice is reminiscent of the authorial distance between a character and a real-life author that characterizes embedded poetry: in “We So Firmly Believed,” the speaker addresses his own younger self: “You’ve long ceased to be I. You’re an outline—the hero / of any first chapter” (*PP*, 89).

While the commentary prevents the loss of numerous lapidary elements, it is not a matter of purely scholarly attachment to a literal gloss. Thus, in a note to the poem “To Prince S. M. Kachurin,” Nabokov apparently discloses the meaning of the poem’s title:

Line 1/ Kachurin, Stephan Mstislavovich. Pronounced “Kachoorin” with the accent on the middle syllable. My poor friend, a former White Army colonel, died a few years ago in an Alaskan monastery. The prince’s golden heart, moderate brain power, and senile optimism, could alone have been responsible for his suggesting the journey depicted here. His daughter is married to the composer Tornitsen. (*PP*, 141)

All this, however, is utter fiction: Prince Kachurin never existed, and the note is one of the characteristic games Nabokov likes to play with his readers. This little fictional addition to the poem impacts the reader’s experience: as Nabokov explains in the translation made for Edmund Wilson, the reader “is supposed to take [Kachurin] for an old friend of the author – with something of the sonorous apostrophic intonation Pushkin gives to the names of his friends in his poems” (*TPK*, 30). Therefore, this note to the English version of the poem can be seen as an integral part of the poetic composition, which belongs to the Russian literary genre of “letter to an old friend.”

Through the paratextual elements of *Poems and Problems* – the translator’s foreword, the notes, and the bibliographical information at the end of the book – the voice of the self-translator is allowed to complete the English poems, pondering the experience of rewriting one’s own poetry in English, remembering the autobiographical facts behind

the poems' composition, and helping the target reader grasp intertextual and historical elements. The paratext is not so much a scholarly assemblage of notes as a meta-poetic and meta-translatory space that complements the translations.

In *Poems and Problems*, Nabokov implemented the results of his research in the field of translation scholarship. In the translations made for that volume, he applied the experience acquired in a lifetime of work on translations of Russian poetry, both of his early period and of his mature years. Perhaps, the authority that distinguishes the self-translator has helped him find a balance between artistic freedom and fidelity to the original. Without completely rewriting the poems in English — a temptation he confesses to have resisted (*PP*, 14) — Nabokov creates readable and accessible reflections of the Russian poems that he chose for this bilingual collection. The self-translations can be enjoyed as English compositions endowed with authentic poetic features, and yet they are closely connected to their Russian counterparts, complementing but not replacing them.

Owing to the author's introduction, commentary and notes, and to the publication of the Russian poems *en face* with their English versions, the results of the process of self-translation are rendered highly visible. If one recalls the metaphor of translation as architectonic restoration (section 1.1.5.4), in *Poems and Problems* Nabokov did not “renovate” his old Russian poems by substituting them with newer English versions, but rather relocated them in a new bilingual space, where the paratext is one of the materials used to preserve and convey the sense of the original and where the old poems coexist and interact with their English versions.

Conclusion

In the foreword to *Invitation to a Beheading* (1959), the English version of *Priglasenie na kazn'* (1935-36), prepared in collaboration with his son Dmitri, Nabokov mentions the temptations of self-translation: "To abridge, expand, or otherwise alter or cause to be altered, for the sake of belated improvement, one's own writings in translation" (*IB*, 7). This points to an ambiguity in Nabokov's relationship with self-translation, especially when the urge to alter a text "grows in proportion to the length of time separating the model from the mimic." In the case of *Invitation to a Beheading*, however, Nabokov "found with relief that there was no devil of creative emendation for [him] to fight" (*ibid.*). Indeed, while many of his prose works — such as *Laughter in the Dark*, *King Queen Knave*, and *Despair* — have indeed undergone significant transformation as a result of this "belated improvement," the need to amend was not equally strong with all his prose self-translations. The creativity that has gone into the translations of *The Gift* and *Lolita*, as in that of *Invitation to a Beheading* went not into improvement of the original text but into a quest for faithful rendering in the target languages and for the new target audiences.

Thus, in 1959 Nabokov was already aware of the psychological implications of self-translation: re-reading and rewriting one's own text in another language can result in significant alterations in the novel's structure, the characters' portraits or their names, or even the treatment of certain themes and motifs. But Nabokov also came to see this creative emendation as a "devil" that could divert one from interlinguistic transposition of a text to its "falsification" (*PP*, 14).

