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Self-translation in Vladimir Nabokov's work

From *Kamera Obskura*
to *Laughter in the Dark*:
a case-study

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Foreword

The present study examines the evolution of one of Vladimir Nabokov's bilingual texts, from the Russian novel *Kamera Obskura* to its English self-translation, published under the title of *Laughter in the Dark*.

A lot has been written about Nabokov's work as a translator. The present analysis examines Nabokov's self-translated text from a multi-faceted perspective. An introduction about self-translation from the viewpoint of Translation Studies will allow the reader to get acquainted with the theoretical framework employed in this work. It is from the perspective of the latest (and still ongoing) research about the phenomenon of self-translation that this study approaches the analysis of Nabokov's self-translated novel, contextualising it within the already available information about Vladimir Nabokov's work as a writer, as a translator and as a self-translator.

The case of *Kamera Obskura* is particularly interesting, because it allows us to compare the work of a standard translator with that of a self-translator: the Russian novel was first translated in English by an external translator and subsequently re-translated by the author himself. This bilingual text has therefore undergone a three-stage transformation, concluded with its final metamorphosis into *Laughter in the Dark*: the results of a word-for-word comparative analysis of these three texts - never before done so in detail - constitute the core of the present work. The comparative approach allows the reader of the bilingual text to view the novel in its completeness and its simultaneous belonging to two linguistic and cultural systems. In addition to this, the information acquired from an accurate study of the text helps shed a light on the writer's early self-translation methodology and enrich our understanding of the phenomenon of self-translation per se.

Abbreviations

- KO* *Kamera Obskura*. 1933; reprint, *Zashchita Luzhina, Kamera Obskura, Lolita i Rassказы*. Moscow: Olma-Press, 2003.
- DB* *Drugie berega*. 1954; reprint, Moscow: Olma-Press, 2003.
- EO* *Eugene Onegin. A Novel in Verse by Aleksandr Pushkin*. Trans. with commentary by Vladimir Nabokov. Bollingen Series 72. 4 vols. 1964. Revised edition: Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- KQK* *King, Queen, Knave*. Translated by Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author, 1968; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- LD* *Laughter in the Dark*. 1938; reprint, New York: New Directions Publishing, 1960.
- LRL* *Lectures on Russian Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981 / London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982
- SM* *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. 1967; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- SO* *Strong Opinions*. 1973; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1990.

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 Nabokov’s own transliterations, which are contained in quotations from his novels, translations, interviews and letters.

Introduction: What is Self-translation?

1.1 The place of Self-translation within Translation Studies

A simple definition of the term “self-translation” can be found in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*, where the phenomenon is defined both as “the act of translating one’s own writings into another language and the result of such an undertaking” (Grutman, 1998:257). The result of self-translation - a self-translated text - has been defined as “a bilingual text, authored by a writer, who can compose in different languages and who translates his or her texts from one language into another” (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:1). Once considered a marginal phenomenon, self-translation has lately started receiving extensive attention among scholars, especially as a consequence of the 1990’s cultural turn in Translation Studies, since the term “self-translation” itself invites to a cultural interpretation of the translation activity.

Translation studies is a relatively young academic field, that focuses its analysis on an undoubtedly ancient human activity. In the collected papers of the 1976 Leuven Colloquium, André Lefevere proposed that the name Translation Studies should be adopted for the discipline that deals with “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”, thus clearly highlighting that “theory and practice should be indissolubly linked, and should be mutually beneficial to one another” (Bassnett, 2011:11). Today, Translation Studies has been fully recognised as a scientific discipline and, like all other disciplines, it has a set of terms to denote its various aspects.

In his introduction to Ricoeur's essays *On Translation*, Richard Kearney states that, in a generic sense, translation indicates "the everyday act of speaking as a way not only of translating oneself to oneself (inner to outer, private to public, unconscious to conscious, etc) but also and more explicitly of translating oneself to others" (Kearney, 2006:xiv-xv). Thus, in its more specific sense, translation signals the work of translating the meanings of one particular language into another: it is a communication process that involves a sender of a coded message and a receiver, who analyses and decodes the message before it can be understood. The peculiar case of self-translation can therefore be considered as a process of both specific and generic or standard translation¹, where the writer translates both the language and the self. Some scholars have gone even further by stating that the very act of writing in secondary languages is a "mental self-translation"². Katharina Reiss has defined translation as a "bilingual mediated process of communication, which ordinarily aims at the production of a Target Language text that is functionally equivalent to a Source Language text (2 media: SL and TL+1 medium: the translator)" (Reiss, 2000:160).

A delicate issue that has been widely discussed among scholars is the relation between standard translation and self-translation. This relation is not as simple as it may seem at a first glance. Despite its implicit connection with standard translation, self-translation stands out in the wide field of Translation Studies and represents an interesting phenomenon with unique characteristics that still need to be fully explored by translation theorists. Because of its specific nature, the study of self-translation requires a re-analysis of the full range of Translation Studies' mostly binary concepts, such as author

¹ From here on, the term "standard translation" will be used to indicate the translation of a literary text performed by an external professional translator, as opposite to self-translation, in which author and translator are the same figure.

² As seen in Cordingley 2013. Here the traditional definition of self-translation will be used as a reference, since it remains the most common.

and translator, original and target text, equivalence and liberty, visibility and invisibility: since the bilingual text exists in two linguistic and literary systems at the same time, how should monolingual categories such as author and original be applied in this case?

The particular way in which a bilingual author rewrites his own text in another language, adapting it to a different linguistic system with different literary traditions, “escapes the categories of text theory”, because the object of study is practically a “twinned text” (Robinson, 2010:166). Once established in the movement between singular languages and literary systems, translation’s core concepts mentioned above become “increasingly dynamic, challenging a binary conceptualisation of translation, inviting hybrid categories, such as, auctorial translation and the *texte croisé*, or hybrid text” (Oustinoff 2001: 248). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the fields of translation studies and comparative literature still lack a comprehensive account on self-translation. The majority of literature about self-translation represents a part of monographic studies about single writers, while in linguistics and translation studies the phenomenon is often mentioned just in passing. However, since the beginning of this century, scholars have increasingly started paying attention to the phenomenon of self-translation, taking as study cases the experience of authors who translated their own texts, either regularly or sporadically (those of Samuel Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov are some of the most outstanding cases).

As observed by Grutman (2013:45), the first scholars who turned their attention to self-translation were those who were studying neo-Latin literature in the Twentieth century. These scholars saw in self-translation a natural consequence of the environmental multilingualism that characterised the society of that time. In *The Poet’s Tongues*, a seminal collection of lectures about multilingual poets, Leonard Forster (1970) studies the cases of several poets of the Sixteenth century (such as Joachim du Bellay, Jan Van

der Noot, Philip Sydney), who translated “their own Latin verses in order to help form their poetic diction in the vernacular” (Forster, 1970:30). French has long been the core language in cases of self-translation, until the Second World War, when English became predominant and replaced French in the majority of cases. Hokenson and Munson’s 2007 work *The Bilingual Text* studies the experience of bilingual writers throughout history, and actually many of them have self-translated from or into French (Nicole Oresme, Charles d’Orléans, Rémy Belleau, Carlo Goldoni, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Julien Green and Samuel Beckett are some examples).

In the Twentieth century some scholars³ considered self-translation to be “proper translation” (to quote Jakobson’s definition of interlingual translation⁴), a fact that however - if accepted - would imply that the bilingual author behaves like a standard translator, who translates someone else’s original text. In more recent times, following the development of translation studies and the reinterpretation of such basic concepts as translation and translator, which emerged after the Cultural Turn of the 1990’s, the conceptualisation of self-translation and its key notions has evolved towards a new vision. The approach that characterises the Cultural Turn has lead scholars to study translated texts “within their network of both source and target cultural signs” (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990:10-12). The fundamental premise of this approach is that translation is strictly related to its socio-cultural dimension and cannot be viewed as a purely linguistic ac-

³ Such as Anton Popovich, who stated that “Due 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” (Popovich, 1976:19)

⁴ See Jakobson’s 1959 essay “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, where he distinguishes three ways of interpreting a verbal sign, which can be translated into other signs of the same language (intralingual translation, or rewording), into another language (interlingual translation, or translation proper) and into another nonverbal system of symbols (intersemiotic translation, or transmutation). According to Jakobson, translation from one language to another substitutes messages not by using separate code-units, but with entire messages in the other language. In order to achieve his work, the translator recodes and transmits a message received from another source: thus translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes.

tivity: according to 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” (Snell-Hornby, 1995:11). Translation studies should therefore employ tools from cultural history and cultural studies as well, in order to understand the translation process *in toto*: the agency of the translator, the socio-economic factors that determine selection and publication of translations, the diffusion of translations in target culture and the ways in which translation serves to construct an image of an author or a literature, or a whole society for the target readership.

Notably, André Lefevere’s idea of translation as rewriting has widely influenced today’s way of studying self-translation by providing new tools to analyse this phenomenon’s characteristics. Lefevere has studied the central role of manipulation and ideologies in the translation processes and has developed a new approach to the very concept of translation: he sees in translation not a mere process of rendering a text from a source language to a target language, but an act of *rewriting* - or what he also called “refraction” - of the initial text. Refracted products are defined by Lefevere as “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work” (Lefevere, 1982:4). In Lefevere’s view, refractions are pressured by patronage systems, represented by groups of influential people, such as parties or institutions, acting in order to promote or spread, but also destroy works of literature. Lefevere argues that translations are made “with the intention of influencing the development of a culture” (Lefevere, 2002:8) and are shaped by the cultural context of the target language and create a new tradition in that language. He urges the necessity to view translations as independent works in their cultural contexts and states that contemporary non-professional readers are “exposed to literature more often by means of rewriting than by means of writing” (Lefevere, 1992:7).

The cultural turn has therefore encouraged scholars to expand their field of investigation beyond the movement of texts from one language to another, and to study the evolution of cultural products between different linguistic communities and literary systems. In Lefevere's view there is no definite boundary between self-translation and rewriting, because "all translation involves rewriting in a more or less overt manner" (as quoted in Bassnett, 2013:23). There are, however, many fundamental differences that distinguish self-translation from "standard" translation: one key feature that characterises the bilingual text is its particular relationship between source and target text, that is one of creative reworking, performed by a writer, who chooses to recreate his own work for a different target audience. This relationship is undoubtedly different from the one that takes place between an original text and its translated refraction: studying this point will help us shed a light on the very nature of the bilingual text.

1.2 Source and Target text: a fluid concept.

As stated by Susan Bassnett, the term self-translation is already problematic itself, because "it compels us to consider the problem of the existence of an original text", since "the very definition of translation presupposes an original somewhere else" (Bassnett, 2013:15). When analysing a self-translated text, one should assume that there is another, previously composed text, from which the second text claims its origin. However, many writers who consider themselves bilinguals, can easily shift between languages in their work. Therefore, the traditional binary notion of source text and target text appears, according to Bassnett, "simplistic and unhelpful" (2013:15).

Moreover, the traditional hierarchy that privileges the original over the target text collapses when used with reference to the activity of self-translation and the resulting bilingual texts. In standard translation there are clearly definite boundaries that confine

the commonly accepted dualism of original and target text, but as far as self-translation is concerned, these boundaries just seem to fade away. As stated by Sàenz (1993), the result of a process of self-translation “is a new work, different from the original, a translation which no independent translator would have ever dared to make, where occurs the phenomenon of a work which has not been translated, but which has two versions [...] without anyone being sometimes able to tell which is the original”. In connection to this, something rather unusual sometimes happens in the publishing industry: translations into a third language are made, quite frequently, not from the “original” novel but from its translation into a second language, when this was rewritten by the author himself. Interestingly, *Kamera Obskura* (1933) is a good example of such a phenomenon: the very first English translation was requested by the London publisher John Long to Winifred Roy and published as *Kamera Obskura* in 1936. Nabokov, however, was so disappointed with her work that he did his own translation, which was published two years later in New York, under the title *Laughter in the Dark*. As pointed out by Santoyo (2013:35), the following translation into Spanish by Javier Calzada, *Risa en la oscuridad* (2001), was made using the English text and not the Russian original. We can therefore imagine that in the perception of this Spanish translator the original Russian text wasn’t hierarchically superior to the English translation of the book⁵. It would be however quite impossible to picture a translator working with a rewritten text instead of its original counterpart had the rewriting been carried out by another “standard” translator.

In relation to this, scholars have also discussed a problem that is connected with the nature of the target text: if it’s not a mere transposition of the original, can we con-

⁵ Quite the contrary: perhaps the English translation, a rewritten text produced by the author himself, was perceived by the Spanish translator as the “ultimate” second version of the novel, and therefore the one to consider for a translation in a third language.

sider the target text to be another “original” with a fully autonomous literary value and existence?

Many scholars agree that to claim this would be a misconception. 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” (Fitch, 1988:19). Fitch, however, considers the source text to be a point of departure for an eventual self-translation, where the latter affects the “original” in two ways: it renders the original “retroactively incomplete”, while also completing it (Fitch, 1988:67, 131). Therefore, Fitch’s claim is that a self-translated text is not simply another “original”, but it is rather a metatext and a completion of the source text. Writing just one year later, Elizabeth Beaujour agreed with Fitch, by stating that self-translation is something that “makes a text retrospectively incomplete”, while, furthermore considering both versions to be “avatars of a hypothetical total text” (Beaujour, 1989:112). More recently, Michael Oustinoff (2001) has also agreed with this hypothesis by stating that self-translation cannot simply be considered a work of “original” writing: “il ne faudrait pas la réduire à l’écriture seule (en la rangeant dans le champ de la recréation) comme on a tendance à le faire trop souvent” (one must not reduce it to just rewriting (thus attributing it to the field of “re-creation”), as it too often happens). Instead, “elle est éminemment à la fois traduction et écriture” (it is outstandingly both translation and writing) (Oustinoff, 2001:57). Moreover, Oustinoff has used the term “traduction auctoriale” as a synonym for self-translation, thus combining the translative and authorial elements of the phenomenon in a single concept.

A different point of view on the nature of the target text is found in the above-mentioned historical account *The Bilingual Text* (2007). As a result of their analysis, Hokenson and Munson have come to the conclusion that the self-translated text may ac-

tually be considered another original, since bilingual authors “do indeed see themselves as re-creators producing a new original on the model of the old” (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:199). This is an interesting point, that is connected in a certain way to the readers’ perception of the target text as an original. However, the risk of such an approach is to distance the analysis from the pure nature of the text and to shift the focus on the peculiar features of the author-translator’s figure as perceived by his target readership.

The target text should not be considered as something alien to the original source text, neither does it come from the hand of another author whom we call the translator: in self-translations both original and target text are created by only one person, and therefore the translation “may appear as deformed and distorted as the author may fancy” (Santoyo, 2013:28). Moreover, as argued by Riffaterre, from the point of view of significance, the text is a single semantic unit: “whereas units of meaning may be words or phrases or sentences, the unit of significance is the text” (Riffaterre, 1978:3-6). Comparing an original *text* and its translation, it is more useful to accept the “idea of translation as rewriting, albeit recognisable as rewriting, because of the movement across languages” (Bassnett, 2013:24). In the case of self-translation, the relationship between source and target text is not a static one: if self-translation is a form of creative rewriting, that requires more than rendering a source text into another language, then what we find ourselves studying is a rewriting “across and between languages, with the notion of an original as a *fluid* rather than a fixed concept” (Bassnett, 2013:19, italics are mine). Susan Bassnett goes even further by doubting the very existence of an original when it comes to self-translation: “what is clear is that the concept of the original in self-translation is far more fluid than in other kinds of translation, and indeed raises doubts as to whether an original can be said to exist at all” (Bassnett, 2013:19).

The idea of fluidity gently removes every clear boundary between source and target text, creating a new dynamic unit: the bilingual text. Santoyo's metaphor of the mirror is an interesting way to illustrate this entity:

The process [of self-translation] ends up incorporating and integrating the mirrored image into the original, thus forming a unique text in which original and translation are both complementary and appear intimately bound together, face-to-face and back-to-back, constantly intertwined in one textual entity. The reader, who is necessarily bilingual, is immersed in a simultaneous, complementary play of two mirrors, a vision that enables him/ her to estimate the quality of the reflected image (whichever of the two it may be, or both). (Santoyo, 2013:31)

Hence, the distinction between original and translated text collapses, giving space to a more flexible terminology, in which both texts can be referred to as "variants" or "versions" of comparable status (Fitch 1988:132-3). This fluidity which characterises the bilingual text can be observed in real-life publishing cases: there instances of self-translators who changed the original version of a book after having already rewritten it in another language. Vladimir Nabokov's autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1967) is a famous and intriguing example of such a dynamic creative process, in which the author's experience of rewriting his own biography in Russian, the main language of his childhood, has evoked new memories and motivated the author to rewrite and publish the original English text a second time.

The reason behind the bilingual text's unique and fluid nature is the peculiar role of its author-translator, who enjoys an enviable freedom when it comes to rewrite his own work in another language for another audience. As stated by Santoyo, "it is precisely that authorial liberty which puts its stamp on the translated text, making it a second original [...], creating a very particular play of mirrors, and, most importantly, establishing a dynamic relationship between the original and its specular image. (Santoyo,

2013:29). Being a single unit made of two dynamic counterparts, the bilingual text and its author should be studied, in my view, with the same bilingual and bicultural approach.

Self-translators as a Group

2.1 Bilingualism

Some important common features that characterise self-translators as a group have already emerged from the corpus of self-translation studies. Since self-translation implies a coexistence of two languages within the same person, bilingualism or multilingualism is always associated with self-translators. According to Grutman, “self-translators are bilingual in a wider sense, i.e. they belong to two linguistic communities at the same time” and very often they are also bicultural, because they have “reference points in both the cultural universes⁶” (Grutman, 2013:49).

Hokenson and Munson (2007) have noticed that our contemporary view of bilingualism and translation is still widely influenced by the German Romantic philology of language. As demonstrated by such theorists as Berman, Pym and Venuti, the critical categories of translation still reflect their origins in the Germanic Romantics’ concept of the specific *Wesen* or essence of a language, an indissociable element from its *Volk* or country, often identified with “nation” in competing ideologies of culture. Such an idea of nations and languages has not always been around in Europe - just think about the Middle Ages, when bilingualism was quite a regular and widespread phenomenon:

Centuries of medieval and Renaissance assumptions about the universality of the transcendent subject across languages, Latin and vernaculars, were displaced by the Romantic ideal of the mother tongue. (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:3)

⁶ Interestingly, this idea fits quite perfectly Mary Snell-Hornby’s definition of a good translator in general, who must be both bilingual and bicultural.

As an example, the authors of *The Bilingual Text* quote Friedrich Schleiermacher's 1813 statement about the actual impossibility for a writer to be bilingual: "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" (Schleiermacher 1997:236, quoted in Hokenson and Munson, 2007:3). In other words, writers must write in the language of their country or otherwise they'll hang in an "unpleasant middle" [*in unerfreulicher Mitte*], while the loss of the maternal language threatens identity and creativity. This loss of identity as associated with the loss of the maternal language is a concept that has survived until our times and is still present in the background of theoretical frameworks of modern scholars: a certain suspicion can still be perceived towards bilingual writers, who are both foreigners and locals, belonging to a sort of inter-culture and using two languages to say the same things in different ways. During 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 both), has continued to contaminate the critical reception of the bilingual texts" (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:3), and posing a problem to translation theory and language studies. Until the end of the Twentieth century, scholars who studied bilingual writers (such as Courtivron, Lesser or Pérez-Firmat) would accept the German Romantic paradigm of the preciousness and uniqueness of the mother-tongue. However, in more recent academic studies, a gradual shift of focus can be observed, which highlights or at least notices the enriching side of the bilingual experience: this seems to be partly due to discoveries in neurolinguistics and partly the result of closer attention by translation studies scholars to bilingual production. Monolingualism, on the other hand, seems a less spontaneous and human phenomenon than multilingualism is (just think about the

Italian dialects): the idea of a state as a “homogenous linguistic entity” (Ibid.) is an artificially created myth, rather than a natural evolution of history.

As stated by Russian formalists in the early Twentieth century, writers or poets need to shape their literary language by distancing themselves from the routine of everyday speech, which automises our perception of language. This estrangement (*ostranenie*) from routine language should allow the writer to discover the “otherness of his mother tongue and its semiotic vitality” (Klimkiewicz, 2013:192). Bilingual writers, on the other hand, create their own artistic originality by changing the medium of expression that provides them with a new or enlarged working instrument. In self-translation, the writer explores the contact zones that take place in a multidirectional and multilingual dialogue, creating at the same time a network of passages that Emily Apter calls “the translation zone”, understood as “zones of linguistic indeterminacy and interaction” (Apter, 2006:2).

The way a bilingual writer naturally uses language as a creative tool is different from what it would have been had he learned only one language. The people’s thoughts need to take shape in their head and only after do they become words: according to Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, “Compared with external speech, inner speech appears disconnected and incomplete” (quoted in Mateika, 1986:172). Its articulation is already problematic itself because the transition from inner to external speech cannot be achieved by simply giving voice to our silent inner speech. It is rather a complex, dynamic process that involves the transformation of “the predicative idiomatic structure of inner speech into syntactically articulated speech intelligible to others”. In the case of self-translators, vocalisation of silent speech is even more complex, since they undergo a process of bilingual “co-enunciation”, with the result of a “twin work, produced in two different languages” (Kimkiewicz, 2013:192).

Moreover, if all self-translators are bilinguals, not all bilinguals are self-translators: the cognitive processes that underlie the activity of translation are different from those which are connected with such activities as speaking, understanding, reading or writing in different languages: in fact, “many fluent bilinguals have trouble translating, and self-translation is usually no less difficult process for a bilingual writer”. (Beaujour, 1989:19). Therefore, a writer’s conscious awareness of his linguistic options is not to be taken for granted, since “bilinguals frequently shift languages without making a conscious decision to do so, but polyglot and bilingual *writers* must deliberately decide which language to use in a given instance’ (Beaujour 1989:38; italics in original). Since self-translation involves an equally important decision, it may be interesting to take a look at how bilingual writers deal with their particular situation of having a double (or multiple) choice of linguistic tools at their disposal to shape their thoughts and turn them into literary works. That of the bilingual author-translator is an especially interesting study case, since both writers and bilinguals in general have a special relationship with language: the particular case of the bilingual writer is therefore characterised by a different language awareness from that of his monolingual colleagues. To say it with Brian T. Fitch’s words, “the bilingual writer is not merely aware of the existence of a multiplicity of tongues, but he lives in the continual presence of this awareness during the very act of writing” (Fitch, 1988:158).

Elizabeth K. Beaujour’s attempt to look inside the bilingual writers’ minds shows how their special condition distinguishes them from other writers *as a group* with different mental patterns as far as linguistic activities are concerned. She observes that “in

many ways, bilingual or polyglot writers have more in common with each other, whatever their national origins, than they do with monolinguals”⁷ (Beaujour, 1995:37).

Beaujour’s starting point is that not all brains are organised for linguistic activities in the same way: assuming that there is a broad range of patterns of hemispheric participation in language processing, bilinguals display a considerable variation of hemispheric representation of certain language functions. It has been observed by neuroscientists that “cortical organisation for language in the adult brain is to some degree flexible” and that certain areas in the dominant-language hemisphere will be “committed to language only if the individual is a bilingual or polyglot” (Beaujour, 1989:14). Therefore, the fact of bilingualism per se may have neurophysiological consequences, with the bilingual brains being differently organised than they would have been had they remained monolingual. When, at an early age, a child needs to build up alternative processing strategies for incoming language data, he becomes “less inclined to rely on more fixed or rigid strategies for a number of cognitive tasks” (Ibid.). Therefore, according to Beaujour’s thesis, bilinguals have more processing strategies available to them than monolinguals do and some of these strategies may even be qualitatively different from any of the strategies available to monolinguals. And she goes even further by stating that there is a connection between bilingualism or multilingualism and superior indices of cognitive flexibility: Beaujour’s claim is that bilingualism provides a person with a “comparative three-dimensional insight into language, a type of stereolinguistic optic on

⁷ Hokenson and Munson’s analysis of the bilingual text throughout history (2007) has led them to a similar conclusion, i.e. to consider self-translators as a group of writers, who have different nationalities and belong to different historical periods, but share fundamental features, that imprint their literary production so much that they end up sharing more features with their bilingual, rather than monolingual colleagues, regardless of how different in time and space these can be found. In particular, Hokenson points out that “If we look closely at self-translators as a group, however, [...], it becomes apparent that across their different periods, languages and cultures, self-translators – as a group – have been largely motivated by certain private, artistic and literary ambitions of a uniquely dual nature” (Hokenson, 2013:40).

communication that monolinguals rarely experience” (Beaujour, 1989:14). Translators often report that they don’t feel their movement between source language and target language to be lateral, but that they rather perceive translation as a “plunge below both languages as though one had to get from one side of a pool to the other by diving in and swimming deep underwater, thus finally reemerging on the other side” (Beaujour, 1989:36). The bilinguals’ particular way of processing language at a cognitive level must certainly influence their way of perceiving language, and, because of their unique perception of language, should impact their literary production from a stylistic and artistic point of view.

Taken into consideration within the context of a writer’s literary career, self-translation is the activity that forces writers, who have been considering to write in another language and perhaps have already been experimenting with it, to finally commit to write in their second or third language. Apparently, there is a certain recurrent cycle within the bilingual writers’ literary biographies, that can help us shed a light on their relationship with their own bilingualism. According to Elizabeth Beaujour,

[...] 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 the literary results of which are frequently startling and always unique. (Beaujour, 1989:27)

Within this cycle, self-translation is usually and at times unconsciously assigned the important task of helping the bilingual or multilingual author proceed through the torment of the first years of writing in a second language and fully realise his bilingual potential in his literary career.

At this point, one might already notice that the relationship between a writer and his own bilingualism is not always peaceful and easygoing. On the contrary, despite the undeniably valuable advantages mentioned above, a writer's bilingualism can come along with a difficult relationship with his two languages, his own identity and self-perception. When an author rewrites his own work in a second language, there are important implications to language, identity and voice, as well as the presence of a sense of continuous duality. If being bilingual has any negative implications at all, these are most probably to be found in this greyish area.

In relation to this, Mary Besemeres has quite recently agreed with the German Romanic paradigm of the impossibility for a person to be bilingual in her work *Translating One's Self* (2002). In Besemeres' view, the process of self-translation is a threat to the writer's identity, which is always related to a person's first language. According to her thesis, bilinguals live within conflicting versions of their selves and sooner or later they will need to make a choice between their two selves and their two languages. She believes that the coexistence of two languages inside a person's mind is far from being a peaceful one: Besemeres sees the second language as "the upstart" that longs to take over and "contest the first language" (Besemeres, 2002:26). She describes a person's mother-tongue as the true home of identity, which needs to be safeguarded. Translation process is therefore a dangerous threat to the writer's identity. However, when writing five years later, Mary Besemeres changed her position towards bilingualism. In *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures*, Besemeres and Anna Wierzbicka present a completely different interpretation of loss in relation to bilingualism. According to their thesis, loss is what monolinguals experience by "lacking a comparative perspective" and missing a whole "world of human experience" (Besemeres and Wierzbicka, 2007:xv). The unique double perspective possessed by bilinguals is here described as an advantage

and an important asset, since being entirely monolingual is an important loss at an individual and social level.

A practical example of the relationship between a writer and his bilingual identity can be found in Susan Bassnett's essay *The Self-Translator as a Rewriter* (2013), where she analyses the case of Canadian writer Nancy Huston. Despite acknowledging the fact that self-translation is a "difficult and painful" process (quoted in Bassnett, 2013:16), Huston, who writes versions of her novels both in French and in English, describes its extremely positive consequences both for her literary work and her bilingual identity:

[self-translation] appears at first to expose gaps between languages, to raise the spectre of a divided mind and of a divided world, but when the translation is completed, the gaps are closed, the process has become a healing one and the self-translator is no longer caught between languages, but able to exist fully in both (Bassnett, 2013:16).

When a work of self-translation is accomplished, Huston reports to feel "a sense of satisfaction" as a consequence of having told the same story in two different languages: "as if that somehow proved that I'm not a schizophrenic, not crazy. Because ultimately I'm the same person in both languages" (personal communication, quoted in Bassnett, 2013:16). Therefore, in Huston's case, self-translation is a cure to any possible threat to her identity, which may derive from the particular condition of bilingualism.

Richard Kearney's view of self-translation seems to confirm Huston's practical experience. In his introduction to Paul Ricoeur's essays *On Translation*, Kearney describes self-translation as a way that can help the bilingual author finding his real sense of identity:

The idealist romantic self, sovereign master of itself and all it surveys, is replaced by an 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).

Traditionally, double things have a negative, even an evil connotation and tend to scare people off: unity is commonly perceived as a positive, clear and straightforward idea, but when it comes to doubles (think about twins or doppelgängers), our cultural heritage invites us to look down at them - at least - with suspicion. This negative allure may to a certain degree be reasonable: if two languages inside the same mind don't evolve towards a peaceful and productive coexistence, one of them will remain either incomplete or become a threat to the other as a productive artistic tool. The broken unity in terms of language and identity can be repaired by self-translation, which works as an "anchor, able to ground the self in the middle of instability" (Kimkiewicz, 2013:191). Self-translation is therefore a fundamental phase of a writer's cycle of acceptance of his own bilingualism, in which a writer first insists on the attempt to maintain the linguistic purity in his first language, secondly masters his other language as a literary working tool and ultimately accepts his condition of bilingualism as an enriching and distinctive feature, which permeates his work and his style.

2.2 (Self-)translators' authority and invisibility

The self-translator's authority is one of the most prominent features of a bilingual author-translator, especially if compared with the case of standard translation. The standard translator works on a source text written by another writer and however closely they may collaborate (if the author is a living one), the question of the translator's invisibility will always arise. According to Venuti (2008:6), a notion of authorship for the translator has not yet been defined. Therefore, in the theory and practice of standard translation, the foreign author is always perceived as a privileged figure, while the translator is somehow subordinate, often regarded to as a "copyist" or a "play actor" (Venuti,

2008:7). The general high regard for the “original” text has long maintained the myth of the translator’s invisibility, or lack of originality.

Lawrence Venuti analyses several study cases of standard translators⁸ throughout history and shows that, before engaging in a translation process, these translators need to understand the dominant values of their native contemporary languages and cultures, i.e. the values of the target language, such as the current usage of the lexicon and syntactical structures. In order to perform their work, they must have also needed to define the cultural and linguistic elements of the source language which might have been considered foreign by their target audience (archaisms and vulgarities can be an example). A standard translator can normally choose between two ways to perform his work: he can either focus on domestication, i.e. on the illusion of fluency and adaptation of the text to the target culture at the cost of changing the source text, or on foreignization, which highlights the differences between the two cultures, instead of erasing them. Venuti points out the prevalence of domesticating practices especially in the area of English language translations. Such practices cause the phenomenon of the translator’s invisibility⁹, which, according to Venuti, is far from being harmless and comes along with subversive effects, or what he calls “the violence of translation” (Venuti 2008:13). Besides, this violence characterises any translation, because a foreign text could never be transposed in a fully intact form into a new language and a new culture: all translations involve domestication to a certain degree, i.e. “an exchange of foreign-language intelligibilities for those of the translating language”. However, domestication “need not mean assimilation, that is, a conservative reduction of the foreign text to dominant

⁸ In his *Translator’s Invisibility* (2008, 2nd ed.), Lawrence Venuti provides examples of standard translators who produced foreignized works: these figures include Doctor John Nott, Francis Newman, Iginio Ugo Tarchetti and Paul Blackburn.

⁹ Venuti’s concept of invisibility refers to a translator who writes in a way that encourages the reader to believe he is dealing with an “original” text.

values” (Venuti, 2008:177). Venuti advocates for a foreignizing translation practice, claiming that it “can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations¹⁰” (Venuti 2008:16). Therefore, in Venuti’s view a good translation should highlight the foreignness of the source text, not allowing a dominant target culture to assimilate the differences of the source culture.

As far as self-translation is concerned, these concepts become once more quite not as straight-forward as they are for standard translation. A standard translator’s invisibility, which derives from his attempt to domesticate the target text and illude his readership that the text has not been translated at all, cannot be plainly applied to a self-translator’s work. Firstly, a self-translator may not always have access to the same ideas about dominant cultures and foreignizing strategies and he doesn’t always translate in his mother tongue (is he always aware of what his mother tongue is in the first place?). Another important issue that needs be taken into consideration for the purposes of this analysis is the fact that many bilingual writers have worked in a context of emigration, which may have lead them to detach themselves from the current knowledge of the target text’s language and culture, because self-translators “are moving away from their original culture towards the language and culture which they embrace” (Miletich, 2008:7).

A writer’s persistence in two cultures and in two languages is not a static one: it is closely connected with each writer’s biography and his historical context. Therefore, his

¹⁰ Geo-political relations may refer, for instance, to post-colonial contexts, where the translator’s invisibility highlighted ways in which an unequal balance of power between languages and literatures had been exploited in translation. As demonstrated by translation studies, literary translation plays a vital role in determining how a society perceives a work of literature that has been produced at another time and/or in another culture. In Venuti’s view, the translator is therefore far from being an invisible filter through which a text passes on to another target readership: the translator’s role is fundamental.

understanding of the dominant values of the target language and its current lexicon, in addition to his knowledge of the cultural and linguistic features of the source language, can vary considerably depending on the different stages of his émigré life. The self-translator's authority, however, is a persistent element of every stage of his bilingual literary production, as opposite to a standard translator's perpetual invisibility. According to 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". The concept of a self-translator's authority is closely related to the unusual hierarchy between source and target text mentioned above. Santoyo describes the phenomenon, further developing his mirror metaphor and stating that:

Only the author retains the right to change, alter, deform or distort the reflected image of the original, and we could not in any way accuse the author of mistakes or inaccuracies, because the 'mirror' is not something foreign to him or her: the author is, de facto, the 'mirror' in which the original looks at itself (Santoyo, 2013: xix).

Consequently, the author-translator's authority allows him to play with the text as much as he wants to: there's no need for him to hide or become invisible, simply because he is rewriting his own book. 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" (Grutman 2009b: 259, quoting Perry 1981:181) The changes resulting from a work of self-translation are a good source of information for a study of the creative process of a fluid bilingual text.

The existence of a self-translated text has important implications on the literary translations' market as well. As already noticed above, translations into a third language are sometimes made starting from the self-translated text, rather than from the first

(chronologically speaking) version of the same text, and having two versions written by the same author allows the standard translator to use self-translations as an important tool of “stylistic, semantic and cultural disambiguation” (Osimo, quoted in Imposti, 2013:257). But if we stay in the realm of the two languages chosen by the writer to produce his bilingual work, it is highly likely that his self-translation will be considered as the “ultimate” translation available on the market and no further attempts to translate this work will be implemented. Alexandra Berlina (2014) has noticed that Nabokov’s Russian translation of *Lolita* is one such example¹¹, while *Kamera Obskura* is an example of a similar, but somehow reversed phenomenon: the self-translator’s English text has definitely replaced the previous work of a standard translator, which consequently has never been republished again. This is strongly connected with the audience’s perception of the self-translated text, which is different from their perception of a regular translation.

The entry on self-translation in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia (2nd ed.)* states that “the public’s reception of an author’s own translation is often based not so much on an extensive study of the textual product’s intrinsic qualities, [...] as on an appreciation of the process that gave birth to it”. Consequently, an author-translator is somehow more “appreciated” and perceived as reliable, since he happens to be the same person who created the original version in the first place. As stated by Fitch, “the writer-translator is no doubt felt to have been in a better position to recapture the intentions of the author of the original than any ordinary translator” (Fitch 1988:125). Therefore, in comparison

¹¹ In her *Brodsky Translating Brodsky* (2014, 23-24), Alexandra Berlina studies the coexistence of self-translated texts with translations of the same texts performed by external translators. She states that “while major literary works are usually retranslated, sometimes more than once by each generation, the presence of an authorial version presents a major ‘translator’s block’”. Her idea is that, especially as far as poetry is concerned, the more translations of a literary work there are, the better: they can all be used to analyse more closely the author’s text during the “after-life” of his work.

with the standard translator, the self-translator holds - in the audience's perception - a higher status and is certainly a *visible* figure: self-translations are usually published with an authorial preface, where the writer describes his experience of self-translation and provides the reader with a personal commentary on this kind of work. When creating a second version of his text, a writer-translator, to quote Fitch's definition, produces an equally respectable work, despite its possible linguistic faults (if any), that is to be included in the writer's production and to be considered as a part of his artistic and literary development.

2.3 Target audience

The issue of the self-translator's authority as perceived by his target readership raises another important question, that needs to be further analysed. Who does the bilingual writer work for when he rewrites his own books? At a first glance, the situation might seem quite similar to what standard translators do: refracted products - to speak in Lefevere's terms - are re-written for a new audience, enter a new literary system, and inevitably change it by interacting with its elements. In Lefevere's view, rewriters are responsible for "the general reception and survival of works of literature among non-professional readers, who constitute the great majority of readers in our global culture, to at least the same, if not a greater extent than the writers themselves" (Lefevere, 1992:1). According to Susan Bassnett (2013, 24), within a bilingual text there is always a relationship between its two components, that is one of creative reworking, in which an author "chooses to rewrite for a new readership". Seen from this perspective, self-translation represents a special case of standard translation as an activity of rewriting for another target readership, in which, however, the author-translator belongs or used to belong to each one or both of these literary traditions at at least one point of his literary career. So

if the bilingual writer's figure stands in between of (at least) two cultures, how do we define the social groups that are addressed by the bilingual text? Sometimes they happen to be two obviously separate, monolingual groups, like Nabokov's Russian and English readers. However, it wasn't always easy for Nabokov to adapt his language and culture to a precise audience: he was born into one country and in the moment he was rewriting his Russian *Lolita*, that country had no longer existed for a few decades. This fact implies extensive transformations in Russian language, society and culture, which Nabokov had inevitably and in great part missed. Besides, his target audience was certainly a Russian speaking one, but this audience didn't coincide with the whole crowd of Russian speaking Soviet citizens. It was actually a much smaller group, made up of the relatively large Russian émigré community and a restricted Soviet élite, which had a dangerous access to illegally imported and reproduced copies of Nabokov's works. Furthermore, his British English, which he had famously spoken since he was a child and widely used during his years at Cambridge University, needed cultural and linguistic adaptation for an American audience.

In other periods and contexts, such as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, or postcolonial systems, a natural milieu for a bilingual readership did and does exist, a phenomenon facilitated by a set of social and historical conditions. The bilingual text is a dynamic entity that requires a dialogic relation to its audience, since people, societies and languages are constantly changing. And even when each version of a bilingual text addresses a precise monolingual target readership, as it happens with Nabokov's self-translations, the text - when considered as a whole unit - seeks for a bilingual audience as well, an audience that can appreciate both versions, the tricks and efforts of rewriting to understand the work in its completeness:

A parallel text explicitly invites bilingual participation because in this case the reader is left hovering, squinting verbally to try to make multiple signifiers coincide on the same referent. Here, normal reading practices are disrupted, since the reader's linguistic competence offers the possibility of moving or 'zigzagging' between linguistic spaces (Kimkiewicz, 2013:191).

If the bilingual text is a fluid concept, the ideal process of reception of a bilingual literary work is also a dynamic one. In this perfect situation, the bilingual readership finds itself immersed in "a simultaneous, complementary play of two mirrors, a vision that enables to estimate the quality of the reflected image (whichever of the two it may be, or both)" (Santoyo, 2013:31). Therefore, the proper reception of a bilingual text cannot be located in one single literary, linguistic, historical and cultural tradition. It can rather be found in a different context, a sort of "no man's land", where the bilingual readers' own perceptions of the two (or more) languages and cultures involved (minor/major, influential/non-influential) will define their reception of the text.

2.4 Reasons to self-translate

Grutman's definition of self-translation found in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* is provided above. However, it contains a second paragraph in which the author highlights the fact that self-translation is actually an intentional choice, far from being a spontaneous phenomenon: "Self-translators do not just master, but *choose* to create in more than one language. Their conscious awareness of this option cannot be overstated". (Grutman, 2009:257, italics are mine). Therefore, if all self-translators are bilingual writers, not all bilingual writers will necessarily choose to self-translate. Why do some authors consciously choose to rewrite in another language what has already been written and published? Grutman's classification of self-translation types can provide us with an overview of the reasons why some bilingual writers choose to self-

translate. This classification is based on the linguistic direction of each translational activity. Some self-translators' linguistic configuration can be described as asymmetrical, because it "involves a language that is symbolically and/or socially dominating and one that is symbolically and/or socially dominated"; the second group of self-translators works only "symmetrically" with "widely distributed languages that occupy comparable positions on the world stage" (Grutman, 2013:200). These are writers who can afford the luxury of using symmetrically some of the world's most widespread and established languages. For them, self-translation can represent an individual venture, marked by their personal or family history, but hardly filled with the difficulties resulting from a socially defined power differential. Many famous names belong to this category: Samuel Beckett, Nancy Huston, and Julian Green (all rather famous French–English self-translators) are good examples, but also Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky, who worked with English and Russian languages during the Cold War.

Speaking of the "asymmetrical" group, these self-translators can move either from a major language towards a minor one or from a less influential language towards a more powerful one. As for the first case, the phenomenon is not uncommon within émigré communities, in which children were raised within a different social and cultural context from that of their families, but still feel some attachment or interest towards their roots. However, as Grutman points out, when a work of self-translation moves from a minor language towards a "bigger" one, the reasons motivating this action are usually quite practical. As an example we can take the case of Luigi Pirandello, who translated some works from the Sicilian local dialect into Italian: his experience shows that the ability to work in a more "powerful" language can provide with important advantages and work as a "very efficient tool of self-promotion" (Grutman, 2013:56). Some speakers of minority languages can "feel compelled to translate their work into the dom-

inant language” Grutman (2009,57) for political and market-related reasons. This was a frequent practice among writers from several republics of the former Soviet Union¹², but there are also instances of bilingual literary works and poetry in contemporary Ireland and Scotland. There is one important downside to this type of translation context: promoting minority literatures by translating them into a major language could only confirm the dominant status of the latter and can trigger significant loss for the local minor cultures. This is especially risky if the writer chooses to translate with a “domesticated”, rather than a foreignized approach. In this sense, Grutman goes hand in hand with Venuti’s view of translation, stating that “the unequal distribution of symbolic capital among the world’s languages is such that it would be naive to picture translation as a horizontal exchange between equal partners. Most instances of translation are not so much bridges between languages as slippery slopes.” (2013:200)

A particular case is represented by émigré writers, whose bilingualism is usually caused by the act of expatriation towards a new linguistic community and whose work of self-translation can be symmetrical or asymmetrical, depending on each personal story. Emigration is itself a major factor that can trigger phenomena of self-translation. Hokenson and Munson’s historical account (2007) describes other major instances throughout history of exiled or émigré authors, who practiced self-translation. For example, they analyse the case of Charles d’Orléans, who was held captive by the English for twenty-five years and began self-translating after his imprisonment (Hokenson&Munson, 2007:51). Another famous case is that of Carlo Goldoni - a native Venetian playwright - who wrote his *Le Bourru bienfaisant* and self-translated it into *Il Burbero di buon cuore* after moving to Paris (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:115-116). Exile as a major practical reason can imply various sub-reasons to self-translate: these

¹² See Dazhdanova (1984), Perotto (2013, 183-197).

can include economical motivation (as it was for Beckett), an attempt to reach a wider audience, or the need to find a publisher. Elizabeth Beaujour (1989) observed that “exile and bilingual writing are inextricably related in obvious ways in the lives and careers not only of Russian and East European émigrés, but also of most of the other bilingual writers currently or recently practicing”.