While this fear of creative self-emendation is also signalled in the introduction to *Poems and Problems*, my study has shown that Nabokov's practice in self-translation of

poetry presents its own peculiar features that distinguish this activity from the translation of prose. It is my hope that several objectives were achieved as a result of the comparative textual analysis performed on Nabokov's bilingual poems. First, this research has pointed to the changes in Nabokov's methodology in translating his own poetry, and put it in the context of his theory and practice of translating other poets and authors. Second, this thesis investigated the poems themselves, observing each version of the poem as a part of a whole bilingual textual entity, so as to propose new insights into each poem and enhance our attention to the local felicities of the bilingual units. Thus, the textual analysis conducted in this work has shown that bilingual close-reading can and should be applied to Nabokov's self-translated poetry: what has been said about his prose self-translations – namely that they represent “a creative interaction of worlds, generating a cultural synthesis in which different versions of the same text merge into one hypothetical text” (Denissova 2019: 27) – can also be applied to the corpus of Nabokov's bilingual poems.

The distinction between poetry embedded in prose and autonomous poetry corresponds to two different approaches to poetry translation. The analysis of the poems attributed to Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev in *Dar* and of Humbert Humbert's verses in *Lolita* has shown that these compositions were translated first and foremost as parts of the novels that frame them. And while the framing novels were partly adapted to the target reader rather than significantly altered, the poetry contained in them was not always rendered faithfully in terms of prosody, meter, and even content. The analysis conducted in Chapter 3 has shown that while the self-translator's methodology is not homogeneous, it always reflects the function poetry plays within the novel and its fictional attribution to the character.

Speaking of *Pale Fire*, a novel that includes a 999-lines long poem composed for the fictional poet John Shade, Nabokov described the experience of composing poetry for a character as “maddening”: “First, I had to create a New England poet who was a follower of

Robert Frost. Then I had to evoke some kind of inspiration to produce a good poem, and I hope I did” (*TWS*, 322).

Similarly, the reader of both *Dar* and *Lolita* can retrace the literary and cultural background of the poems created for the characters of Fyodor and Humbert Humbert. In particular, since *Dar* is a *Künstlerroman*, Fyodor’s cycle of poems performs a precise function in the novel. The textual analysis conducted in Chapter 3 has shown that this function represented a priority for the self-translator and is reflected both on the levels of form and content of the poems contained in *The Gift*. But the novel also includes poems — such as “Ласточка” — whose level of artistic expression genuinely satisfied Nabokov, and so the boundaries between character’s poetry and that of his real-life author were practically erased.

Seen within the context of the narrative structure of *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert’s poetry appears more objectified (to use Bakhtin’s term), with its lack of genuine inspiration, its parodic nature or simply poor poetic quality. These stylistic features cohere with Nabokov’s portrayal of this character, and this coherence is fully maintained in all the Russian translations of the narrator’s poems. Not only do Humbert’s Russian verses maintain and clarify their parodic or imitative nature, but they also replicate his neurotic poetic style, sometimes by means of a paraphrastic approach at the expense of fidelity to the poem’s content.

Thus, the translation of Nabokov’s embedded poetry can be described through the metaphor of a translator-actor who crafts a new mask — complete with corresponding style and literary background — that speaks with the character’s poetic voice in the target language.

In the introduction to *Poems and Problems*, on the other hand, Nabokov clearly distances himself from self-translation as creative rewriting and declares his agenda of approaching the translation of his own poetry as an impartial literal translator. Yet, in the tension between creativity and impartiality, the latter disposition does not always prevail.

The heterogeneity of the English translations – some of which are indeed almost literal renditions of the Russian texts, while some others recreate meter, rhyme, and, possibly as a result, display semantic variations – proves that Nabokov did not adhere to a uniform practical methodology for the translation of his own poems. While making use of his rich experience in translating Russian poetry, he also flexibly adapted to the special features of every poem, highlighting this or that aspect in its translation: in some versions, onomatopoeic and alliterative games dominate over fidelity to meaning, whereas in other cases it is the meta-poetic nature of the Russian poems that emerges as the translator's priority.

This can be seen as another expression of the self-translator's authority: in the introduction, Nabokov set the rules of a scholarly approach to the translation of his own poetry but then he also allowed himself to break them. The textual analysis has shown that Nabokov invested in readability and euphony of the English poems. Hence, while not replacing the Russian poems with newer English ones, Nabokov did not produce mere "cribs," but texts that interact and communicate with their Russian sources.

Despite these differences between embedded poetry and *Poems and Problems*, some of their shared features can now be outlined and can be regarded as constant features of Nabokov's poetic self-translations. Overall, a striving for clarity dominates the process of semantic selection. While instances of omission are very rare, addition of new lexical items or their substitution with more precise synonyms recur in the translations. This finding confirms the importance of performing a bilingual analysis on self-translated poetry and is in tune with the theories that define the bilingual text as a single and yet dynamic unit made of two parts that complement each other. Due to Nabokov's aversion to omission in translation and his tendency to enhance semantic precision, the comparative analysis of the poems with their translations reveals previously unnoticed shades of meaning and semantically disambiguates certain passages. In other words, the self-translation sometimes sheds light on the *Gestalt* behind the original poems. The analysis also

foregrounds the skill with which the author recreated in English the prosodic and euphonic features of his Russian poems, sometimes attempting to mimic their actual sound, sometimes enriching the target text with new sound effects.

Another feature shared by embedded poetry and *Poems and Problems* has emerged from the study of poetic meter: Nabokov sometimes turns to mild adaptation of meter to the target language and its literary tradition. This can be observed, for instance, in Fyodor's poems on childhood, in Humbert's imitative poem of "Ash Wednesday," rendered with a more regular rhythm than the English original, and in "Irregular Iambics" in *Poems and Problems*. This strategy of metrical simplification and adaptation can be interpreted as, among other things, a part of Nabokov's endeavor to avoid ambiguities.

The search for clarity also manifests itself through the addition of brief explanatory comments in the novels that frame embedded poetry, as well as in the footnotes to the translations of *Poems and Problems*. These footnotes amplify the translator's voice and guide the anglophone reader through a selection of thirty-nine Russian poems that cover five decades of the author's poetic production. Not only do they tell the story of some poems' composition, but they also elucidate the numerous cultural and intertextual references of the Russian texts. While preventing domestication on the one hand and semantic impoverishment on the other, the notes display another important feature of Nabokov's poetic translations, namely his awareness of speaking to a specific interpretive community. One can feel this awareness also in the poetry of *Dar* and *Lolita*, where culturally specific terms and references to the national literatures of the source language are abundant. In Humbert Humbert's imitative and parodic poems the more sophisticated literary background is maintained in the translation, often with the help of explanatory additions within the novel. The references to popular culture and everyday life, however, tend to appear more blurred in the Russian versions of Humbert's verses. Like the novel itself, the poems of the Russian *Lolita* display the translator's awareness of addressing a

specific target audience, located in a precise historical time and place, belonging to the rather isolated politic, cultural, and linguistic context of Soviet Russia.

In *The Gift*, Nabokov avoids notes and does not transpose the allusions to Russian literature to an English setting, but preserves the novel's "Russianness" with the help of brief additions within the novel. One interesting feature that *The Gift* shares with *Poems and Problems* has emerged from the analysis of intertextuality conducted in this research. In these translations from Russian, Nabokov refers to his own English translation of *Eugene Onegin* when rendering allusions to Pushkin's novel in verse, using it as an actual English hypotext both implicitly (in *The Gift*) and explicitly (in *Poems and Problems*). Thus, in *The Gift*, a textual allusion to the ending of *Eugene Onegin* in the novel's closing poem can easily be recognized by the reader of Nabokov's own translation; in "The Paris Poem," an allusion to the opening stanzas of Pushkin's novel in verse is unveiled and explained with the support of a note that quotes Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* directly. Moreover, in *Poems and Problems*, Nabokov actively draws on the semantic material he elaborated when working on *Eugene Onegin* – not only in such obvious examples as "racemosa," but also in his rendition of words like "shum" as "sound" (*PP*, 59) or "toska" as "yearning ache" (*PP*, 30), on which he reflects in his commentary to Pushkin's novel in verse.

One can therefore conclude that in the Russian-English language pair Nabokov operates within an intertextual space of poetic language that he has created over decades of work on the translation of Russian poetry. This is only one of the many invisible threads that connect Nabokov's works as a novelist, a poet, and a translator of poetry. As I hope to have shown in this study, a critical analysis of any of these activities should involve reflections on this dynamic relationship, while neither area is secondary for the understanding of Nabokov's oeuvre. Such links may constitute object of further linguistic and literary research, as Nabokov's work not just as a poet, but as a bilingual poet, is only beginning to receive proper attention.