These self-translators’ bilingualism can be defined as “exogenous”, i.e. caused by external factors, as opposite to the situations, where bilingualism is “endogenous” and the key role is played by a major State language, which interferes with local or foreign languages spoken by minorities. An example of exogenous bilingualism is that of Joseph Brodsky, who mastered English language as a working tool after having emigrated to the United States (although he already was an admirer of American poetry back in the Soviet Union). Even Nabokov can apply to this category, but in a slightly different way. Raised as a trilingual child due to the social and cultural milieu of his aristocratic family, his Russian-English bilingualism can hardly be classified as exogenous. However, his family was openly fond of British traditions, he studied in Cambridge and his English was certainly profoundly British. He therefore had to use the American English when he moved to the United States, a fact that implies lexical and cultural novelties that needed to be learnt in order to write such a novel as *Lolita*, which in almost its entirety is set in the United States.

From an artistic point of view, self-translation has often been perceived as a tedious task by bilingual writers. Beckett described it as the “wastes and wilds of self-translation” (quoted in Grutman, 2009:257), while Nabokov depicted self-translation like “sorting through one’s own innards, and then trying them on for size like a pair of gloves” (quoted in Beaujour, 1989:90). The latter started self-translating as an émigré writer, who had written several books in Russian before switching to English as main

language of literary production. His efforts in self-translation are a way to safeguard his literary work from contemporary and future external translators¹³. Nabokov feared the “clumsy attentions of future well-intentioned incompetents” (Beaujour, 1989:114). As mentioned above, “dissatisfaction with an existing translation” (Grutman, 2009:259) has triggered in Nabokov the desire to self-translate his *Kamera Obskura* into the English book *Laughter in the Dark*. Another interesting example of strictly artistic motivation behind a work of self-translation is the case of the above-mentioned Nabokov’s autobiography. What he did was expanding the autobiographical short story “Mademoiselle O,” written in French, into an English memoir, originally entitled *Conclusive Evidence*. He then self-translated the work from English into Russian under the title of *Drugie Berega* and self-translated it again back into English, thus obtaining a new final English version called *Speak, Memory*. In the author’s own words, he undertook this challenging task because a similar one “had not been tried by any human before” (SM, 12).

¹³ This motive is connected with the self-translator’s authority, which in this case is an authority perceived by the writer himself in the first place before being passed down to the target readership. Nabokov is aware that his translation, in the afterlife of his publications, will have an authority that standard translators will hardly ever gain.

Nabokov's approach to translation

3.1 Nabokov as a translator

Nabokov's translation technique has undergone a development in time; this development can be traced using two different sources of information: one is the study of his works of translation and the other is represented by his direct words and statements about translation and translators.

Firstly, Nabokov was both a translator and a self-translator: his earliest efforts in translation date back to 1910, when Nabokov - an eleven-year old boy - translated Mayne Reid's *The Headless Horseman* from the English into French alexandrines (Boyd 1990: 81). Another interesting fact: Nabokov's literary production has been touched by all three types of translation enumerated by Jakobson. Nabokov actively worked with "interlingual translation" in many different ways (translations of prose and poetry, in addition to self-translations), but he also experimented with "intralingual translation" - that is his "re-formulation of *Lolita* as a film adaptation" (see Trubukhina, 2015) and, finally, *Lolita*, *Laughter in the Dark* and *The Luzhin Defense* were all turned into films: these adaptations represent "intersemiotic translations", i.e. the "interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems." (Jakobson, 1959:139).

As far as interlingual translation is concerned, it is useful to analyse Nabokov's approach to this activity from two separate points of view: "standard" translation and self-translation. Below, table 1 sums up Nabokov's major works in these two fields of activity. Having self-translated two Russian novels in the 1930's, Nabokov increased his efforts in translating his earlier Russian fiction following *Lolita*'s success, but in a form

	Translation	Self-translation	Collaboration with Dmitri Nabokov	Other collaborations
1910-1920's	Headless Horseman (1910) EN-FR Iunaia Mysl' (Musset) 1916 FR-RU Nikol'ka Persik (1922) FR-RU Ania V Strane Chudes (1923) EN-RU			
1930's		Despair (1937) RU-EN Laughter in the Dark (1938) RU-EN		
1940's	Three Russian Poets (1945) RU-EN			Short stories RU-EN: Cloud Castle Lake (1941) The Aurealian (1941) Spring in Fialta (1947) (Peter Pertzov)
1950's	Starts working on Eugene Onegin (1953) A Hero of Our Time (1958) RU-EN (revised + introduction by N)	Drugie Berega (1954) EN-RU	Invitation to a Beheading (1959) RU-EN	
1960's	The Song of Igor's Campaign (1960) RU-EN Eugene Onegin (1964) RU-EN	Despair (II) (1966) RU-EN Lolita (1967) EN-RU (started in January 1963, finished March 1965) Speak, Memory (1967) RU-EN Poems and Problems (begins 1968) early poems RU-EN	The Eye (1965) RU-EN The Waltz Invention (1966) KQK (1968) RU-EN (revised by N in February 1966)	The Gift (1963) RU-EN (Michael Scammell with N's corrections + first chapter translated by Dmitri) The Defense (1964) RU-EN (Michael Scammell, corrected by N in October 1963)
1970's			Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories (1975) RU-EN Details of a Sunset and Other Stories (1976) RU-EN	Mary (1970) RU-EN (Michael Glenny and Nabokov) Glory (1971) RU-EN (revised in Sept 1970) A Russian Beauty and Other Stories (1973) RU-EN S. Karlinsky

Table 1. Nabokov's major translations and self-translations

of collaborative self-translation. After the first collaboration with his son Dmitri, Nabokov decided to publish his Russian novels in an English translation with the following general methodology: according to Brian Boyd, Nabokov would usually add “a new introduction by the author, a text translated entirely by him, when major revisions are required, or by Dmitri (when he has time) or another translator working under Vladimir Nabokov’s detailed supervision” (Boyd, 1995:xliv).

It is visible that Nabokov did put a lot of effort and time into his work as a translator, but literary translation wasn’t an easy task for him (as it never is). Translation, he complained, drained his energy and required “another section of the brain than the text of my book, and switching from the one to another by means of spasmodic jumps causes a kind of mental asthma” (Letter to James Laughlin, 16 July 1942. *Selected Letters*, 1989:112). However, his biggest and longest efforts in translation did gratify him. In a 1967 interview to the “Paris Review”, Nabokov was asked what works he shall be remembered for in the future. His answer was made up of two elements:

“I shall be remembered by *Lolita* and my work on *Eugene Onegin*”. (SO,106)

3.1.1 Early works: domesticated approach

Nabokov’s most prominent early translation works are the translations of Romain Rolland's *Colas Breugnon* (1921) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1922). It is well known that young Nabokov “cheerfully russianized both, trawling dictionaries for suitable archaic equivalents. He also made fine appropriative translations of French and English poets, amongst them Verlaine, Rimbaud, Supervielle, Rupert Brooke, and Yeats”. (Coates, 2006:377)

Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* is a good example of Nabokov’s translation methodology of the earlier period: he translated it at an age of 23, as a young writer fresh

of Cambridge graduation. The work was commissioned by Gamaiun, an émigré publishing venture in the summer of 1922 and published under the title of *Ania v strane chudes* in Berlin in 1923. Lewis Carroll's book was written for British children of the Victorian period. Nabokov's work, on the other hand, was written for Russian émigré children and - being a work of a white émigré writer - only in 1989 did it reach the Soviet Union with an official republication.

The translator's methodology can be observed starting from the very title of this work: the British girl *Alice* becomes a very Russian *Ania* and transformations don't end here. It is indeed possible to read the whole book without having the slightest suspicion that this perfectly Russian girl was generated by an English counterpart: characters' names, food items, spatial dimensions, historical figures and cultural and literary references were all adapted by Nabokov to a young Russian audience of his time. Similarly to what a modern strategy of localisation would do, in which the translator attempts "to anchor a reference firmly in the culture of the target audience" (Davies 2003: 72), Nabokov has created a sense of familiarity, helping his Russian readers to enter the world of Carroll's book and to "identify themselves with the characters of the story" (Vid, 2008). To speak in Venuti's terms, Nabokov has used a typically domesticated method of "radically familiarising of the original" (Vid, 2008). This choice privileges the target language over the source language; in addition to this, it bears a function of cultural mediation between countless Victorian and British references and a Russian historical, cultural and literary context.

This domesticated approach gave freedom to its translator's rich imagination and made the book more comprehensible to his young audience. Scholars have defined this translation as a work of "adaptation" or "transposition" (*perelozhenie*) (Connolly, 1995:19), and also described it as a "felice operazione di russificazione del testo origi-

nale” (“successful operation of Russification of the original text”) (Imposti, 2013:258). The result of Nabokov’s free and creative approach to the work was critically acclaimed, due to the actual brilliancy and originality of this translation. Carroll’s book is an objectively difficult task for any translator, full as it is of wordplay and elaborate puns. In his *Alice in Many Tongues: The Translations of Alice in Wonderland*, Warren Weaver has described Nabokov’s translation as an “especially clever and sensitive” foreign reincarnation of Carroll’s novel (Weaver 1964: 90). Julian W. Connolly calls Nabokov’s version “one of the most ingenious and delightful” (Connolly, 1995:19).

However, there is an obvious downside to the strategy of domestication in translation, and that is the loss of the unique cultural, linguistic and literary background of which the target text is originally permeated. Since domestication “assimilates a foreign text to the translating language and culture” (Venuti, 1998), Nabokov’s *Ania V Strane Chudes* has lost all the British cultural references, in which Carroll’s work is especially rich. As a consequence, Nabokov was at times criticised for his use of examples from Russian poetry and accused of excessive Russification of Carroll’s story, while deleting any shade of the “English” spirit (Demurova, 2003:184). Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the book is first and foremost addressed to a target audience of little Russian readers: it would be unreasonable to expect from any Russian child to understand parodies of British writers like Isaac Watts or Robert Southey. The choice of adapting them with the use of popular Russian verses allowed Nabokov to preserve Lewis Carroll’s original intention, that is to have his readers guess the source of the poem. Besides, Lawrence Venuti’s view of the contrasting translation strategies domestication/foreignization is very much related to the ethics of translation, in which “bigger” languages may absorb the otherness of “smaller” languages and cultures, this is why he advocates for the use of foreignization as a choice in translation strategy. However, the question of

ethics can hardly be applied to Nabokov's case: neither the source nor the target language or culture can be considered somehow "minor", so the problem is not much about ethics, but rather about the loss of elements from the source text in general.

The reason behind Nabokov's choice of a strongly domesticating strategy can probably be found elsewhere: this methodology choice can be explained if analysed from the point of view of Hans Vermeer's *skopos*¹⁴ theory, where the translation strategy is decided according to the purpose of the translation and the function of the translation in the target literary system. As mentioned above, Nabokov's literary translation of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is aimed at being understood by Russian children and therefore, as it often happens in children's literature, applies the practice of cultural context adaptation, i.e. domestication.

Ania v strane chudes is the last instance of a domesticated translation produced by Nabokov: from now on he would advocate for and work with a more foreignizing strategy in standard translation. Later in years, with a typical tone of a mature Nabokov, the author has spoken without enthusiasm about his *Ania*. Nabokov was seventy years old when he was commenting Simon Karlinsky's article "Anya in Wonderland: Nabokov's Russified Lewis Carroll" (1970), which fully agreed with Weaver's positive review of the Russian translation:

[Karlinsky] is much too kind to my *Anya in Wonderland* (1924). How much better I could have done it fifteen years later! The only good bits are the poems and the word-play. (SO, 286)

Nabokov's love for wordplay and puns did not fade away with years. He played with language, words and sounds in *Ania v Strane Chudes* and this part of his work was

¹⁴ Vermeer's *skopos* theory is centred around the purpose of a translation, and therefore can explain a text's translation methodology: "What the *skopos* states is that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting the target text. The theory does not state what the principle is: this must be decided separately in each specific case" (1989:228). Therefore, the same source text can be translated with different methods, depending on the purpose of a given translation.

no less appreciated by Nabokov himself almost fifty years later. Nabokov loved challenging his and the readers' mind with riddles and puzzles. If wordplay and puns were bound to leave Nabokov's standard translation methodology, they have ultimately settled themselves within his original novels, thus becoming an important characteristic of Nabokov's literary style.

3.1.2 Shift to foreignization

3.1.2.1 Lectures on Russian Literature

Nabokov's approach to standard translation has considerably evolved in years. His so-called "shift to literalism" is especially obvious in Nabokov's last two big efforts in standard translation - *The Song of Igor's Campaign* and *Eugene Onegin*, published respectively in 1960 and 1964.

Whereas the common definition "shift to literalism" is questionable, the fact that Nabokov's methodology in standard translation, as a result of his personal interest in this activity, has undergone an evolution is undeniable. This evolution was in part triggered by his teaching activity. Due to the writer's personal inclination, always extremely attentive towards precision in language, he quickly noticed (and was very annoyed by) the numerous flaws in the English translations of the authors he gave lectures about.

Nabokov's lectures on Russian literature, written in the 1940's and published in an 1981 collection, contain partial translations of the works of such Russian classics as Gogol, Tolstoy and Chekhov: these translations were made with the purpose of becoming part of Nabokov's lectures, as a consequence of his dissatisfaction with many existing English translations of the major Russian classics. Even though these translations were not made with the intention of publishing an actual English translation of Gogol's *Dead Souls* or Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, they can still be used as a source of useful informa-

tion about Nabokov's approach to standard translation, since they deal with prose works written by major Russian writers. For his lectures, Nabokov provides his students with a kind of translation that is very close to the text, as can be seen in this example taken from Gogol's *Dead Souls*:

Даже самая погода весьма кстати
прислужилась: день был не то ясный,
не то мрачный, а какого-то
светлосерого цвета, какой бывает
только на старых мундирах
гарнизонных солдат, этого, впрочем,
мирного войска, но отчасти нетрезвого
по воскресным дням.

Even the weather had obligingly
accommodated itself to the setting: the
day was neither bright nor gloomy but of a
kind of bluey-grey tint such as is found
only upon the worn-out uniforms of
garrison soldiers, for the rest a peaceful
class of warriors except for their being
somewhat inebriate on Sundays.

Nabokov as a professor of literature, paid attention to these translations, including in his lectures comments about his translation experience, reflecting upon the difficulties of translating - as in this case - the very particular syntax of the original passage:

It is not easy to render the curves of this life-generating syntax in plain English so as to bridge the logical, or rather biological, hiatus between a dim landscape under a dull sky and a groggy old soldier accosting the reader with a rich hiccup on the festive outskirts of the very same sentence. Gogol's trick consists in using as a link the word "vprochem" ("for the rest," "otherwise," "d'ailleurs") which is a connection only in the grammatical sense but mimics a logical link, the word "soldiers" alone affording a faint pretext for the juxtaposition of "peaceful"; and as soon as this false bridge of "vprochem" has accomplished its magical work these mild warriors cross over, staggering and singing themselves into that peripheral existence with which we are already familiar.

This passage acknowledges the careful translator's difficulties in transposing Gogol's peculiar style and syntax. In doing so, it simultaneously points the students'/reader's attention towards a manifestation of Gogol's literary talent, a talent that was able to connect through a graciously constructed structure the impressions derived from certain weather conditions with the uniforms of Russian soldiers.

Another distinctive feature of these translations is represented by the numerous authorial remarks, which were added by Nabokov in brackets right in the middle of the text. These remarks bear a series of different functions. One of them is the need to point out what Nabokov considered “mistranslations” he found in previous editions of the same book: one such example can be found in another passage from *Dead Souls*, when Nabokov translates “полные хозяйева” with “complete mistresses” and immediately adds in brackets: [or literally: 'full mistresses,' 'polnya khozyaiki,' which Isabel F. Hapgood in the Crowell edition mistranslates as 'fat housewives'].

Another function of these remarks is purely academic: Nabokov uses them to intervene within the text with his - in this case the university professor's - voice, in order to explain the writer's literary intentions or certain stylistic choices.

The remarks in brackets also bear an important explanatory function: they are used as a support for Nabokov's non-domesticated translation, in order to explain typically Russian cultural elements. In these texts Nabokov did not translate or transpose purely Russian elements of the source text to an American setting. Quite the contrary: he maintained names of things and people in their original form and directly explained them with the use of brackets. Thus, in the chapter dedicated to Gogol we have: transportation means like “tarantas [simplest kind of traveling carriage]”, food elements like “kalachi [purse-shaped rolls]” and “kokoorki [buns with egg or cheese stuffing]”, historical characters like “Bagration [famous Russian general]” and even fairy-tale characters like “Kashchey the Deathless [a ghoulish character in Russian folklore]”.

In the chapter dedicated to *Anna Karenina*, Nabokov's methodology is very similar (same numerous remarks in brackets), but it was further developed through an appendix of notes, which provide his audience with digressions and additional details about such recurring themes as Russian proverbs, everyday culture, clothing and fash-

ion, education, sports, food habits, history, politics and religion. Surely these detailed notes are necessary for the good reader to understand the context of Tolstoy's novel, to immerse himself in Anna Karenina's Russia, but also to appreciate the writer's style at its fullness. At the same time, these notes allowed Nabokov to translate passages from *Anna Karenina* very closely to the text, and to clarify what's hardly understandable for an American student and reader through a simple translation. The clarification function is a key one and it was also inherited by the notes attached to Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin*, a monumental work that is also deeply imbued by academic purposes.

3.1.2.2 Eugene Onegin

The teaching experience was a significant trigger in the development of Nabokov's translation methodology. After a series of lectures on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, he was so bothered by a bad English translation of the French novel that he wrote the following letter to its editor:

I am teaching a course in European Fiction at Cornell University and have selected as a permanent item Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary'. In September I ordered, for a class of 133 students [...] your edition of that novel [...]. I devoted seven class meetings to the discussion of the novel, and at least 10 minutes of every such period had to be spent in correcting the incredible mistranslations (more exactly, only the worst of them). In point of fact every page of the book contains at least three or four blunders—either obvious mistakes, or slovenly translations giving the wrong slant to Flaubert's intention. His lovely descriptions of visual things, clothes, landscapes, Emma's hairdo etc. are completely botched by the translator. I had to revise all this, going through each word of the book with a copy of the French first edition before me and have found, in addition to the various blunders due to the translator's insufficient French, a number of misprints due, in most cases, to faulty proofreading.

The letter is reported here because an important element of Nabokov's view on translation (but also teaching and writing) is implicitly mentioned in the text: the writer's meticulous attention to details contained in literature, which, in his view, are a

fundamental element of a writer's artistic talent and make up the beauty of a literary text. It was this reading approach that allowed him to quickly notice every mistranslation in English of a French novel:

My intention was to use the book next year and in later years. As my classroom analysis of Flaubert's style is a close one, and as my students are not expected to have enough French to turn to the French original, the situation is an alarming one [...] My suggestion is that before you make a new printing of your new edition [...], you accept from me a list of more than 1000 corrections [...]. I have also come to the conclusion that a number of notes elucidating local, literary and historical allusions, which are absolutely incomprehensible to the American student, ought to be added to the English translation of the book [...] and this I would also be willing to do [...] (To John Selby, Editor at Rinehart, 17 January 1951. *Selected Letters*, 1989:111–12)

This excerpt includes several interesting implications: one is Nabokov's famous approach to teaching literature (very "close" to the text¹⁵). What's more interesting for our purpose, however, is that this letter was written shortly before Nabokov started his monumental work on *Eugene Onegin* (according to Brian Boyd, he began working on it in 1953): it shows how Nabokov realised - also thanks to his teaching activity - that numerous flaws inevitably characterise a literary translated text whenever this is performed without a scrupulous attention to every detail. Nabokov's view on translation is strongly connected with his passion for accuracy and, as Brian Boyd states in his article "Nabokov as Translator: Passion and Precision" (2010), it is related to the way he saw the world at large:

¹⁵ Details were indeed of primary importance during Nabokov's classes:

"In my academic days I endeavored to provide students of literature with exact information about details [...]. In that respect, general ideas are of no importance. Any ass can assimilate the main points of Tolstoy's attitude toward adultery but in order to enjoy Tolstoy's art the good reader must wish to visualize, for instance, the arrangement of a railway carriage on the Moscow-Petersburg night train as it was a hundred years ago" (SO, 157).

"When studying Kafka's famous story, my students had to know exactly what kind of insect Gregor turned into (it was a domed beetle, not the flat cockroach of sloppy translators) and they had to be able to describe exactly the arrangement of the rooms, with the position of doors and furniture, in the Samsa family's flat" (SO, 55).

Nabokov felt that a world as full and rich as ours offers endless rewards for curious minds. He writes of one of his characters, “He was a pessimist, and like all pessimists, ridiculously unobservant.” The more we make the effort to understand the surprising particulars of our world, he thought, the more we take the effort to see the individuality of things, the more we can appreciate the world we find ourselves in. (Boyd, 2010:15)

A curious and extremely precise attitude is therefore required from an artistic talent, from a reader and from a translator: compare this attitude “with that of translators who don’t think particulars matter to the original poet or the poet’s audience” (Boyd, 2010:15) and it will be easy to realise why Nabokov was so annoyed by bad translations of the world classics he gave lectures about at Cornell.

When a writer creates a literary text, be it prose or poetry, he deliberately chooses to use certain, very precise words. A relationship of power develops between the author and his text, and this relationship has very important consequences on the phenomenon of translation: as stated by Christine Rougert-Bouvard (1995), the text, seen from this perspective, is a sort of a sacred entity, “inviolable, to be conserved ‘as it is’ except in cases of intervention by the author and by him alone”. A translation becomes therefore a “profanation” of the original text, whilst reading a bad translation is “a degrading act” (Rougert-Bouvard, 1995:119-124), both for the literary value of the original text and for the reader¹⁶. This, in my view, can explain why Nabokov concentrated on the source text, sacrificing form in the target text and applying an extremely rigorous and unaesthetic approach to his English translations of such fundamental Russian literary works as *The Song of Igor’s Campaign* and *Eugene Onegin*.

¹⁶ This viewpoint can also show why Nabokov chose to self-translate and to control the English translations of his Russian novels: “A reader of a translated text inevitably faces the issue of authority (in the sense of the text’s origin), but also of power - the power of the words themselves: in fact, “the power of words so troubled Nabokov that he chose to be his own translator”. (Rougert-Bouvard, 1995:119-134).

The above-mentioned letter shows that in 1951 Nabokov had already realised, while teaching literature at Cornell, that a translation alone cannot disclose all the information contained within a foreign source text: if the translator doesn't want (and this is a translator's intentional choice) to distort and localise the source text, a target text can be made culturally and historically comprehensible to a foreign audience only with the support of "elucidating" notes, which allow the translator to maintain the unique cultural, historical and literary references of the source text¹⁷.

This approach is strongly connected with the purpose of the translation: Nabokov's foreigneized translations were not supposed to "entertain or delight, but to educate and inform" (Coates, 2006:381): during the 1950s, the writer translated mostly for teaching purposes. In his foreword to the translation of Lermontov's classic *A Hero of our Time* (1958), Nabokov illustrated the characteristics of bad translations:

In the first place we must dismiss, once and for all the conventional notion that a translation 'should read smoothly' and 'should not sound like a translation' [...]. In point of fact, any translation that does not sound like a translation is bound to be inexact upon inspection; while, on the other hand, the only virtue of a good translation is faithfulness and completeness (pp. xii-xiii).

Interestingly, Nabokov's assessment against translations that "read smoothly" and "don't sound like a translation" reminds of the opening of Lawrence Venuti's famous work *The Translator's Invisibility*¹⁸. The latter, however, advocates for a foreigneized

¹⁷ Cultural references were therefore translated by young and mature Nabokov in completely different ways: in *Alice*, he favours the method of transposition, i.e. he transposes the entire setting from the United Kingdom to Russia, while in a more mature translation like that of *Eugene Onegin*, everything Russian is maintained and explained through notes, which convey the full meaning of the source text to an American target audience.

¹⁸ "A translated text [...] is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the "original." (Venuti 2008:1)

form of translation out of ethical principles, whilst mature Nabokov - who uses three major European languages - sees in freely adapted translations an excuse for an unacceptable lack of precision and consequent loss of the author's literary intentions in translation. Nabokov's "foreignized" translation methodology (Vid, 2008) is characterised by the use of these "elucidating" notes, which he had already adopted for teaching purposes in the early 1950's: his translation of *Eugene Onegin* aims at explaining the meaning of the original text with the support of a huge paratext made up of a rich collection of annotations. The footnotes can be therefore seen as a tool, used by the translator in order to help the reader approach the original work, or as B. Osimo has put it, to "taste the real thing", instead of "feeding him/her on homogenised food with a literary flavour" (Osimo, 1999:216).

Nabokov's early English translations of Pushkin, published in a small collection (*Three Russian Poets: Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev*, Vladimir Nabokov, Norfolk: New Directions, 1945), were later dismissed by the writer as "graceful imitations". In his introduction to *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov firmly states that the only possible translation is a literal translation, resolutely refusing any form of adaptation or paraphrase:

The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. The term 'literal translation' is tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody (EO, 134).

Nabokov stated that for his work on Pushkin, he "had to decide between rhyme and reason" - and he chose reason: "My only ambition has been to provide a crib, a pony, an absolutely literal translation of the thing, with copious and pedantic notes whose bulk

far exceeds the text of the poem¹⁹. Only a paraphrase «reads well»; my translation does not; it is honest and clumsy, ponderous and slavishly faithful” (SO, 7). The result of this didactic and scholarly method has been defined by Gabriella Imposti as a “dissezione anatomica del testo, [...] una traduzione quasi filologica” (“anatomic dissection of the text, almost a philological kind of translation”) (Imposti, 2013:259).

Nabokov’s so-called “shift to literalism” is often regarded as a radical change in approach to translation. This is - up to a certain degree - true. However, one should bear in mind that the purpose and the target audience of his mature translations have also radically departed from those of his early translations. Another important aspect to be considered is the function that these translations play within Nabokov’s literary biography. The early translations (*Nikol’ka Persik* and *Ania V Strane Chudes*) were made at a young age and can be seen as literary experiments in translation of a neophyte trilingual writer, who loves poetry and word-play, to the point that they were defined as “bravura performances” (Beaujour, 1995:714). Later translations have different purposes and deal with milestones of the history of Russian literature: there is no contradiction between young and mature Nabokov-translator, rather a natural evolution of theoretical premises and goals in translation.

Below, table 2 compares the main characterising categories of Nabokov’s young and mature translations, using as samples the two works that were discussed in the present work.

¹⁹ An interesting fact was pointed out by Shunichiro Akikusa. Nabokov’s own novels contained, of course, quotations from *Eugene Onegin*. In his self-translations of his Russian novels, Nabokov used lines from his own translation of Pushkin’s masterpiece when dealing with quotations from *Eugene Onegin*: “The most direct connection of Nabokov’s EO with his works clearly appears in his self-translations during his post-American years. Needless to say, Nabokov’s Russian works often include parts of Pushkin’s EO [...]. When he translated them in later years, he always utilised his EO.” (2010,104) Examples can be found in the translations of *Mashen’ka* (1926) and *Zashchhita Luzhina* (1930).

	Ania V Strane Chudes	Eugene Onegin
Source language - target language	English-Russian	Russian-English
Text type	Prose with parts written in poetry	Poetry
Stylistic features of the translation	Nabokov replicates and re-creates Carroll's characteristic style both in the prose (word-play, puns), and in the poetry (the text contains parodies of British poems, for which Nabokov re-creates parodies of Russian poems)	The text is a crib, the translator is focused on rendering the meaning of the source text's every single word (heavy use of elucidating notes). Style and form is irrelevant in the target text. The translator has deliberately chosen not to re-create the poetic aspect of the text, labelling it as an impossible task.
Culturally specific elements	Domestication and transposition: British literary, cultural and historical elements are substituted with the Russian equivalents and therefore lost in the target text. <i>Ania</i> reads like a Russian story: that is, as if it hasn't been translated at all.	Foreignisation: the text has deliberately maintained its foreign allure. Elucidating notes are used to explain what's otherwise incomprehensible reading the sole literal translation
Purpose	Entertainment: the translation is a rewriting in the sense that it reads like a new, Russian book. The translator doesn't mean to convey to his readers such British literary elements as parodies of Victorian poets.	To convey a foreign literary masterpiece to a new readership. The translation is a tool to be used by a foreign audience in order to approach a literary work that belongs to a different literary polysystem.
Source-target text relationship	The target text is a transposed imitation of the source text's original form. The target text has acquired its own poetic and artistic value, but lost many of the source text's original elements.	The source text intentionally predominates over the target text, the latter openly and completely depending on Pushkin's original work.
Target audience	Russian émigré children: Carroll's book was also originally published as a text for young Victorian readers.	The reader of this translation is a student or a scholar, who wants to study a foreign literature: he's not opening the book in a moment of relax to entertain himself, but he's a conscientious reader with an academic approach to literature. He might even use the "crib" provided by the translator as a support to the original source text if he has a basic knowledge of the source language.

Table 2. From Carroll to Pushkin

3.1.3 The Art of Translation

Today, reading Nabokov's own words, it is easy to perceive how strong his feelings against bad translations and bad translators were. His "shift to literalism" was connected to the writer's deep respect for textual and linguistic precision in literature.

In his essay "The Art of Translation" (1941), Nabokov makes a list of the characteristics and skills a good translator must possess in his view. These include:

- Literary talent ("First of all he must have as much talent, or at least the same kind of talent, as the author he chooses." (197))
- Knowledge of both source and target language and their cultures ("Second, he must know thoroughly the two nations and the two languages involved." (197))
- Knowledge of the author's literary style ("Be perfectly acquainted with all details relating to his author's manner and methods."(197))
- An in-depth lexical knowledge ("..the social background of words, their fashions, history and period associations." (197))
- The gift of mimicry, i.e. the ability to enter the author's mind and understand what lies behind a literary text ("..he must possess the gift of mimicry and be able to act, as it were, the real author's part by impersonating his tricks of demeanor and speech, his ways and his mind, with the utmost degree of verisimilitude."(197))

It's easy to see here that Nabokov realises the difficulties and the great responsibility of the translator's task: a translator must have both talent and knowledge in linguistic and literary areas. Therefore, given the importance of the translator's job, in the same essay Nabokov writes with the usual degree of repulsion about bad translations and bad translators:

Three grades of evil can be discerned in the queer world of verbal transmigration. The first, and lesser one, comprises obvious errors due to ignorance or misguided knowledge. This is mere human frailty and thus excusable. The next

step to Hell is taken by the translator who intentionally skips words or passages that he does not bother to understand or that might seem obscure or obscene to vaguely imagined readers; [...] The third, and worst, degree of turpitude is reached when a masterpiece is planished and patted into such a shape, vilely beautified in such a fashion as to conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public. (195)

This paragraph is characterised by the use of such heavy key words as “evil”, “Hell” and “turpitude”: it exposes Nabokov’s merciless judgement of whoever distorts literary works with bad translations. Now, it was precisely this feeling that gave Nabokov the motivation to translate his beloved Russian classic into English, but it was also the motivation behind his efforts in self-translation of his novels and short stories into the languages he could use as a working tool.

3.2 Nabokov as a self-translator

3.2.1 Early multilingualism and stylistic strangeness

Between the ages of ten and fifteen in St. Petersburg, I must have read more fiction and poetry—English, Russian and French—than in any other five-year period of my life. I relished especially the works of Wells, Poe, Browning, Keats, Flaubert, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Alexander Blok. On another level, my heroes were the Scarlet Pimpernel, Phileas Fogg, and Sherlock Holmes. In other words, I was a perfectly normal trilingual child in a family with a large library. (SO, 43)

Nabokov’s early multilingualism is a widely acknowledged fact, as well as his characteristic writing style, which immediately stands out in both his Russian and English works. Starting from his earliest childhood in pre-revolutionary Russia, Nabokov had grown used to playing with words and languages together with his parents: his family’s linguistic games, like “multilingual punning, garbling quotations, parodying styles, translating thorny texts, were a pleasurable pastime, no less challenging than detecting and constructing patterns in chess” (Boyd 1990:256-7). Nabokov’s early literary interests

were Russian, but also very European, going hand in hand with his family's openness to Western Europe, including his parents' fondness of everything British (from everyday objects such as toothpaste to literature and politics) and the usual summer trips to France and Italy.

Later in years, Nabokov's prose did not escape the suspicion which tends to characterise the criticism of a bilingual writer's style (mentioned above and analysed as a general phenomenon by Hokenson and Munson, 2007). This suspicion was - as it usually happens - generated by the impossibility of encircling Nabokov's prose into a definite national literary background and polysystem. A fact that Nabokov was far from being embarrassed by: he flaunted his cosmopolitan nature, arguing that "the nationality of a worthwhile writer is of secondary importance" (SO, 63), and presenting himself as a "born cosmopolitan genius who has never been attached to anything and anybody but his autonomous imagination and personal memory" (Dolinin, 2005:53). It is well-known that Nabokov himself had never identified his work with any definite national literary tradition: his writings show "marked traces of French, English, Russian literary influence" (Grayson, 1977:57). His Russian production was influenced by Western European traditions as well, and was "to a certain degree out of line with Russian writing of his time" (Grayson, 1977:57). This deliberate non-alignment was maintained by Nabokov when he switched to the English language.

His literary style was thus perceived as strange both by Russian and - later on - by English-speaking critics: some of his émigré contemporaries considered Nabokov's prose

“foreign” and “un-Russian²⁰”, just as some American critics would later find his English contrived²¹. (Forster, 1993; Hokenson and Munson, 2007). In an interview, Nabokov invoked the Russian term *ostranenie*, when asking, “What doesn’t make strange, estrange, *strangify* in a book if the author is a genuine artist?” (quoted in Grayson 1977:216).

This “estrangement” of Nabokov’s prose is an important characteristic of his literary style: according to Khodasevich, Nabokov widely used the above-mentioned technique of *ostranenie* to convey the central theme of his works, that is “Жизнь художника и жизнь приема в сознании художника” (the life of the artist and the life of a device in the consciousness of the artist): in his 1937 essay “On Sirin”, Khodasevich states that “При тщательном рассмотрении Сирин оказывается по преимуществу художником формы, писательского приема” (under thorough scrutiny Sirin proves for the most

²⁰ Foster (1993, 8) points out that “Nabokov’s émigré contemporaries sensed something non-Russian in his work”. He cites Adamovich, for whom, Nabokov was “a major Russian writer, but out of step with Russian literature.” Nina Berberova wrote in her autobiography *Italics are Mine* that Nabokov belonged “to the entire Western world”: “Набоков — единственный из русских авторов (как в России, так и в эмиграции), принадлежащий всему западному миру (или — миру вообще), не России только. Принадлежность к одной определенной национальности или к одному определенному языку для таких, как он, в сущности, не играет большой роли.” (“Nabokov is the only Russian author (both in Russia and in emigration), who belongs to the entire Western world (or to the world in general), and not only to Russia. For an artist of his nature the fact of belonging to one certain nationality or to one certain language doesn’t play a significant role any longer”) (358) A 1930 article by M. Tsetlin states that “Оба романа Сирина («Король, дама, валет» и «Защита Лужина»)… настолько вне большого русла русской литературы, так чужды русских литературных влияний, что критики невольно ищут влияний иностранных.” (“both novels (KQN and *The Luzhin Defense*)… are so alien to the big flow of Russian literature, so distant from Russian literary influences, that critics are spontaneously looking for foreign influences”) (1930:530-531). G.P. Struve wrote more moderately that “Неоднократно указывалось на „нерусскость“ Сирина. Мне это указание представляется неверным в общей форме. У Сирина есть ‘нерусские’ черты — вернее, черты, не свойственные русской литературе, взятой в целом.” (“Sirin’s un-Russianness has been noticed and commented by many critics. To me this definition appears incorrect in its general form. Sirin has ‘un-Russian’ traits - or better - traits that are unusual for Russian literature in general”), while E.N. Andreev described Nabokov’s prose as a synthesis between «русских настроений с западноевропейской формой» (“Russian moods and Western European form”). (quoted in Struve, 1956)

²¹ Another more recent example is found in Michael Wood’s 1994 book *The Magician’s Doubt*: in the preface to his book the author defined Nabokov’s English as “fabulous, freaky, singing, acrobatic, unheard-of English” (1994:5)

part to be an artist of form, of the writer's device). The formal aspect of his prose is thus extremely important, since

Сирин не только не маскирует, не прячет своих приемов, как чаще всего поступают все [...], но напротив: Сирин сам их выставляет наружу, как фокусник, который, поразив зрителя, тут же показывает лабораторию своих чудес. (Khodasevich, 1937).

Sirin not only does not mask, does not hide his devices [...] but on the contrary, Sirin himself places them in full view like a magician, who, having amazed his audience, reveals immediately the laboratory of his miracles.

Nabokov intentionally used striking and surprising images when he was writing in Russian, a prose that was very often synaesthetic, rhythmic, alliterative and onomatopoeic: every word in his writings plays an important role and contributes to creating the general sound of Nabokov's text, so rich in details that it carries an intense aesthetic value.

Nabokov's images leap a gap of surprise, they are meant to look artificial, *unnatural*, and yet awaken the possibility of a universe somehow coruscating with consciousness in ways we cannot see (Boyd 1990:296, italics are mine).

As Jane Grayson (1977:206) has assumed, "it would almost seem that Nabokov, in order to establish an individual style and stamp it with difference and distinction, was ... quite deliberately choosing the *extraordinary*": Nabokov's style is undoubtedly outstanding, both in Russian and in English. Some scholars have explained this on a neurological level, that is, with his multilingualism: Nabokov has stated that he thinks in images, not in words: "Nabokov insists on his audition colorée, seeing letters in colours, intimately linked to sound. Nabokov also frequently thinks in literary images, that are both visually and linguistically couched". (Beaujour, 1989:35)

If the development of Nabokov's literary style can be traced in any direction at all, that direction would be a direction of "increasing stylisation, increasing deployment of artifice, with the author's controlling hand more openly revealed" (Grayson, 1977:176).

During his career as an American writer, Nabokov increasingly blended his languages in the English text, thus the text ultimately became “a linguistic and literary conundrum, as in *Invitation of a Friend*, when reading a Nabokov text in English became a process of decoding” (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:179).

3.2.2 Self-translation and the language switch

It is well known that Nabokov’s personal and artistic life was deeply affected by the historical turmoils, which defined the age he happened to live in: he had to fled revolutionary Russia first and Hitler’s Germany later, until he settled himself with his family in the USA. The main and quite painful consequence on his work was the writer’s language switch, from Russian to English:

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. (“On a Book Entitled *Lolita*”, 1959:316)

The writer’s linguistic transition from Russian to English can be analysed with the use of the above-mentioned cycle described by Elizabeth Beaujour: first, it is possible to point out a moment of deep concern, in which the writer is obsessed with the maintenance of his “linguistic purity” in the first language (i.e. Russian). When living in Berlin, Nabokov even refused to learn German well, out of fear of diluting his Russian:

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)

Subsequently the circumstances prevail and the bilingual writer realises that the language switch is inevitable: for Nabokov, the switch to English seems “a necessity, an

unavoidable stage of the evolution rather than a free choice (“I had to”)” (Dolinin, 2005:54). The violence of the writer’s switch to English was described by Nabokov like “learning anew to handle things after losing seven or eight fingers in an explosion” (SO, 54). In a 1942 letter to his wife, it is possible to read an even more emotional and personal statement about the impossibility to write in Russian, as a consequence of the 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. (9 November 1942. quoted in Boyd, 1991:52 and *Letters to Véra*, 2014:774)

Switching from Russian to English was therefore so strenuous and demanding for two main reasons: firstly, because Nabokov missed his “docile” Russian, and secondly, because, despite his early bilingualism, the writer wasn’t entirely self-confident about his English as a language for making literature (“second-rate brand of English” as he called it). However, an important role in this linguistic switch was played by self-translation, as acknowledged by Nabokov himself:

Oh, I did know I would eventually land in America. I switched to English after convincing myself on the strength of my translation of *Despair* that I could use English as a wistful standby for Russian. (quoted in Appel 1967: 149)

It is undoubtedly relevant that the first time Nabokov wrote a text of his own in English, he was actually re-writing one of his Russian novels: the writer defined his first translation of *Despair* as “the first serious attempt to use English for what may be loosely termed an artistic purpose” (quoted in Boyd, 1990:421).

Hence, self-translation allows the bilingual writer to feel more confident about his new language as a tool to make literature and to accept it as his own: in this sense, self-translation helps filling the gap between two languages, which are both part of the bilingual writer's mind:

After translating his novel *Otchaianie* into *Despair* in 1935 and *Kamera obscura* into *Laughter in the Dark* in 1937, Nabokov felt confident enough to write *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in English from December 1938 through January 1939. (Connolly, 1999:10)

Nabokov's switch from Russian to English implied "the exile from his mastered territory and, therefore, from his former identity" (Dolinin, 2005:50), while his self-translated work represents a "living link between Russian and English writing" (Grayson, 1977). Nabokov's self-translations, like in other bilingual writers' biographies, have played the role of a bridge between an old and a new phase, in which the two languages would eventually peacefully coexist within a multilingual self:

Indeed, even if Nabokov's English is bound to remain his primary creative tool, his mature texts are famously rich in multilingual puns and word-play: in a 1972 interview Nabokov was asked about the advantages and disadvantages of being able to write in so many languages; as far as the disadvantages are concerned, he acknowledged "the inability to keep up with their ever-changing slang" (perhaps referring to Russian, which had inevitably and considerably changed during the years of his long exile); the advantages, however, seem to be pretty satisfying and impressive: mature Nabokov had grown used to benefit from his multilingualism in order to be able "to render an exact nuance" by "shifting from the language I am now using to a brief burst of French or to a soft rustle of Russian" (SO, 184).

3.2.3 Self-translation: theory and practice

Translation as a part of Vladimir Nabokov's work has played an important role not only in the form of "standard" translation of texts of others, but also in the particular form of self-translation. For self-translation, Nabokov's working methods were quite various: whereas Russian language was translated autonomously, Nabokov usually preferred collaboration when he translated into English. The author's controlling hand, however, was always present: he thoroughly revised the work prepared by carefully selected translators or by his son Dmitri, his "docile assistant" (quoted in Coates, 2006:377) . The results of these strenuous efforts can be seen in Table 1: a huge part of Nabokov's Russian production has been translated into English under the writer's meticulous supervision.

3.2.3.1 Author, reader, translator

Nabokov loathed bad readers no less than he feared bad translators; Nabokov's books speak directly to "good readers", who are able to grasp details and do not lean on emotional identification: "the good reader is one who has imagination, memory, a dictionary, and some artistic sense [...and who will] notice and fondle details..." (essay on 'Good Readers and Good Writers', published in LRL). For Nabokov, the author-reader relationship was not an easy one: the author's figure "clashes with the reader because he is his own ideal reader and those other readers are so very often mere lipmoving ghosts and amnesiacs" (SO, 183). Literature is a form of art, but reading is also a form of art: Nabokov stated that he wrote for "artists, fellowartists and followartists". One of the aims of his literature classes was to turn his students into good readers. Nabokov's perfect reader is "an active and creative reader, a rereader" (LRL, 3), it is someone who

reads first and foremost a text, rather than a story or a plot, someone who is able to enter the writer's world and grasp its infinite details.

Translators are also readers of texts in the first place. According to Susan Bassnett, the communicative relationship in the process of translation can be represented as a diagram, which shows that the translator is both receiver and emitter, the end and the beginning of two separate, but linked chains of communication:

Author – Text – Receiver = Translator – Text – Receiver (Bassnett, 2013:48).

The standard translator is therefore both a reader and a powerful figure, responsible for the text's afterlife in a new literary polysystem, for its reception by a whole new group of readers. For Nabokov, however, the best reader, "the model reader is the author of the book²²" (1968). Looking at Bassnett's chain of communication, it is possible to see that in the case of standard translation, two key and slippery actions are performed before a text reaches the new receiver: the text is read (received) in the first language and translated in the second language by an external translator; the quality of both actions is fundamental for a good result in translation. The chain of communication can be therefore represented as follows:

Source Text Writer -> Translator as Reader -> Translator as Rewriter -> Target Text Reader

According to G. Saldanha (2009:154), source writers provide "interpretive potentials in their text", while readers and therefore translators as readers infer a "most likely communicative intent from these potentials" on the basis of their linguistic knowledge and their understanding of literary genres, their knowledge of a given author, but also

²² . Dommergues, "Entretien avec Vladimir Nabokov" in *Les Langues modernes*, no. 1 (janv.-fv. 1968), pp. 99-100.

their cultural and personal background (hence, the “gift of mimicry” required by Nabokov in a good translator).