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Ciclo: 33 _____

Titolo della tesi: Vladimir Nabokov's Bilingual Poetry: A Study of Verse Self-Translation. _____

Abstract:

Questa ricerca costituisce il primo tentativo di effettuare uno studio esaustivo della poesia autotradotta di Vladimir Nabokov. La tesi presenta i risultati di un'analisi testuale comparativa che ha coinvolto le poesie tradotte da Nabokov per i romanzi *Dar* e *Lolita*, alcuni racconti e le poesie pubblicate nella raccolta *Poems and Problems*. L'approccio metodologico si basa sulla convinzione che l'esistenza di un'autotraduzione genera una nuova entità testuale, un testo bilingue, composto da due parti intimamente collegate che si compensano tra di loro. Lo studio riflette sulle somiglianze e le differenze tra ciascuna versione del testo bilingue e lo colloca nel contesto del lavoro di Nabokov come poeta, romanziere, teorico della traduzione e traduttore di poesie. L'analisi testuale conferma che le autotraduzioni non solo possono e devono essere utilizzate come strumenti di disambiguazione semantica, ma possono anche arricchire la nostra interpretazione di un testo poetico. Inoltre, i risultati di questo lavoro determinano diversi obiettivi, metodi e priorità traduttologiche nelle diverse fasi della vita letteraria di Nabokov (prosodiche, semantiche, culturali). Allo stesso tempo, la ricerca rileva degli elementi che restano costanti nelle autotraduzioni poetiche di Nabokov e trova collegamenti metodologici con le sue traduzioni poetiche di altri autori.

This research is a comprehensive study of Vladimir Nabokov's self-translated poetry. It presents the results of a comparative textual analysis that involved the poems Nabokov self-translated for the novels *Dar* and *Lolita*, some short stories, and the bilingual poems published in the collection *Poems and Problems*. This approach is based on the belief that the existence of a self-translation generates a new textual entity, a bilingual text made of two intimately related parts that supplement each other and compensate for each other. In analyzing Nabokov's self-translated poetry, I reflect on the similarities and differences that characterize the English and the Russian versions and place it in the context of Nabokov's work as a poet, a novelist, a translation theorist, and a translator of poetry. This comparative analysis confirms that self-translations not only can and should be used as tools of semantic disambiguation, but they can also enrich our interpretation of the poem by revealing new shades of meaning. Moreover, the findings of this study point to different goals and methods of self-translation practiced at different stages of Nabokov's literary life and to the different priorities (prosodic, semantic, cultural) that he had in each case. At the same time, this research detects some elements that remain constant in Nabokov's practice as a self-translator of poetry, such as a striving for clarity in the target text, while also discerning methodological links with both his early and mature approach to the translation of poetry.

התזה הזו היא חקר מקיף של תרגום-עצמי של השירה של ולדימיר נבוקוב. היא מציגה את תוצאות ההשוואה טקסטואלית מדוקדקת של השירים הנכללים ברומנים *המתת ו-לוליטה*, במספר סיפורים קצרים וגם באוסף השירה הדו-לשוני, *Poems and Problems*. ההשוואה מושתתת על ההנחה שתרגום שנעשה על-ידי המחבר עצמו גורם להיווצרות של יצירה חדשה – טקסט דו-לשוני שבין שני חלקיו, הקשורים זה בזה בצורה אינטימית, קיים יחס של שיפוי והשלמה הדדית. הניתוח של יצירות אלה בתזה מצביע על תכונות משותפות ותכונות שונות של שני החלקים (הרוסי והאנגלי), וגם בודק את ההשפעה עליהם של העקרונות של נבוקוב כתאורטיקן התרגום ושל הפואטיקה שלו כסופר, משורר, ומתרגם של השירה של משוררים אחרים. הניתוח מחזק את הציפיה שהתרגום עוזר להבנת המקור על-ידי סילוק דו-משמעויות. בנוסף, המחקר מראה כיצד התרגום מעשיר את פרוש המקור אל ידי הוספה של גווי משמעות חדשים. אחת המסכנות העיקריות של התזה היא שבתקופות שונות של יצירתו עמדו לפני נבוקוב מטרות שונות בנוגע לתרגום העצמי ושהוא יישם שיטות תרגום שונות בהתאם לקדימויות שונות (פרוזודיות, סמנטיות ותרבותיות). אך קריאה מדוקדקת מגלה גם המשכיות מסוימת בדרכי תרגום העצמי של נבוקוב, כגון שאיפה לבהירות מקסימלית בתרגום, ומצביעה על קשרים מתודולוגיים בין הגישה המוקדמת שלו לתרגום שירה וגישתו בתקופתו הבוגרת.

Firma dello studente