With self-translation there’s no risk for this task to be performed inappropriately, since the translator as reader is the author of the text, who is aware of the interpretive potential of his work, but is also a bilingual and bi-cultural writer who, ideally, possesses the skills that are necessary to translate the text for a new audience. Therefore, for Nabokov, who gave a lot of thought to the theory and practice of translation, the ideal translator is also the author of the book, “è l’autore stesso” (Imposti, 2013:261). And despite being a tedious task, which requires enormous amounts of time, Nabokov rigorously controlled the translations of his novels in as many languages as he or his family could understand, simply because it was impossible for him to self-translate all of his novels alone: “The translation of my Russian books is a nightmare. If I were to do it all myself it would obviously prevent me from writing anything new.” (Karlinsky, 1979: 56).

3.2.3.2 Collaborations

Especially starting from the 1960’s, Nabokov developed a method of using what Hokenson and Munson defined “subtranslators” in order to translate his Russian books. This would usually mean either a collaboration with his son, or a collaboration with external translators. As far as the first kind of collaboration is concerned, Dmitri would usually draft a first literal translation, which Vladimir used as a departure point to prepare the final text for his publishers. While most scholars don’t make a clear distinction between Nabokov’s collaboration with his son and other translators, Gabriella Imposti defines this particular collaboration as a “forma ibrida di auto-traduzione” (hybrid form of self-translation) (Imposti, 2013:261) and furthermore “al pari di un normale esempio

di auto-traduzione, in virtù del controllo esercitato dall'autore su di essa" (as an example of regular self-translation, due to the maintenance of the author's control over the text):

Nel processo di autotraduzione il Nabokov scrittore russo si fonde quindi con il Nabokov scrittore di successo in lingua inglese, una fusione che avviene anche tra Nabokov padre e Nabokov figlio nella loro opera di auto-traduzione a quattro mani. (Imposti, 2013:263)

In the process of self-translation, Nabokov the Russian writer meets Nabokov the successful American writer; but there is also a connection between Nabokov-father and Nabokov-son, who put their heads together for a collaborative work of self-translation.

While the author's control is also present in other Nabokov's collaborative translations, it certainly is reasonable to suppose that father and son worked more closely together than Nabokov did with other translators (some of whom he never met in person). We don't have a manuscript of Dmitri and Vladimir's collaboration, but it's the father who made the major modifications thanks to the writer-translator's authority. The foreword to *King, Queen, Knave* illustrates this: first a literal translation was prepared by Dmitri and then V. Nabokov revised the translation by collation with the Russian original ("by the end of 1966 my son had prepared a literal translation of the book in English and this I placed in my lectern beside a copy of the Russian edition") (KQK foreword, pp. viii-ix).

For the second kind of collaboration, the one with external translators, the first step was to carefully select a translator: when rejecting a proposal for certain translators in 1942, Nabokov replied, "they lack my main desiderata: style and a rich vocabulary. Without a good deal of linguistic and poetical imagination it is useless tackling my stuff". Among his collaborators, we find Peter Pertsov, Simon Karlinsky, Michael Scammell and Michael Glenny. According to Grayson (1977), in all these partnerships Nabokov required very "accurate literal rendering, reserving to himself alone to make changes" (1977:7). With Scammell and Glenny the work was achieved thanks to mail cor-

respondence and Glenny never even met Nabokov in person. Translations were usually sent to Nabokov several chapters at a time. The writer would then check the literal translation very carefully, detecting any mistake (there are lists of mistranslations enclosed to Nabokov's letters to Glenny). Nabokov felt free to modify idioms, style or make any additional changes without discussing them with the translators (discussion was generally confined to correction) and the author's changes appeared only in the final printed version of the book: Nabokov wrote about the collaboration for translations with Pertzov, that he is "alone responsible for any discrepancies between them and the original texts"²³. While revising the literal translations into English, Nabokov often added technical or rare words, amplifying the collaborators' versions "either through minute lexical changes [...] or through larger arabesques changing image and rhythm." (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:181).

On the American publishing market no difference can be discerned between Nabokov's collaborations with his son and his collaborations with other translators: in both cases collaborative translations were published with the mention "translated by Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author" and, for instance, "translated by Michael Scammel in collaboration with the author" (these examples were taken from the first editions of *King, Queen, Knave* and *The Defense* respectively). However, it is on foreign markets that a certain difference in the perception of Dmitri's translations and other collaborations can be observed. For example, Italian translations of Nabokov's Russian books were usually made starting from the English text as far as self-transla-

²³ see *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. by D.Nabokov (2011, 671)

tions²⁴ and collaborations with Dmitri are concerned. On the other hand, books that were published in collaboration with other translators were translated from the Russian original source text with the addition of the American preface, translated in Italian. Furthermore, Dmitri himself has contributed to the translation of the Italian edition of Nabokov's collection of short stories (2008). Also, the German publishing market behaves in a similar way: whenever a self-translation in English was available, the book was translated from English (with the exception of Nabokov's autobiography, which was translated in both its versions). The same tendency can be observed in connection with Dmitri's translations (both *Invitation to a Beheading* and *King, Queen, Knave* were translated from the English version), whereas for other collaborations the approach is more mixed. *Mashen'ka*, Nabokov's first novel, was translated twice and both times from the Russian text: in 1928 it was published under the title *Sie kommt, kommt Sie* and in 1999 it came out as *Maschenka*, thus maintaining even the Russian name of the character and the novel's original title. *The Gift*, on the other hand, was translated from the English version and *The Defense* was translated using both the editions (the German market produced a hybrid version of the Russian and English texts). On the French market the situation is somewhat various: firstly, French translations of Nabokov's Russian novels did not always pick the English self-translation as a source text: whereas *Despair* was translated from the English version of the novel, Nabokov's autobiography was translated from its Russian edition. *Kamera Obskura* was translated from both versions and published as separate books. French editions present a mixed behaviour for

²⁴ *Laughter in the Dark* was first published in Italy in 1947 under the title of *Camera Obscura*, but the text used for the translation was the English one. The book was then re-translated twice: first, in 1961 following *Lolita*'s commercial success (the cover of the book, published by Mondadori, contains the statement "Margot: due anni più di Lolita", which highlights the girl's young age and uses the scandalous side of *Lolita*'s success for sales promotion). A newer translation, published in 2016 for Adelphi, was also translated from *Laughter in the Dark* and published under the title *Una risata nel buio*.

Nabokov's collaborative translations: *Invitation to a Beheading* was translated from the Russian original, but *King, Queen, Knave* was translated from Dmitri's English text. Similarly, *The Defense* and *Mary* were translated from the Russian original, but *The Gift* and *Glory* were translated from the English version (translated by M. Scammel).

Whereas the French translations do not follow a consistent pattern, the Italian and German markets display an obvious tendency to use Dmitri's English translations as willingly as the author's self-translations as a source text for their own editions, while in the case of other collaborations, translations tend to be made starting from the Russian original.

These collaborations were undoubtedly a great help for Nabokov's enterprise of transposing his Russian novels into English. He desired authoritative control over the translations of his texts and was terrified at the thought of mistranslated novels in other languages that he wasn't able to understand. Nabokov also checked translations of his works into French and German, and his wife learnt Italian when she was in her sixties to check the Italian translations of his poetry:

In the case of languages my wife and I know or can read — English, Russian, French, and to a certain extent German and Italian — the system is a strict checking of every sentence. In the case of Japanese or Turkish versions, I try not to imagine the disasters that probably bespatter every page. (SO, 205)

The idea of control is a key moment that characterises Nabokov's collaborations in translations, in addition to what Gabriella Imposti calls "insicurezza dello scrittore nei confronti del suo inglese" ("a lack of confidence in his own English language") (Imposti, 2013:261). As a writer, Nabokov paid a lot of attention to style in his novels, and deeply cared for their correct and precise translation for new audiences. The use of "subtranslators" allowed Nabokov to save time required for self-translation, but also to maintain full authorial control on the English translations of his Russian novels and short stories.

3.2.3.3 Self-translation vs standard translation

Having analysed the basic principles of Nabokov's approach to standard translation, an interesting question that some scholars have attempted to answer is: did Nabokov's methodology in self-translation follow similar principles to those he had gradually conceived with regards to standard translation? Diverging answers have been found to this question.

Within the existing bibliography one common viewpoint states that Nabokov's self-translation methodology significantly departs from his standard translation technique. According to Hokenson and Munson (2007:178), Nabokov used a completely different translation method when it came to translating his own texts: the authors of *The Bilingual Text* state that "the most interesting thing about his theory and his productions from Pushkin and Lermontov is how radically he overturned these methodological principles when he translated his own literary work". As pointed out by Jane Grayson, Nabokov as a self-translator often valued the retention of stylistic effects more than he cared about the retention of meaning, as opposite to what he did in his translation of *Eugene Onegin*, for instance. In her 1977 book *Nabokov Translated*, Jane Grayson has shown that especially the earliest Nabokov's self-translations modified the source text extensively, while the writer's persistent interest in transposing to the target text such rhetorical figures as alliteration and onomatopoeia, shows, in her view, that the "theories of literal translation he evolved meet with little reflection in his practice as a self-translator" (Grayson, 1977:176). A similar viewpoint is shared by Irina Marchesini (2013,270), who states that in his self-translations Nabokov "smentisce i suoi stessi principi che teorizzano una traduzione estremamente aderente al testo originale, privilegiando la traduzione infedele che gli consente addirittura un ripensamento o un rifacimento globale dell'opera" ("denies his own principles, which advocate for an extremely adherent

translation with regards to the original text, and adopts an unfaithful self-translation methodology, which allows him to rethink or even globally modify his own work”). But are Nabokov’s self-translations really unfaithful? And is *Eugene Onegin*’s translation really a literal one? These questions are far from being straightforward.

According to other scholars, such as Michael Oustinoff (2001) Nabokov as self-translator did maintain some criteria similar to those he applied in standard translation. It is indeed reasonable to believe that the writer could hardly have used totally opposite methodologies in self-translation, having gradually theorised a very definite set of ideas about standard translation: even if standard translation and self-translation are characterised by significantly different features, both are, at the end of the day, activities of interlingual translation. As mentioned by Gabriella Imposti, Nabokov’s self-translation of *Lolita* is a “una sorta di ‘copia perfetta’ dell’originale, un doppio, un’altra edizione definitiva autorizzata dall’autore che ha lo stesso status dell’opera originale, e che rende impossibile ogni ulteriore rielaborazione del testo.” (“sort of perfect copy of the original, a double, another ultimate edition, authorised by the writer, which maintains the same status as the original and makes it impossible to produce any additional rewriting of the text”) (Imposti, 2013:257). Some of Nabokov’s self-translations are extensively reworked versions of the Russian originals, but translation does not only revolve around literalism, while literalism and faithfulness are not necessarily the same thing: there are fundamental principles of Nabokov’s translation theory which are maintained with regards to his self-translations. In self-translation, the author-translator’s authority allows Nabokov to make as many changes as he likes, but even when a self-translated book is considerably altered, the author “is concerned not only to rework, but to conserve his original.” In his self-translations “the conscientious translator coexists with the creative artist”, finding a

different balance between “opposing forces of conservation and revision” in every translation (Grayson, 1977:167).

My idea is that a definite and general answer to this question has not yet been found, and perhaps such an answer is unobtainable, since every Nabokov’s self-translation has its own story and there is still room for a further and more detailed research. Besides, if we look at Nabokov’s self-translations, his bibliography appears very inconsistent: the general idea is that many of his early books were extensively reworked, while Nabokov’s Russian translation of *Lolita*, for instance, is considered to be a rather close rendering of the English original, which comes with an appendix of notes, containing explanations of English expressions and idioms. This appendix of notes bears a similar function to the notes attached to Nabokov’s *Eugene Onegin*, i.e. “funzione simile (seppur in scala ridotta) a quella dell’imponente apparato di note della traduzione nabokoviana dell’*Evgenij Onegin*” (“a function that is similar (although on a smaller scale) to the set of notes attached to Nabokov’s translation of *Eugene Onegin*”) (Imposti, 2013:256).

His autobiography, for the very nature of the text, is a particular instance of the phenomenon of self-translation: Nabokov’s account of a writer’s childhood and youth revolves around the theme of memory. As mentioned above, the evolution of this bilingual (or better, trilingual) text is quite unique and also strongly related to the writer’s memory: when Nabokov was self-translating his autobiography as *Drugie Berega*, he wrote “under the impulse of memory²⁵”, readily transposing allusions, adding many references to Russian culture, Russian literature and political affairs²⁶, since he was translating as an émigré writer for the Russian émigré community.

²⁵ See Jane Grayson, who suggests that “a Russian childhood is perhaps more completely evoked in the language in which it was written”. (1977: 154)

²⁶ For instance, Nabokov put more emphasis on the brutality of the Russian revolution and compared the fall of the Russian monarchy to the fall of Athens and Rome.

Kamera Obskura's self-translation belongs to that category of Nabokov's early Russian novels which were more extensively modified in translation. According to Hokenson and Munson (2007), here the author-translator typically enhanced "the dramatic draft", i.e. the reference to illusion (theatre, cinema, magic), enrichment of alliterative texture, rhyme and wordplay, along with the comic and grotesque aspect of his characters. From the first self-translation in the 1930's, Nabokov amplified and redesigned his English texts, since he believed that each language comports its own literary heritage. He therefore tried to "enrich the linguistic texture and thereby the modes and tones of characterizations, actions, and settings". (Hokenson and Munson, 2007:182). These self-translations were defined by Jane Grayson as "major reworkings" (1977:23) and include *Laughter in the Dark*, *Despair*, *The Eye* and *King, Queen Knave*.

From *Kamera Obskura* to *Laughter in the Dark*.

4.1. Kamera Obskura

Nabokov's Russian novel *Kamera Obskura* was finished in May 1931, serialised in *Sovremennye Zapiski* 49-52 (1932-3) and finally published as a book in 1933 (Berlin and Paris: Parabola and *Sovremennye Zapiski*); being Nabokov's sixth Russian novel, it followed *Podvig* (translated in English as *Glory*) and preceded *Otchaianie* (translated in English as *Despair*).

The plot of the book is quite a simple one and can be summarised as follows: a wealthy man, Bruno Kretschmar, meets and becomes obsessed with young cinema ush-erette Magda Peters, who ultimately forces him to leave his wife and daughter. Robert Horn, Magda's first lover, meets Kretschmar, finds out that Magda is now his lover, and initiates a relationship of friendship with Kretschmar. During a holiday in France the three characters spend together, Magda and Horn become lovers again: having discovered the betrayal, Kretschmar tries to kill Magda, but then forgives her and tries to run away with the girl. In a subsequent car accident, the man goes blind. He moves to a Swiss chalet and Magda becomes a sort of nurse, but Horn comes along with the couple and a humiliating existence starts for Kretschmar. Thanks to his brother-in-law, Kretschmar learns of the horrible deception and tries to kill Magda again, but he misses his target and ultimately the gun kills the blind man.

Seen within the context of Nabokov's bibliography, *Kamera Obskura*'s atmosphere is quite opposite to that of its preceding novel, *Glory*: an opposition that is immediately revealed if one compares the titles of these books. *Camera* was written im-

mediately after *Glory* and, according to Brian Boyd, “the novel appears deliberately designed as a contrast to *Glory's* world” (1990:365). Darkness pervades in many ways the pages of *Kamera Obskura*, it fills its characters’ feelings, souls and desires, while clashing with *Glory's* romantic yearnings and innocent characters. Martin, *Glory's* main character, is a dreamer who chases his own childhood in a glorious quest for his motherland, while an explicitly heroic attitude serves him as a tool to free his creative energy. *Kamera Obskura's* protagonist also possesses some creative energy, but this is funnelled in a cruel and perverse obsession with a young girl, an obsession that in turn triggers - like circles on water - more cruelty and more obsessive pain in Kretschmar’s life. At the end of *Glory*, Martin simply disappears, a disappearance that reminds of how the most remote memories of our childhood can vanish from our minds. Kretschmar, instead, loses his sight and consequently the world around him disappears, vanishing into the darkness. He remains vulnerable and powerless, pervaded by his obsessive desire to possess Magda’s beauty, while being cruelly tortured by the very object of his desire. As David Rampton has pointed out, *Kamera Obskura* is about “blindness rather than insight, darkness instead of radiance, the moral turpitude of self-indulgence as opposed to the heroism of self-abnegation” (Rampton, 2012:51).

The Russian version of the book was written by Nabokov when he was twenty-six years old and the intensely cruel images contained within the book could not have gone unnoticed by critics, especially later on, after Nabokov had reached his peak of fame. According to Brian Boyd, “few images in literature can be more horrifying or more gratuitously cruel than that of the blind Kretschmar in his chalet, teased and tormented by Magda and Horn.” (1990:365). Answering a question related to the English translation of this novel, Nabokov stated in an interview to *The Listener* (1962) that he wrote the book when he was only “a boy of twenty-six. [...] If I was cruel, I suppose it was because I

saw the world as cruel in those days. I don't think that there is a specially perverse or cruel streak in my writing. In life I'm a mild old gentleman: I'm very kind. There's nothing cruel or brutal in me whatsoever." As a matter of fact, the kind of destructive and obsessive human attachment examined by the author in *Kamera Obskura* is the perfect opposite of his idea of true love, which emerges elsewhere in Nabokov's works as "a partial release from the essential isolation of the self" (Boyd, 1990:366).

Kamera Obskura was first translated into English by Winifred Roy and published in London by John Long in 1936. Subsequently, in 1937, Nabokov retranslated his own book and changed its title into *Laughter in the Dark* (published in Indianapolis by Bobbs-Merrill in 1938). Nabokov's English version of the book departs from the original Russian version in many aspects, to the point that it has been defined "a complete rewriting of the novel²⁷" (Dosse, 2010:259). Indeed, one could say that the English translation of *Kamera Obskura* is what most directly suits the idea of "rewriting" a text while performing a translation: *Laughter in the Dark* contains countless modifications, but despite these transformations the main outlines of the central plot remained quite fixed (Connolly, 1995: 216). In the English version some details were added, some others were lost; many things and even entire chapters were simply changed. If compared with the

²⁷ Dosse sees in *Laughter in the Dark* a new, separate novel, by stating that "Plutôt que de s'autotraduire, il entreprend une réécriture complète de son roman [...]. Le résultat est un nouveau roman qui paraît en 1938 sous le titre *Laughter in the Dark* [...](les différences entre les deux sont en effet si importantes qu'il existe en français deux traductions distinctes, *Chambre obscure* et *Rire dans la nuit*)". ("rather than self-translating the book, Nabokov undertakes a full rewriting of his novel. The result is a new novel, that appears in 1938 under the title of *Laughter in the Dark* (the differences between the two texts are so important that in French they exist as two separate translations, *Chambre obscure* and *Rire dans la nuit*") (2010, 259). This point of view, however, separates self-translation from rewriting. But if all translation involves rewriting, self-translation is a particular form of rewriting: especially in self-translation the target and the source text can not be considered as completely independent entities. It is interesting, on the other hand, that the two novels were translated in a third language in both their versions: this shows, in my view, that neither of the texts can be considered as an "ultimate" version of the story, and that both the author's versions of the book are relevant.

work Nabokov performed on the Russian version of *Lolita*, the translation of *Kamera Obskura* is a much freer one, much more modified.

We can attempt to find a justification to Nabokov's choice of translation technique for *Kamera Obskura*, which is the novel he revised "most extensively" (Connolly, 1995:215). First of all, it will be useful to look at the reasons why did Nabokov undertake this work of translation. Many scholars tend to agree upon the fact that the author decided to translate *Kamera Obskura* himself after the publishing of the above-mentioned Winnifred Roy's translation. Consequently, the purpose was that of taking control over his own work and translate it into a language he already was fairly acquainted with. According to Michael Oustinoff, the least that can be said about Roy's translation of *Kamera Obskura* is that the result had "horrified" Nabokov and has given him the motivation to "auto-traduire *Otchayanie/Despair* et à (auto-)retraduire *Kamera Obskura* sous le titre de *Laughter in the Dark*." ("self-translate *Otchaianie/Despair* and (self)re-translate *Kamera Obskura* under the title of *Laughter in the Dark*") (Oustinoff, 2004:172).

Taking another look at *Kamera Obskura* within the context of Nabokov's bibliography, it is easy to see that the book somehow stands aside amid other works, and this is most probably due to the fact that the novel was written with an eye to the cinema²⁸ (the book was indeed turned into a film in 1969²⁹). As critics have pointed out, the novel appropriates cinematic motifs, imagery, and points of view (Connolly, 1995:215). According to Khodasevich (1934), "в романе Сирина синемаграф выступает важнейшею движущей силой, то оставаясь за сценой, как Рок трагедии, то прямо являясь на сцене в качестве действующего лица" ("in Sirin's novel cinema acts as a fundamental

²⁸ Nabokov stated that he wished "to write the entire book as if it were a film" (Quoted in Appel, 1974:258)

²⁹ The film was directed by Tony Richardson and was criticised by Nabokov for countless tropes and the "commonplace quality" of its "sexual passages" (SO, 137).

driving force, now hiding in the backstage, like Fate in tragedies, and then making its appearance on stage, as an acting character”). The content of the novel is indeed deeply affected by the world of cinema: there are characters who work in the film industry, cinematic settings and key moments of the novel’s plot, which revolve around cinema. Even stylistically *Kamera Obskura* is inspired by cinema: according to Apfel, the novel does indeed “mimic the conventions of a thriller” and, thanks to the large number of its chapters, “convincingly imitates a rapidly paced series of short takes.” (Appel, 1974:258-261).

Some scholars have noticed (Appel, 1974; Tàmas, 2016) that Nabokov was not particularly fond of this novel and we can indeed cautiously suppose, that probably *Camera* was not one of

his personal favourites. Back in April 1932,

Nabokov had been checking the proofs of his

freshly written book, which was about to appear for the first time in May in *Sovremennye Zapiski*. In a letter of April 6th, in between of other things, he wrote to his wife, Véra: “There’s a conversation going on in the room; it’s hard to write. Here we all live in a mutual draught. I don’t like *Camera*” (6 April 1932. *Letters to Véra*, 2014:313). In October of the same year, he wrote to his wife about the reception of *Kamera Obskura* within the Russian émigré community, where it was an “absolutely *unexpected* success.[..] Even Zina³⁰ liked it. Kerensky shook my hand, held the pause, and, in a dramatic whisper:



Fig. 1 The cinema-themed cover of the first Edition of *Kamera Obskura* (Ed. Parabola, Berlin. 1933)

³⁰ Zinaida Gippius, who had once told Nabokov’s father that young Vladimir was never to become a writer of prose (SM, 235). Therefore, her appreciation did not go unnoticed by Nabokov in 1923.

‘Amazing’.” (Italics are mine; 22 October 1932. *Letters to Véra*, 2014:343) Some years later, having already translated the book, Nabokov defined it in a 1941 letter to James Laughlin as “one of his worst novels” (24 January 1941. *Selected Letters*, 1989:103) .

Today it is impossible to have a more accurate and detailed account of the way Nabokov looked upon his novel, than these pieces of information we already have. It is common for a writer to have favourites within his own bibliography, but, in my view, we cannot blindly rely on the opinion he expressed in letters and interviews about a certain book: that is, we cannot firmly state that he simply disliked it. Of course, considering that this book that was not shortlisted for being one of Nabokov’s personal favourites³¹, while rewriting it in another language, he might have taken the opportunity to play with the text a little more. Many changes introduced by the author can indeed be attributed to meaningful categories which modify in one way or another the original Russian story: a comparison of the two texts allows us to trace these categories.

4.2 Winifred Roy's Camera Obscura

4.2.1 Lost and restored in translation

Winifred Roy's *Camera Obscura* was the first of Nabokov’s books to have been published in the English language. Today, we know virtually nothing about Winifred Roy, except for the very fact that she translated Nabokov’s *Kamera Obskura*³². When

³¹ Probably Nabokov’s disapproval of *Kamera Obskura* suggests that, for him, a work of literature is unsuccessful if it does not counterbalance its relationship with cinema (such as the usage of conventional characters or certain tropes or schemes): whilst *Lolita* was also influenced by films in many ways, it is not as cinematic as *Kamera Obskura*.

³² Shapiro (2003) noticed that we have so little information about Winifred Roy that he supposed her correct name to have been Winifred Ray, who was indeed an active translator in the 1930’s, although she was mostly translating from German and French.

published, the book was far from having been a commercial success and today it is considered to be quite a rarity, since this edition was never reprinted³³.

The story of this translation is usually told in broad terms by scholars as follows: Nabokov, dissatisfied with Winifred Roy's work, decided to make his own English translation of the novel and "started afresh" to rewrite *Kamera Obskura* as *Laughter in the Dark*³⁴. Generally speaking this is true, since Nabokov's English version of the book is an excellent example of self-translation as an activity of creative rewriting, in which many differences and changes were introduced by the author to the translated text. However, if one looks more into detail, it becomes evident that Nabokov did keep an eye on Roy's translation while rewriting *Kamera Obskura* for an American audience.

Winifred Roy's translation is fairly close to the Russian original, except for one structural change³⁵, some newly added little details and a series of removals (removals definitely prevail over additions). The following analysis is not going to focus on the features of Roy's translation per se, as if it were an independent work: the evolution of this bilingual text has followed three steps, one of which is Roy's translation, therefore her work is intertwined both with the previous Russian text and the following authorial self-translation. Roy's translation, despite having been rejected by the author and denied future republication, is a precious source of interesting information:

- It allows us to compare the work of a standard translator with Nabokov's work as a self-translator;

³³ Only three copies with dust-jacket have survived, one of which is Nabokov's own annotated copy held at the NY Public Library, while ten more institutional copies are listed on WorldCat.

³⁴ See N. Cornwell (2005:157), who states that Nabokov took a break from writing *The Gift*, "starting afresh to replace the Roy version with his own", and B. Boyd (1990:445), who writes in his Nabokov's biography *Russian Years* that the writer "ignored Winifred Roy's 1935 translation and started afresh".

³⁵ Roy's translation contains one structural change, which was maintained by Nabokov in *Laughter in the Dark*: the Russian Chapter 5 is divided to make two chapters (5 and 6). Therefore, the Russian text has 37 chapters, while Roy's version has 38 of them.

- It can - at least partly - shed a light on what Nabokov disliked about Roy's work, for instance by seeing which gaps in her translation the writer decided to restore (but also to see some gaps that Nabokov did not restore in his translation);

- It allows us to see that Roy's translation wasn't completely ignored by Nabokov for his self-translation;

- It can show that several passages of *Laughter in the Dark* were taken quite directly from Roy's translation and therefore spare us mistakes in an analysis of Nabokov's self-translation, in which certain parts were not actually written by the author's hand, but simply deemed acceptable and inherited from a previous translation.

In a 1935 letter Nabokov described Winifred Roy's translation as "loose, shapeless, sloppy, full of blunders and gaps, lacking vigour and spring", while he judged her English as "flat" and "dull" (Letter to Hutschinson&Co, 22 May 1935. *Selected Letters*, 1989:13). Roy's text does indeed contain a series of "gaps": Nabokov could hardly have approved her decision to freely simplify, shorten and even omit certain passages concerning the characters' inner lives, their projects and dreams³⁶. A significant instance of such a removal is the description of Magda's mother's recurrent dream. The Russian text gives quite some space to it:

Ей часто снилась по ночам сказочно великолепная, белая, как сахар, лестница и маленький силуэт человека, уже дошедшего доверху, но оставившего на каждой ступени большой черный подошвенный отпечаток, левый, правый, левый, правый... Это был мучительный сон (130).

³⁶ However, Nabokov, as a self-translator, was free to omit anything he considered necessary (and so he did here and there). The difference between the authority of a standard translator and a self-translator really stands out in these omissions.

^{symbolic ideal}
 The Staircase was the main feature
 of her existence, ~~but it was the idea~~ ^{not as a symbol}
 of ^{glorious} ascension ~~which to higher things, but~~ ^{as}
 thing to be kept ~~the~~ ^{she} nicely polished, so that
~~the~~ ^{she} her worst dream (after two ~~much~~ ^{having a history of} potatoes and
 cabbage) was a flight of white steps with
 the black Frace of a boot ~~an~~ ^{an} ~~one~~ ^{one} first up
 then left, then right again and so ^{III to the top landing.} up ^{she was aged eighteen.}

A poor wine, indeed, and ^{Margot} ^{her age: sixteen}
^{no matter} ^{for dinner.} **H**ER name was Magda Peters, and she was,
 in fact, only ^{eighteen} years of age. Her
 father was a porter, a disabled soldier, whose hair
 was already turning grey; his head jerked un-
 ceasingly, and he fell into a violent passion on the
 slightest provocation. Her mother was still quite
 young, ^{but} ⁱⁿ ^{weak} ^{health}—a coarse, cold-
 hearted woman, whose ^{hand} ^{was} ^{constantly}
 raised to strike. Her head was always tied up in
 a handkerchief to keep the dust from her hair
 while she was working, but after her great
 Saturday clean-up—which was mainly effected
 with a vacuum-cleaner ingeniously connected to
 the lift—she dressed herself up and sallied forth
 to pay visits. She was unpopular with the
 tenants on account of her arrogance and her
 brusque way ^{of} ^{asking} any one who came in to
 wipe his or her feet on the mat. ✓

Otto, Magda's brother, was three years older
 than she. He worked in a bicycle factory,
 despised his father's ^{republicanism}, held forth
 on politics in the neighbouring ^{tavern} and

20 pot house

Fig. 2 Page 20 of Nabokov's copy of Winifred Roy's Camera Obscura, held at the NY Public Library. The picture shows how Nabokov took notes directly on Roy's text, removing, adjusting and restoring whenever he considered it necessary.

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Winifred Roy simply skipped this passage, but Nabokov chose to restore it completely and even added further details to it:

The Staircase was the main idol of her existence—not as a symbol of glorious ascension, but as a thing to be kept nicely polished, so that her worst nightmare (after too generous a helping of potatoes and sauerkraut) was a flight of white steps with the black trace of a boot first right, then left, then right again and so on— up to the top landing (24).

Above (Fig.2) shows the photography of a page of Nabokov’s own copy of Roy's *Camera Obscura*: the writer took notes directly on the pages of the book; he put a “V” to locate the translator’s gap, and wrote his translation of the dream as a note in the upper area of the page.

Winifred Roy has also removed the description of Margot’s secret dream to become a famous actress, summing it up in just a few words: another loss of a detail, which contributes to conveying the character’s portrait to the reader:

Kamera Obskura	Roy’s translation	Laughter in the Dark
<p>Магда, впрочем, лишь смутно понимала, чего именно добивается. <u>Далеко-далеко маячил образ фильмовой дивы. Господин в нарядном пальто с котиковым воротником шалью подсаживал ее в лаковый автомобиль. Она покупала переливчатое, прямо-таки журчащее платье, которое сияло и лилось в витрине баснословного магазина.</u> (133)</p>	<p>For the rest, Magda had only a very vague idea of what she really wanted. <u>She had visions of herself as a film star in the dim future.</u> (25)</p>	<p>So the days passed and Margot had only a very vague idea of what she was really aiming at, though there was always that <u>vision of herself as a screen beauty in gorgeous furs being helped out of a gorgeous car by a gorgeous hotel porter under a giant umbrella.</u> (30)</p>

Nabokov restored a more detailed description of Magda's ideal vision of her own future, but rewrote it anew: the anaphoric repetition of the word "gorgeous" adds an obvious note of irony to the dream, thus making fun of the girl's simplistic and boastful nature (interestingly, as a result of this rewriting, the expensive fur coat migrated from the gentleman, who was helping Margot in the car, directly to Magda's shoulders, thus substituting the description of the dress).

Another gap in Winifred Roy's translation is the anecdote of the fresco painter, narrated from Horn's point of view, whose cruel sense of humour the author was describing while reporting the character's inner thoughts for the first time:

Очень забавен, конечно, анекдотический ученик, который, чтобы остановить и этим спасти великого мастера, обливает из ведра только что оконченную фреску, заметив, что мастер, щурясь и пятясь с кистью в руке, сейчас дойдет до конца площадки и рухнет с лесов в пропасть храма, – но насколько смешнее спокойно дать великому мастеру вдохновенно допятиться... (171)

This anecdote was completely restored by Nabokov, who paid a particular attention to this character, when translating *Kamera Obskura*: translating *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov maintained Horn's "funny" stories and often further developed them, since they are part of the character's personality and are in a way related to Kretschmar's cruel treatment in the Swiss chalet.

Another significant detail which Roy's translation has lost is the description of the film that was being screened in Margot's cinema the moment Kretschmar entered it for the first time: Roy significantly shortened the whole passage:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation
<p>Глядеть на экран было сейчас ни к чему – все равно это было непонятное разрешение каких-то событий, которых он еще не знал (...кто-то, плечистый, елено шел на пятивнууюся женщину...). Было странно подумать, что эти непонятные персонажи и непонятные действия их станут понятными и совершенно иначе им воспринимаемыми, если он посмотрит картину с начала. Интересно знать, вдруг подумал Кречмар, смотрят ли вообще капельдинерши на экран или все им отточертелю? (129)</p>	<p>He now felt no interest in watching the screen where all sorts of things were happening, which he could not yet understand and which were quite bewildering, since he had not seen the beginning of the film. (16)</p>

The first remark, describing the film scene, is indeed far from being random because it is a pointer to the main character's future, who will "blindly" walk towards Margot in an attempt to kill her at the end of the book. Such little coincidences are typical of Nabokov's prose, they are part of the novel's construction and their loss in translation is a loss of the writer's artistic intentions. *Laughter in the Dark* restored this moment, although in a different way (it is examined below), but Nabokov did not restore the second omission in the paragraph, a direct report of Kretschmar's inner thought: this is just one example of a series of removals "inherited" from Roy's translation in Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*.

4.2.2 Winifred Roy's presence in *Laughter in the Dark*

As mentioned above, a comparison of the original Russian text with its two English translations shows that Nabokov could hardly have completely ignored Roy's translation. Generally speaking, *Laughter in the Dark* is a significantly modified version of Sirin's Russian novel *Kamera Obskura*. Many sentences were removed by Nabokov,

many others were added. What's interesting, however, is that Nabokov has not always restored Roy's omissions. Quite the contrary, he did restore some of her "gaps", as shown above, but typically his methodology was a little different: a comparison of the three texts shows that his goal was not to merely amend Roy's translation - a fairly literal one - by restoring everything she had missed, but to rewrite the Russian novel for an English-speaking audience making it as Nabokovian and artistically harmonious as possible. As a consequence, we have in *Laughter in the Dark* a second version of the same novel, but, interestingly, Nabokov's self-translation does share an amount of passages and gaps with Roy's translation, even if the latter had not been approved by the author.

Speaking of shared passages, there really are in *Laughter in the Dark* whole paragraphs which are practically identical to Roy's translation. Since Roy's version of the text is the closest to the original, in *Laughter in the Dark* these happen to be the paragraphs, which, if compared with the Russian text, have changed less as far as content is concerned. Here are some examples:

Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
<p>He had only one wish: to find Magda immediately, no matter what the cost. Destiny, which had promised him so much, had not the right to cheat him now. He was so desperate that he resolved upon a very daring step. He knew that her old room looked out on the courtyard and he also knew that she had lived there with her aunt. Thither he went. (69)</p>	<p>He had only one wish: to find Margot immediately, no matter what the cost. Destiny, which had promised him so much, had not the right to cheat him now. He was so desperate that he resolved upon a very daring step. He knew where her old room was, and he knew that she had lived there with her aunt. Thither he went. (75)</p>

These sounds, these footsteps and these voices seemed to be moving on a different plane. He was here, and they were somewhere else. And between them and the night which enveloped him was an impenetrable wall. He made an effort, rubbed his eyelids, turned his head this way and that, jerked himself about, but it was impossible to force a way through this solid darkness, which was like a part of himself. (236)

These sounds, these footsteps and voices seemed to be moving on a different plane. He was here and they were somewhere else, but still, in some unaccountable way, close at hand. Between them and the night which enveloped him was an impenetrable wall. He rubbed his eyelids, turned his head this way and that, jerked himself about, but it was impossible to force a way through this solid darkness which was like a part of himself. (240)

In his own rooms Kretschmar almost had the feeling that he could see the furniture and the various objects and this gave him a sense of security. But when he was seated in the garden, he felt himself surrounded by a vast unknown, because everything was too big, too unsubstantial and too full of sounds to enable him to form a picture of it to himself. (257)

In his own rooms Albinus almost had the feeling that he could see the furniture and the various objects, and this gave him a sense of security. But when he was sitting in the garden he felt himself surrounded by a vast unknown, because everything was too big, too unsubstantial and too full of sounds to enable him to form a picture of it. (261)

Completely identical parts, however, are quite rare in the book. What's more common is a similar syntactical structure within the two English texts: both translations tend to shorten very long sentences present in the source text by dividing them into several simpler sentences.

In the following example a very long Russian sentence was simplified in its structure by means of division into five shorter sentences. Obviously, in both the English texts the syntactical structure is alike:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
<p>Кречмар сидел в кресле у окна, за которым были солнце, веселые английские голоса с тенниса, и перебирал все, что произошло, все мелочи с самого начала знакомства с Горном, и среди них вспоминались ему такие, которые теперь освещены были тем же мертвенным светом, каким нынче катастрофически озарилась жизнь: что-то оборвалось и погибло навсегда, – и как бы яснооко, правдоподобно не доказывала ему Магда, что она ему верна, всегда отныне будет ядовитый привкус сомнения. (200)</p>	<p>Kretschmar sat in a chair by the window; outside the sun was shining, and gay English voices floated across from the tennis-ground. Mentally he reviewed every least episode from the beginning of their acquaintance with Horn, and among them he recalled some which were now irradiated by that deathly light whose disastrous glow was spreading over his whole life. Something was shattered and destroyed for ever; no matter how convincingly Magda tried to prove that she had been faithful to him, everything would henceforward be tainted with a poisonous flavour of doubt. (222)</p>	<p>Albinus sat in a chair by the window; outside the sun was shining and gay English voices floated across from the tennis-ground. Mentally he reviewed every least episode from the beginning of their acquaintanceship with Rex, and among them some were touched by that livid light which had now spread over his whole existence. Something was destroyed forever; no matter how convincingly Margot tried to prove that she had been faithful to him, everything would henceforward be tainted with a poisonous flavor of doubt. (228)</p>

Another element that confirms Nabokov's at least partial use of Roy's translation is the fact that there are instances of transposition within the text, in which parts of a sentence or entire sentences were moved in exactly the same position as in Roy's translation, that is different from the Russian original:

<p>«Что случилось? – раздался неожиданно голос Макса. – Что случилось? Ты заперт» (<u>Боже мой, ведь у Макса был ключ от квартиры!</u>). Дверь открылась, [...] «Нет, я приверженец лифта», – ответил Макс. «Пронесло», – подумал Кречмар и очень оживился. (143)</p>	<p>“What’s happened?” shouted an unexpected voice—that of his brother-in-law, Max. “What’s the matter? Are you locked in?” The door opened. [...] “No, I always take the lift,” answered Max. “That’s a lucky escape!” thought Kretschmar, his spirits reviving considerably. <u>So intent had he been about his wife’s return he had forgotten Max also had a key to the flat.</u> (58)</p>	<p>"Hullo. What's the matter?" asked an unexpected voice—Paul's! "Are you locked in? Shall I let you out?" The door opened. [...] "I took the lift," said Paul. "Saved," thought Albinus, his spirits reviving considerably. <u>(But how dangerously foolish to have forgotten that Paul, too, had a key to the flat!)</u> (63)</p>
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And even more interestingly, *Laughter in the Dark* contains a few little additions, which are absent from *Kamera Obskura* and actually appeared for the first time in Roy's translation. Here is an example of such an addition:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
Он был из тех впечатлительных людей, которые краснеют до слез от чужой неловкости. Теперь же случилось нечто во сто крат худшее. «Нет, нет, это ошибка, это глупое недоразумение» (146)	He was one of those sensitive beings who blush to the point of tears when someone else makes a blunder. But now something had happened which was a hundred times worse. <u>The man whom he loved and revered was, he felt convinced, deceiving his sister.</u> "No, no, it's a mistake, a stupid misunderstanding," (65)	He was one of those sensitive beings who blush guiltily when someone else makes a blunder. <u>Could this man whom he loved and revered be deceiving Elisabeth?</u> "No, no, it's a mistake, some silly misunderstanding," (72)

The underlined sentence is present in *Laughter in the Dark*, but absent from *Kamera Obskura*. A comparison between the two English texts shows that the remark was directly inherited from Winifred Roy's translation: Nabokov reformulated it in the form of a question, thus better connecting it to the subsequent inner thoughts of the character, but the content of the remark is the same.

Here is another example of a short sentence newly added to the English text by Winifred Roy and maintained in Nabokov's self-translation:

С полчаса он просидел в темноте, выпуклыми глазами уставившись на экран. Она приподняла для него складку портьеры. (129)	For about half an hour he sat in the darkness, his prominent eyes fixed on the screen. <u>Then he rose and walked away.</u> She drew the curtain aside for him. (17)	For another half hour he sat in the darkness, his prominent eyes fixed on the screen. <u>Then he rose and walked away.</u> She drew the curtain aside for him with a slight clatter of wooden rings. (21)
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Roy's influence on *Laughter in the Dark* can be observed also from her removals: having restored what he deemed necessary, Nabokov actually transferred to his self-

translation a significant amount of cuts, which were performed by Winifred Roy in the first place. Nabokov's version also acquired countless details and typically Nabokovian stylistic features, but, in my view, the fact that some of Roy's removals were not restored by Nabokov is a further indication that the writer used her translation as a starting point for his rewriting, which he modified as much as he liked, sometimes accepting entire passages and sentences, sometimes rewriting them and modifying whole chapters.

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
<p>Кречмар не только не заявил в полицию, но даже как будто рассердился, когда Макс опять об этом заговорил. Человек, который встает в ужасную-ее взломщиком, не так-то легко примиряется с этим. Макс невольно задумывался – старался установить, не заметил ли он все-таки кого-нибудь подозрительного, когда входил в дом, направляясь к лифту. (146)</p>	<p>Kretschmar had not only failed to notify the police, but he was actually annoyed when Max spoke of it. Involuntarily Max brooded over this incident. He tried to recall whether he had seen a suspicious-looking man when he entered the house and walked towards the lift. (64)</p>	<p>Albinus had not only failed to notify the police, but he was actually annoyed when Paul returned to the subject. So Paul could not help brooding over the thing. He tried to recall whether he had, perhaps, seen any suspicious character when he came into the house and walked toward the lift. (71)</p>
<p>Его удивляло в ней отсутствие любознательности – она ничего не спрашивала из его прежней жизни, принадлежа к числу людей, которые представляют себе ближнего по известной схеме и схеме этой доверяют вполне. Он старался, иногда, занять ее своим прошлым, [...] (154)</p>	<p>He was amazed at her lack of curiosity, she never questioned him about his former life, he sometimes tried to interest her in his past; (89)</p>	<p>He was amazed at her lack of curiosity: she never questioned him about his former life. Sometimes he tried to interest her in his past [...]. (93)</p>

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
<p>Магда в то утро вместе с Эмилией была в деревне по хозяйственным делам (надо было, например, хороненько выругать пращу за розовые подтеки на белом джемпере). Автомобиль Макса она, однако, проглядела [...]. (218)</p>	<p>That morning Magda had gone to the village with Emilia. She did not notice Max's car. (273)</p>	<p>That morning Margot had gone to the village with Emilia. She did not notice Paul's taxi; (276)</p>

Most of Roy's removals are unsystematic and can hardly be divided into meaningful categories, but one series of removals and modifications can actually be attributed to Roy's general tendency to mitigate the erotic tone of the novel. And what's most intriguing, Nabokov seems to have followed her tendency.

4.2.2.1 Erotic references

According to Jane Grayson, the "most significant feature" of Winifred Roy's translation is the "toning down of the erotic content of the novel". She states that this note of censure is widely present in Roy's translation and was sometimes retained by the writer, while some changes were "abandoned" by Nabokov (Grayson, 1977:29). However, it is also important to point out that numerous allusions to eroticism were removed by Nabokov himself, after they had actually been translated into English by Winifred Roy³⁷.

Here is an example of a removal made by Winifred Roy and partly restored by Nabokov, which by the way, happens to be another character's recurrent dream:

...а по ночам ему снились какие-то молоденькие полуголые веныры, и пустынный пляж, и ужасная боязнь быть застигнутым женой. (128)

³⁷ Quite an unusual tendency in Nabokov's self-translations: for instance, his translation of *King, Queen Knave* highlights is known for an increased amount of erotic scenes in the English version of the text.

Roy's translation shortened the dream significantly: her Kretschmar at night

...dreamed of some young girl on a lonely shore, and then he was overcome with a terrible fear of being detected by his wife. (13)

Nabokov's translation does not contain the adjective "half-naked" either, but it enriches the dream with visual details, thus highlighting its importance and the character's obsession with such a dream:

...but at night he dreamed of coming across a young girl lying asprawl on a hot lonely beach and in that dream a sudden fear would seize him of being caught by his wife (17).

There are other passages which somehow belong to the realm of eroticism and were removed or significantly censored by Roy and somehow restored in *Laughter in the Dark*. Jane Grayson enumerates them in her book (pp. 29-33) and these include:

- The description of Kretschmar's desire for a young lover, significantly shortened in Roy, almost fully restored in Nabokov.

- The scene, in which Kretschmar doesn't want to wait in the café "furtively" ("исподтишка") gazing at other men's lovers ("чужих любовниц", p.129). In Roy's translation Kretschmar simply didn't feel "disposed" (15) to wait for an hour, whilst Nabokov put it as follows: "the sight of other men with girl friends always upset him" (19) - still slightly differently from the Russian original.

- The unpleasant description of Margot's sexual experience with an old man has been considerably cut Winifred Roy, but Nabokov did not exactly restore the passage: after having deleted the same sentence as Roy and even something more, he has modified the passage to better convey Magda's disgusting and sad experience, without restoring however the "strange" demands of the old man:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
С ним оказалось сначала очень легко, он сразу засыпал, после краткого и слабого объятия, и спал непробудно до рассвета. Потом он начал требовать всяких странных новшеств. Гардероб ее пополнился двумя новыми платьями. (136)	After one brief and feeble embrace he fell asleep immediately and did not wake till morning. Her wardrobe was enriched by two new frocks. (34)	He was a comfortable bedfellow, dropping fast asleep the moment he had finished his messy little job. (139)

Seen at a closer distance, however, neither of these removals was fully restored by Nabokov and neither of these passages was literally translated from the Russian original.

As noticed by Jane Grayson, Winifred Roy has taken the freedom to add her own remark about Kretschmar's shame of his own desire: the remark was fully removed by Nabokov ("He felt ashamed of these persistent thoughts yet continued to toy with them", pp.13).

In addition to these - not particularly strong - cases in which Nabokov goes against Roy's "censorship", *Laughter in the Dark* contains far more numerous examples in which the writer has indeed followed and even developed this tendency: as mentioned above, it is a rare occurrence in Nabokov's oeuvre and it is worth a closer examination.

A delicate issue, Magda's age (sixteen in the Russian text) was comfortably increased by Roy in the first place, and Nabokov - in his own way - followed this increasing tendency. The process can be observed in several passages of the novel:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
Ей было с виду <u>пятнадцать-шестнадцать</u> лет. (129)	He guessed her age to be about <u>seventeen or eighteen</u> . (17)	He guessed her age to be <u>about eighteen</u> . (21)

Ее звали Магда Петерс, и ей было <u>вправду только шестнадцать лет</u> . (130)	Her name was Magda Peters and she was, in fact, <u>only eighteen years of age</u> . (20)	She was called Margot Peters. (24)
«Ах, это успеется. Мне только <u>пятнадцать</u> . И зачем? [...]». (133)	“Oh, there’s no need for that, yet awhile. <u>I’m only sixteen</u> . And what’s the use? [...]». (26)	"Oh, there's no need for that yet. I'm only <u>sixteen</u> , aren't I? And what's the use? [...]". (31)
Да, господин Шиффермюллер, ведь ей <u>пятнадцать лет</u> – вы не верьте, если она говорит, что больше. (158)	She is only <u>seventeen</u> years of age, you know. Don’t believe her if she says she is older. (99)	She's only <u>sixteen</u> , you know —don't believe her if she says she's older. (104)

In the Russian text, Nabokov openly communicates to his readers that Magda was only sixteen, but looked even a bit younger (fifteen as she and her brother declared). In Winifred Roy’s translation, the narrator tells that Magda was “only eighteen years of age”, looked about seventeen or eighteen, but openly declared her age to be sixteen.

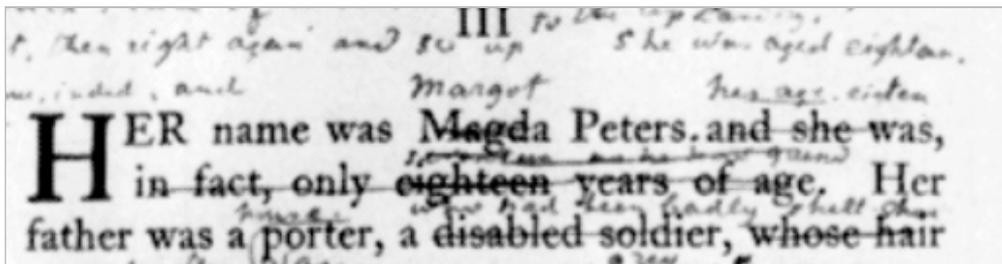


Fig.3 In these notes, Nabokov changed Magda’s name into Margot, but did not decrease the girl’s age back to the original sixteen: in the upper right corner of the image it is possible to read his note “She was aged eighteen”.

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In *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov decided to avoid openly stating the girl’s age with the narrator’s voice when presenting this character, so the reader can guess that the girl must have been somewhere around seventeen/eighteen (since we cannot fully trust Margot and her brother’s voices on the matter, who had already decreased her real age in the Russian text). However, Nabokov wrote on his copy of Roy’s translation his own amendment of Roy’s sentence “she was, in fact, only eighteen years of age” (see Fig.3).

Nabokov chose not to include this note in the final version of *Laughter in the Dark*, thus leaving some vagueness about Margot's real age, but the note shows that he accepted Roy's modification of the girl's age.

Winifred Roy has deleted several passages which contain physical or somehow erotic references: just like in other cases listed above, Nabokov has chosen not to restore these removals and *Laughter in the Dark* contains the same gaps as Winifred Roy's translation. These include:

- Kretschmar's first love affairs (lost the detail about a former lover's gynaecological disease, in addition to the whole story about the second lover) (CO 127, LD 15).
- The scene in which Kretschmar instructs Magda about the rules of hygiene (lost in both the English translations) (CO 153, LD 92)
- Some details of Magda's sexual awakening were lost in both translations³⁸.
- During Magda's film screening, Horn entertained himself caressing the girl, protected by the surrounding darkness. The whole passage was removed from both translations.

There are more deletions made by Roy and subsequently inherited in Nabokov's translation:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
«Почем я знаю. Завела молодца ему в подмогу, вот и все. Мне, знаете, стыдно, когда другие жильцы смотрят на эту... (нехорошее слово). [...]» (185)	“How should I know? She's probably got hold of another gentleman friend. That's all. I'm ashamed the other tenants should see it all; [...]” (177)	"Don't ask me. An additional lover, I suppose. To tell the truth, I'm ashamed that the other tenants should see it all. [...]” (181)

³⁸ These two passages were removed from both translations: “Когда ей было лет восемь, ее до боли ущипнул без всякой причины почтенный старик, живший в партере.” (131) “Появился в супротивном доме молодой человек, кудрявый, в пестрой фуфайке, который по вечерам облакачивался в окне на подушку и улыбался ей издали, – но скоро он съехал” (131).

<p>«Магда, вернись», – умоляюще говорил он, протягивая руку. «Тебе вредно, тебе вредно», – равнодушно отвечала она, поглаживая Горна по его длинной и мохнатой спине. Кречмар не унимался, дергался, яростно потирал глаза. «Я хочу тебя, – говорил он. – Гораздо вреднее, что вот уже два месяца мы не...» <u>(тут следовал самодельный, так сказать, глагол, домашний, ласкательный, из их любовного лексикона)</u>. Горн подмигивал Магде. Она многозначительно улыбалась, стуча себя пальцем по лбу. Кречмар продолжал ее звать, словно тетерев на току. Порою Горн, либивший риск, подходил босиком [...]. (212)</p>	<p>“Magda, come to me,” he said imploringly, stretching out his hand. “It isn't good for you, it isn't good for you,” she answered calmly, stroking Horn's long hairy back. Kretschmar did not move. He rubbed his eyes angrily. “I want you!” he said. “It's far worse for me that it's now two months . . .”[*] Horn winked at Magda. She smiled expressively, and tapped her forehead with her finger. Kretschmar went on calling her, like a woodcock in the mating season. Now and then Horn, who loved taking risks, went up quite close to Kretschmar [...]. (256)</p>	<p>"Margot, come to me," he said imploringly, stretching out his arms. Now and then Rex, who loved taking risks, went up quite close to Albinus on the tips of his bare toes and touched him with the utmost delicacy. (259)</p>
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The second example shows how Nabokov further expanded Roy's omission (the underlined remark in brackets vs the whole passage in italics) and practically removed the whole scene. A comparison of the original *Kamera Obskura* with *Laughter in the Dark* shows that there are gaps in Nabokov's English text, actually absent from Roy's translation, which regard the characters' sexual activity. Here is an example:

Камера Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
[...] было что-то неотразимое в его глазах, в голосе, в хватках, в его манере толстыми жаркими губами <u>ездить вверх и вниз по спине, между лопатками.</u> (134)	There was something so irresistible about his eyes, his voice, the grip of his hands, and in the movement of his thick, hot lips, <u>as he kissed her between the shoulder-blades and all over her back.</u> (30)	There was something so satisfying about the grip of his hands, the touch of his thick lips. (35)

These are more numerous than Roy's deletions, restored by Nabokov. Comparing Nabokov's Russian and English texts, there are especially many removals in two moments of the story: one is related to Magda's and Horn's forced abstinence during their summer trip to southern Europe and their subsequent intimate reunion thanks to a shared hotel bathroom. Another group of removals related to sexual desire can be found when blind Albinus ponders over his and supposed Margot's abstinence in the Swiss chalet (to which the above-mentioned removal also belongs).

Therefore, I would conclude that Winifred Roy has introduced the tendency to mitigate the erotic and uncomfortable content of the novel, such as the girl's age, but this tendency was maintained and further developed by Nabokov himself. Said this, Nabokov's self-translation has not lost the key features of the relationship between Bruno/Albinus and Magda/Margot: quite the contrary, it developed and unfolded them for the English reader.

4.2.3 Translating style: a comparison of two translations.

As shown in Figure 2, Nabokov made his notes directly on Roy's translation, amending and rewriting it. He modified both her translation and the Russian original in an attempt to improve the style and content of the target text in an artistic sense, as only an author-translator can do. Nabokov extensively used Roy's text as a departure point

for his very own creative process of a new English text. He added or changed details in descriptions, modified colours, paid a special attention to names of plants and animals, personalising the stylistic features of the text.

The examples provided below show that the self-translator enriched these descriptive passages by adding new details and even entire sentences:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
<p>С трудом оторвав взгляд от щек и плеч Магды и нервно покусывая ноготь большого пальца, он отошел к окну. Была оттепель, автомобили расплескивали лужи, на углу виднелся ярко-фиолетовый лоток с цветами, солнечное мокрое небо отражалось в стекле окна, которое мыла веселая, растрепанная горничная. (183)</p>	<p>With an effort he turned his eyes away from the cheeks and shoulders of the sleeping girl, nervously bit his thumbnail and walked to the window. It was thawing. Motor-cars were splashing their way through the puddles; at the corner a man was selling violets; the moist, sunny sky was mirrored in the glass pane, which was being washed by a cheerful, slatternly servant-girl. (171)</p>	<p>With an effort, he turned his eyes away from the sleeping girl, nervously bit his thumbnail and walked to the window. It was thawing. <u>Bright</u> motorcars were splashing their way through the puddles; at the corner a <u>ragged rascal</u> was selling violets; <u>an adventurous Alsatian was insistently following a tiny Pekinese, which snarled, turned and slithered at the end of its leash; a great brilliant slice of the rapid blue sky</u> was mirrored in a glass pane which a bare-armed servant girl was washing vigorously. (179)</p>
<p>У меня был приятель, юноша, полный жизни, с лицом ангела и с мускулами пантеры, – он порезался, откупоривая бутылку, и через несколько дней умер. (183)</p>	<p>I once had a friend—a boy full of life, with the face of an angel and the muscles of a panther. He cut himself when he was opening a bottle and died a few days later. (173)</p>	<p>I once had a dear friend—a beautiful boy full of life, with the face of an angel and the muscles of a panther. He cut himself while opening a tin of preserved peaches—<u>you know, the large, soft, slippery kind that plap in the mouth and slither down.</u> (181)</p>

<p>Темноголовая, стриженная, совершенно голая, она боком сидела на коврике, опираясь на выпрямленную руку – так что на месте локтя был нежный морщинистый глазок, – сидела, чуть склонив худенький стан, в позе задумчивого изнеможения, и смотрела исподлобья, как рисовальщики поднимают и опускают глаза, и слушала легкий шорох карандашной штриховки или попискивание угля [...]. (132)</p>	<p>With her black, short hair, Magda sat on a small rug, completely naked, leaning on her outstretched hand, her thin back bent slightly forward in an attitude of pensive weariness; she watched the students raise and lower their eyes, and heard the faint rustle of the moving pencils or the grating of the charcoal. (25)</p>	<p>With her <u>sleek</u> black hair <u>nicely cut</u>, she sat on a small rug, stark naked, <u>her feet curled under her</u>, leaning on her <u>blue-veined</u> arm, her slim back (<u>with a sheen of fine down between the pretty shoulders, one of which was raised to her flaming cheek</u>) bent slightly forward in a semblance of wistful weariness; she watched askance the students lift and lower their eyes and heard the faint whir and grating of <i>carbon pencils shading this curve or that</i>. (29)</p>
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The first example shows how Roy’s fairly literal translation was enriched by several additions, which allowed the author to better convey the lively atmosphere of the first days of spring in a city. The second example is an addition to Rex’s anecdote - as mentioned before, the author tends to enrich in English his numerous little stories - that appeals to the reader’s sense of taste. The third example is especially interesting because it allows us to see how a detail of the girl’s physical description got lost from Roy’s *Camera Obscura*, did not return in the author’s translation, but was instead replaced by a new, different piece of description. This paragraph also shows that standard translation lost such a typically nabokovian stylistic device as alliteration: the sequence of words “слушала **л**егкий **ш**орох карандаш**н**ой **ш**триховки” contains two intensely recurrent voiceless fricative sounds, /x/ and /ʃ/. Roy’s translation has no alliteration at all, while Nabokov’s version contains slightly different lexical choices, which do not alter the meaning of the sentence, but allow the author-translator to create a generally more flowing sound within the sentence: whereas Winifred Roy translated “задумчивое изнеможенье” as “pensive weariness”, Nabokov chose to translate it as “wistful weariness”

ness”, whilst instead of translating “поднимают и опускают глаза” with “raise and lower”, he chose two words beginning with L: “lift and lower”. Another little stylistic adjustment: Roy translated literally, “rustle of the moving pencils or the grating of the charcoal.”, whereas Nabokov changed the sentence into “whir and grating of carbon pencils”, which allowed him to recreate an almost onomatopoeic effect with a recurring R sound in two adjacent words.

Speaking of alliteration, Nabokov’s Russian text *Kamera Obskura* makes wide use of this rhetorical figure: it is important to keep in mind that Nabokov started his career as a writer of poetry and continued to write poems throughout his whole life. Scholars even speak of “poetization of his prose fiction, which relies heavily on alliteration and rhythm and even contains passages written in meter” (Alexandrov, 1995:360).

It will be interesting to compare how the standard translator and the self-translator dealt with the translation of this stylistic device, and to see whether they attempted to convey it at all. The above-mentioned example is a good point of departure: here Nabokov managed to recreate some alliteration in the same sentence, even though it significantly decreased in intensity. Elsewhere, the alliteration was not recreated in exactly the same point, but it was added anew in other passages, thus conveying to the English text a typical Nabokovian signature.

First, it will be useful to observe some examples alliteration in the Russian text. Instances of recurring sibilant and affricate consonants can be found in descriptions of nature and things. Here is an example of alliteration of the Ж consonant:

БЫЛО ОКОЛО ВОСЬМИ, ЛЕГКИЕ СУМЕРКИ **ОЖИВЛЯЛИСЬ НЕЖНЫМИ
ОРАНЖЕВЫМИ** ОГНЯМИ, НЕБО БЫЛО ЕЩЕ СОВСЕМ ГОЛУБОЕ, И ОТ НЕГО
КРУЖИЛАСЬ ГОЛОВА. (148)

Another example of a buzzing recurring Ж is contained within the description of the messy room right after Annelise left Bruno’s house forever:

Желтое платье **жены** **лежало** на постели. (151)

In both translations of this sentence the alliteration was lost, as well as the colour of the dress in *Laughter in the Dark* (Roy: “His wife's yellow dress lay on the bed”. (82) / Nabokov: “His wife's evening gowns lay on the bed” (86)).

Here is a description that contains two recurring consonants (Щ and Ш), in addition to a sequence of assonant adjectives characterised by the vowel O:

Берлин, майское утро, **еще** очень рано. В **плюще** егозят воробьи. Толстый автомобиль, **развозящий** молоко, **шелестит** **шинами**, **словно по шелку**. В **слуховом окошке** на скате черепичной **крыши** отблеск солнца. Воздух еще не привык к звонкам и гудкам и принимает, и носит эти звуки как нечто **новое, ломкое, дорогое**. В палисадниках цветет сирень. (150)

This little description of an early spring morning has lost in translation the intensity of alliteration, which characterises the Russian text, but Nabokov added a whole new sentence to it, which introduces some alliteration, in addition to a couple of new adjectives, one of which - quite typically for Nabokov - is a more rigorous scientific identification of a plant:

Berlin, a **May morning**, quite early. The sparrows were bustling about in the ivy. A **large milk** van **rolled smoothly along**. The sun gleamed against an attic window on a sloping tiled roof. The air had not yet accustomed itself to the hooting and hubbub of the traffic; it gently took up these sounds and bore them along like something new, fragile and precious. In the trout gardens the lilac was in bloom. (78)

Berlin-**West**, a **morning in May**. **Men in white caps cleaning** the street. **Who are they who leave old patent leather boots in the gutter?** Sparrows bustling about in the ivy. An **electric milk** van on fat tires **rolling creamily**. The sun dazzling in an attic window on the slope of a green-tiled roof. The young fresh air itself was not yet used to the hooting of the distant traffic; it gently took up the sounds and bore them along like something fragile and precious. In the front gardens the Persian lilac was in bloom. (82)

There are many more instances of alliteration in the Russian text, below for example we have one paragraph with recurring H and Ж consonants (**ЖЕНЫ**,

неподвижно, напряженно - alliteration absent in Roy's translation, and newly added by Nabokov with a new detail "ghostly glass").

Камера Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
В детской Кречмар увидел спину жены, неподвижно и напряженно склонившейся над кроватью, – сестра милосердия взяла ее за плечи и отвела в полутьму. (181)	In the nursery Kretschmar saw his wife's back as she bent motionless and intent over the bed. The hospital-nurse put her arm round her shoulder and led her into the darkness. (166)	In the nursery, Albinus saw his wife's back, as she bent, motionless and intent, over the bed, still holding, it seemed, a ghostly glass in her hand. The hospital nurse put her arm round her shoulders and led her into dimness. (175)
В автомобиле переливались пятнистые потемки , она сидела до одури близко, от нее шло какое-то блаженное, животное тепло, [...]. (141)	There were patches of darkness; Magda was seated intoxicatingly near to him, and a blissful animal warmth radiated from her body; [...]. (52)	The darkness inside the taxi slid and swayed as <u>quarters and halves and whole squares of ashen light passed from window to window across it</u> . Margot was sitting so near that he felt the blissful animal warmth of her body. (57)
« Дюжинный донжуан сегодня же с ней бы познакомился», – беспомощно подумал Кречмар. (130)	A real Don Juan would make her acquaintance this very day, thought Kretschmar helplessly. (18)	"Any normal man would know what to do," thought Albinus. (22)

The second example shows a sequence of three words starting with the consonant П: alliteration is absent from Roy's text, whilst Nabokov managed to recreate both meaning and alliteration, this time with an S, in addition to having paraphrased and enriched the Russian image of the evening shadows and lights in the car ("В автомобиле переливались пятнистые потемки"). The third example contains a heavy consonance in "**дюженный донжуан**", this time lost in both translations (Roy's translation is closer to the Russian original, but not precise - real is not дюженный -, while Nabokov opted for a non literal translation).

An interesting passage, quite rich stylistically in the source text, describes Kretschmar's inner thoughts when he imagines Magda and Horn packing their trunks after Bruno's departure from the Swiss chalet. His wife's silent and ethereal memory contrasts with Magda's image, compared to a snake in her essence, her physical appearance and her movements:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
<p>Да, шелестящее, слабо пахнувшее одеколоном воспоминание, больше ничего. Подлинная жизнь, та хитрая, увертливая, мускулистая, как змея, жизнь, жизнь, которую следовало пресечь немедля, находилась где-то в другом месте, где? Неизвестно. С необычайной ясностью он представлял себе, как после его отъезда она и Горн – оба гибкие, проворные, со страшными лучистыми глазами навывкате – собирают вещи, как Магда целует Горна, <u>трепеща жалом, извиваясь среди открытых сундуков</u>, как наконец они уезжают – но куда, куда? Миллион городов и сплошной мрак. (221)</p>	<p>[...] an almost soundless memory, carrying a faint reek of eau-de-Cologne—that was all. Real life, which was cruel, supple and strong, like a <u>snake</u>, and which he wanted to destroy without delay, was somewhere else—but where? He didn't know. With extraordinary distinctness he pictured Magda and Horn—both quick and agile, with terrible, beaming goggle eyes—packing their <u>trunks</u> after his departure; Magda kissed Horn, threading her way among the open <u>trunks</u>, and then they went away—but where, where? A million towns and thick darkness. (280)</p>	<p>[...] an almost soundless memory drifting about listlessly with a faint trail of eau-de-Cologne —that was all. Real life, which was cruel, supple and strong like some <u>anaconda</u>, and which he longed to destroy without delay, was somewhere else—but where? He did not know. With extraordinary distinctness he pictured Margot and Rex—both quick and alert, with terrible, beaming, goggle eyes and long, lithe limbs—packing after his departure; Margot fawned, and caressed Rex among the open trunks and then they both went away—but where, where? <u>Not a light in the darkness. But their sinuous path burned in him like the trace which a foul, crawling creature leaves on the skin.</u> (283)</p>

This example shows how Nabokov seems to have worked directly on Roy's translation, since the syntactical structure and many lexical choices within the passage are identical. However, Nabokov introduced some modifications and amendments: some alliteration in the first sentence about Albinus' wife; another alliteration in a newly added sequence of three words starting with L: long, lithe, limbs; another alliteration in

the newly added final sentence with the pair of words “crawling creature”. Nabokov removed the repetition of the word “trunks”, present in Roy’s translation. Roy’s translation has significantly simplified the passage in which Nabokov returns to the metaphor of the snake in order to describe Magda’s movements amid the open trunks (“Магда целует Горна, трепеща жалом, извиваясь среди открытых сундуков”/“Magda kissed Horn, threading her way among the open trunks”). In *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov did not translate literally this sentence, thus not restoring the gap in the same precise point, but added a new final remark, containing another, somehow similar image of a poisonous, vicious creature, which leaves a burning mark on the skin, just as a stinger would do.

One last thing: like with the Persian lilac, Nabokov chose to translate the common term “snake” with a more precise definition of the species, i.e. “anaconda”, which better conveys the idea of a “strong” (“мускулистая”) snake. This tendency to translate animals, plants and insects with increased scientific precision in the English text can be observed throughout the whole book and is part of Nabokov’s attention to translation of natural elements. As seen above, Nabokov’s English text does not always transpose alliteration in parallel sentences, but *Laughter in the Dark* contains many examples of carefully chosen pairs of words, which introduce alliteration to the English text (either modified versions of a Russian original, or completely new additions):

Kamera Obskura	Roy’s translation	Laughter in the Dark
Жена, судя по портретам, нимало не походила на даму с <u>властным лицом, опухшими ногами и тяжелым характером</u> , которую Магда представляла себе; напротив, это, видно, была смирная, нехваткая женщина, которую можно отстранить без труда. (145)	To judge by her photograph, Kretschmar’s wife was not at all as Magda had imagined her—a lady with a <u>stern face and a difficult character</u> , on the contrary, she seemed a quiet, vague creature, who could be got out of the way without much trouble. (62)	Also, to judge by the photograph on his bed table, his wife was not at all as she had imagined her—a large stately woman with a grim expression and a grip of iron ; on the contrary, she seemed a quiet, vague sort of creature who could be got out of the way without much trouble. (68)

...и ей сдавалось, что у нее это выходит вовсе не хуже, чем в Холливуде. (145)	And it seemed to her that she did all these things quite as well as they were done in Hollywood. (63)	And it seemed to her that she simpered and sneered as well as any screen actress . (69)
Переливалось шумное волнение. На лед плавно выехали игроки, сперва шведы, потом немцы. Очень хорош был голкипер в толстом своем свэтере и с огромными кожаными щитами на голенях. (173)	A frenzied excitement swept through the crowd. The players were gliding across the ice in magnificent curves—first the Swedes, then the Germans. The goal-keeper, in his thick sweater with the huge leather pads on his calves, looked splendid. (142)	Among catcalls, clappings and clamor , the players were leisurely gliding across the ice—first the Swedes, then the Germans. The visitors' goalkeeper, in his brilliant sweater, with great leather pads from instep to hip, slid slowly toward his tiny goal. (151)
Понимаю, почему мой трус улизнул, жалко, что я не заметила раньше. (174)	Now I understand why my coward ran away. (145)	Now I see why my worm crawled away . Pity I didn't notice them before. (153)

In these examples, the Russian text contains no rhetorical figures, but Nabokov's translation, despite being in part similar to Roy's version, adds new alliteration to the English text, thus providing the translation with a more Nabokovian sound, closer to the author's characteristic style: in the first example Nabokov made some different lexical choices, which contain a strong alliteration (grim-grip), but represent quite faithfully what was the original text's intention (curiously, both the English texts lost in translation the detail of Annelise's swollen legs). The second example is a modified translation: again, similar meaning, but better sound with a heavy recurrence of an S consonant. The third example introduces into a very dynamic scene of a hockey match a sequence of three words starting with C, whilst the last one is a nice example of how not only did the English text gain in style with a recurring W, but also in meaning: if Albinus compared Magda to an anaconda, she, in turn, saw him as a "crawling worm". In all these cases, of course, the standard translator chose meaning over form and translated quite faithfully, despite a few gaps in details (such as Annelise's legs). Nabokov never distances himself

significantly from the message of the source text, quite the contrary: the English text has intensified both form and meaning thanks to the self-translator's modifications, who finds here a very good balance between these two elements, also thanks to the writer-translator's authority and, of course, to his knowledge of his own literary style.

Both Nabokov's source and target text contain more rhetorical figures, such as onomatopoeias and similes. Here are some examples:

Kamera Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
[...] бальный зал, где, под <u>цимбалы и улюлюкание джаза</u> , пожилые мужчины делали ей весьма откровенные предложения. (131)	[...] dance hall where elderly men made her extremely frank proposals, to the <u>noisy strains of a jazz band</u> . (23)	[...] dance hall where elderly men made her extremely frank proposals to <u>the crash and whine of a jazz band</u> . (27)
[...] и в глубине бежала вода; (202)	Far below could be heard the <u>murmur</u> of a stream. (228)	Far below could be heard the <u>swish and rumble of a rapid stream</u> . (235)
Как-то, через несколько дней, он проснулся раньше обыкновенного, увидел сизо-голубой день в окне, еще дымчатый, но уже набухающий солнцем, мягко-зеленые склоны вдали, и ему захотелось выйти, долго ходить, взбираться по каменистым тропинкам, вдыхать запах тмина. (194)	A few days later Kretschmar woke up earlier than usual, saw through the window the deep blue sky, still hazy but already luminous with the first sunshine and the soft green slopes in the distance, and he felt a longing to stroll about, to clamber up the stony little paths and to breathe the thyme-scented air. (204)	A few days later he woke up earlier than usual, <u>threw open the shutters</u> , <u>smiled</u> at the <u>tender</u> blue sky and at the soft green slopes, luminous yet hazy, <u>as if it were all a bright frontispiece under tissue paper</u> , and he felt a strong longing to climb and wander, and to breathe the thyme-scented air. (212)

<p>Раздражительность и нервность мужа она объясняла погодой – май выдался необыкновенно странный, то жарко, то ледяные дожди с градом, который звякал о стекла и таял на подоконниках. (145)</p>	<p>Her husband’s irritability and nervousness she put down to the weather, which was quite unusual for May: at one moment it was hot, and the next there would be icy torrents of rain, mixed with hail-stones, which rattled against the panes. (64)</p>	<p>His irritability and <u>jumpiness</u> she put down to the weather, which was quite unusual for May: at one moment it was hot, at the next there would be icy torrents of rain, mixed with hailstones <u>that bounced on the window sills like tiny tennis balls.</u> (70)</p>
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The first example shows how an onomatopoeia describing some live jazz music was lost in Roy’s translation and found *Laughter in the Dark*, but decreased in intensity. The second example is taken from the location of the car accident which caused Kretschmar’s blindness: in the Russian text there are no rhetorical devices in use, while Winifred Roy introduced an onomatopoeic note by focusing the sentence on the verb “hear” and not on the action of the water, flowing below in the precipice. Nabokov maintained this change, but modified the text a third time: since the accident happened on a mountain road, the stream must have been “rapid” and instead of placidly “murmuring”, the water was “swishing” and “rumbling” - a different auditory perception.

The last two examples compare Roy’s literal translation with Nabokov’s variation: here he introduces similes to describe natural phenomena (morning haze and hailstones). In both passages Nabokov’s translation is similar to Roy’s in its syntactic structure, but - again - the text was modified by the self-translator in order to improve it stylistically. In the last example, Roy’s translation stressed the sound of the hailstones “rattling” against the windows, whereas Nabokov introduced a simile, which allowed him to highlight the almost Romantic connection in Annelise’s mind between her husband’s “jumpiness” (substitute of Roy’s literal translation “nervousness”) and the bad weather, the image of the hailstones, that “bounced on the window sills like tiny tennis balls”.

The Russian novel contains similes and metaphors within similar contexts as well. An example is the description of cicadas in chapter 27 (*Laughter in the Dark* - chapter 28): in *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov uses the metaphor of a clockwork mechanism to convey the incessant, but disordered sound of these insects, in addition to an anaphoric repetition of the verb “трещали”:

Камера Obskura	Roy’s translation	Laughter in the Dark
Затем их окружили сосенки, на стволах сидели сплюснутые цикады и трещали, трещали, пока то у одной, то у другой не кончался завод. (195)	Then came some pines, on the trunks of which cicadas sat chirping. When one stopped, another began, so that the sound was incessant. (206)	[...] a pine grove where the creaking of the cicadas was like the endless winding-up and whirr of some clockwork toy. (216)

A comparison of these three passages shows that Winifred Roy’s translation has lost Nabokov’s metaphor, while the self-translator unfolded it into a simile, thus giving more space to the comparison.

Another interesting feature of the translation’s formal aspect is the way the two translators deal with passages describing sequences of actions. Here, as it can be seen in the selected passages below, Winifred Roy opted for a literal translation, that indeed conveys the meaning of the original text without any gaps, but Nabokov opted for a different solution: he changed the syntactic structure of the original sentences and introduced an enumeration of verbs, which provide the passage with a particularly dynamic sound.

Камера Obskura	Roy’s translation	Laughter in the Dark
Мотоциклист рассердился, молча пустил машину, довез Магду до какой-то улицы и там оставил. (132)	The motor-cyclist was annoyed, silently started his machine, drove Magda to a street and left her there. (23)	The youth shrugged his shoulders, <u>started his engine, ran, jumped, swerved and was gone</u> ; leaving her sitting on a milestone. She returned home on foot. (28)

<p>«Магда, послушай, это правда – у меня жена и ребенок, но я прошу тебя, эти насмешки лишние... Ах, погоди, Магда!» – добавил он, всплеснув руками. (141)</p>	<p>“Magda, listen to me. It is true that I have a wife and a child, but please don't jeer about it.... Oh, don't go away, Magda!” he added, raising his hands entreatingly. (49)</p>	<p>"Margot, listen to me. It is true, I have a family, but please, please, stop jeering about it . . . Oh, don't go away," <u>he cried, catching her, missing her, clutching at her shabby little hand-bag.</u> (54)</p>
<p>Они тут же поссорились, но шевелили губами неслышно, так как было кругом шумно – захлебывающийся, радостный человеческий лай. Там, на льду, изогнутые палки подцепляли проворно скользящий пластик, передавали его друг дружке, с размаху били по нему или подкатывали его, – игроки летели во весь опор, то разбегаясь вдруг концентрическими кругами, то соединяясь опять [...]. (173)</p>	<p>Their lips continued to move, but they could not understand each other, for the clamour grew louder again; the crowd was shouting with glee and excitement, while on the ice the curved sticks pursued the gliding disk with a wide sweep; they struck at it and passed it to one another. The players sped to and fro. At one moment they dispersed in concentric circles, then they gathered into a knot again. (143)</p>	<p>Their lips continued to move, but the clamor around drowned their swift quarrel. The crowd was roaring with excitement as nimble sticks pursued the puck on the ice, <u>and knocked it, and hooked it, and passed it on, and missed it, and clashed together in rapid collision.</u> (151)</p>

Neither of these translations are literal: in the first one Nabokov introduced a sequence of actions with which the motorcyclist, who took an adolescent Margot for a ride, leaves her in the middle of nothing by the countryside road (thus highlighting the failure of her little romantic adventure). The second sequence of verbs is related to Albinus, who instead of “raising his hands entreatingly”, performs a series of helpless actions in an attempt to stop an angry Margot (all verbs are inflected in the -ing form and are followed by an anaphoric repetition of the pronoun “her”). The third passage is another non-literal translation, this time the description of a game of hockey. Winifred Roy’s version is a literal rendering of the Russian text, but Nabokov - well aware that every language has its own sound - decided to rewrite the sentence, in order to convey the dynamism of a

hockey match: the self-translator turned the original sentence into a pure sequence of action verbs connected by an anaphoric repetition of the conjunction “and” and pronoun “it”. The passage works especially well also thanks to the shortness of the verbs chosen by the author, all monosyllabic in simple past tense.

As mentioned above, *Kamera Obskura* contains influences from the cinema world: the formal aspect of the text reflects this connection. *Kamera Obskura* is rich in visual images, dynamic actions, colours and sounds, cinematic coincidences, some of which - as seen above - were lost in Roy’s translation. In his critical article about the novel, in which he analyses its connection with cinema, Khodasevich (1934) stated that *Kamera Obskura* was written with an “enchanted” and even “overabundant” mastery. When rewriting this novel in English, Nabokov made direct use of Roy’s translation, but he endowed it with his personal literary style, by expanding descriptions and refining or modifying lexical choices. This is, of course, a consequence of the advantages of an author-translator: if we look at the characteristics enlisted in Nabokov’s essay “Art of Translation”, the bilingual self-translator possesses them all (literary talent, knowledge of both source and target cultures, knowledge of the author’s literary style, excellent lexical knowledge, the ability to play “the real author’s part” - the mimicry). Discontent with Roy’s “dull” English, Nabokov managed to accomplish a mixed work of rewriting: some parts of *Laughter in the Dark* (which will be analysed below) were indeed translated “afresh” and therefore are a direct authorial rewriting of *Kamera Obskura*; some others, such as the passages analysed above, are a free rewriting of Roy’s translation with a careful eye on the Russian original.

Laughter in the Dark

5.1. The novel's title

The author did not translate or maintain the same title (which actually did not need a translation from Russian, since it's in Latin). The title has indeed been completely rethought: in his account of Nabokov's "Russian years", Brian Boyd tells that the writer "mull[ed] over a less obscure title" for his book, pondering over such candidate titles as *Blind Man's Buff*, *Coloured Ghost* and *The Magic Lantern*: "with moth and candle in mind, he noted down "The Clumsy Moth" and "The Blind Moth"—and then hit upon *Laughter in the Dark*". (Boyd, 1990:365).

In the English text the image of the moth acquires a new symbolic meaning and is more highlighted than in the Russian one. The title *The Clumsy Moth* is most probably a reference to the following sentence, which Nabokov added anew to *Laughter in the Dark* and which is absent from the Russian text:

A clumsy moth flapped round a rose-shaded lamp; and Albinus danced with Margot. Her smoothly brushed head barely reached his shoulder. (116)

In *Kamera Obskura*, this species was present only once and it was referred to as "ночницы", i.e. more generally, as a group of insects. In *Laughter in the Dark* the same species is referred to twice and always singularly as "a moth", as its behaviour reminds of the main character of the novel: the clumsy moth flaps around a lamp while Albinus dances with his young lover (a clear parallelism) and in another scene a white moth (connection with the colour of Albinus' surname) flutters around a lamp until it falls on the table.

Another candidate title, *Blind Man's Buff*, was also taken from a sentence that is absent from the source text. The final scene of the novel, where a blind Albinus tries to shoot Margot, but ultimately fails and gets killed by the girl, is described with more details and contains the following entirely new sentence:

Now he advanced as quietly as possible so that he might detect every sound. Blind man's buff, blind man's buff ... in a country-house on a winter night, long, long ago. (288)

The title *The Magic Lantern* somewhat recalls the original Russian title, since it also contains a reference to a vintage mechanism used to recreate images, which is at the same time in a way related to darkness. Also, two of these titles, including the final version, contain an opposition between a cheerful and a gloomy word (Coloured/Ghost, Laughter/Dark),

5.2 Characters' names

Nabokov changed all the names of *Kamera Obskura*'s main characters, with the only exception of the protagonist's daughter Irma:

Kamera Obskura	Laughter in the Dark
Бруно Кречмар / Bruno Kretschmar	Albert Albinus
Магда Питерс / Magda Peters	Margot Peters
Роберт Горн / Robert Horn	Axel Rex
Аннелиза / Annelise	Elizabeth
Макс / Max	Paul
Ирма / Irma	Irma
Дитрих фон Зегелькранц / Dietrich Von Segelkranz	Udo Conrad

Even some minor characters were given new names in the English text, although many of them maintained the same name as in the Russian original. This is the case of

Bruno/Albert's maid, who in Russian was called "горничная Лизбет" and in English turned into "Martha the maid" (probably because of Albert's wife's new name). An interesting set of names, which undergoes several changes, is that of the guests' names, who are invited at Albert's place for dinner after Margot moved in with him in his old house. Some of the guests' are coupled for dinner:

Kamera Obskura	Laughter in the Dark
Доктор Ламперт - Марго Денис Doctor Lampert - Margot Denis	Dr. Lampert and Sonia Hirsch
фон-Коровин – Ольга Вальдгейм von-Korovin - Olga Waldheim	Boris von Ivanoff and Olga Waldheim
писатель Брюк pisatel' Bruk	Baum the author

One of the guests bears the same name Magda will inherit in *Laughter in the Dark*, so she obviously changes and turns into Sonia in the English text. In addition to this, the Russian guest фон-Коровин becomes even more obviously Russian for an English-speaking audience, thanks to the name Boris and one of the most Russian surnames ever, Ivanoff. In both texts the man pretends to be a noble émigré, but as the author makes it quite clear (with simple inverted commas for the particle "фон" and a more explicit explanation in English), he probably is not.

Now, to take a quick look at the main characters' name change, one can observe three general tendencies in these modifications. The first one is a general simplification of the names: they all sound less German and a bit shorter, especially that of the writer Segelkrantz and Kretschmar's surname; as Jane Grayson has pointed out (1977, 34), "here Nabokov is obviously adapting the names of his characters for an English-reading public". Besides, Nabokov's choice for the writer's new surname is not just an easier one. The reference to Conrad, "not the famous Pole, but Udo Conrad who wrote

Memoirs of a Forgetful Man”, can hardly be random: this choice might serve “to ingratiate Nabokov with his new audience by mentioning another Slavic writer who had made English his literary language” (Forster, 1993:77);

The second type of change concerns the pair of Bruno and Robert’s names, which became increasingly more fable-like in their meaning and sound (another detail: both gain a surname taken from Latin language, thus sounding more un-national). Albert Albinus contains a very obvious and strong alliteration, a rhetoric figure that can be found in fairytales’ characters’ names. The very first translation of Kretschmar’s name was Retlow, as seen in the notes on Nabokov’s copy of Roy’s translation:

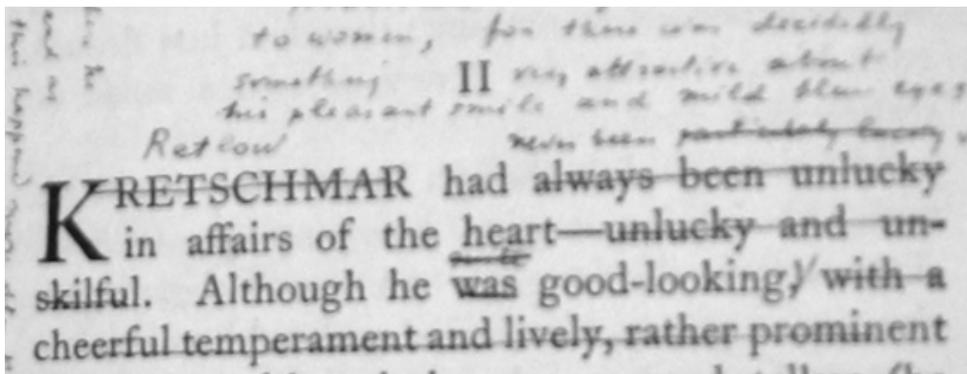


Fig.4 In this photograph of Nabokov’s copy of Roy’s translation (page 11), Nabokov replaced Kretschmar’s name with Retlow.

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In Nabokov’s copy of the book there is also a pen correction regarding the first version of Rex’s new name: instead of Horn, the self-translator wrote on a page of his book the new name “Walter”, which is an almost perfect reflection and anagram of “Retlow”. Interestingly, the 1938 and 1960 editions of *Laughter in the Dark* have maintained a trace of Retlow, used as Kretschmar’s new surname, when Margot “sped through the R’s and found Albinus’ address and his telephone number” (48). The typo was corrected in all subsequent editions.

As we all know, Nabokov decided to choose Axel Rex as the new name for Robert Horn. The sound connection is not lost: Axel Rex also sounds somehow Latin, fable-like and contains associations with an axe and a king, all “fitting allusions to the role of cruel omnipotence he will play in the novel” (Grayson, 1977:34). Actually the axe association has been disguised by Albinus himself, when he said at the dinner party: “Do you know, I had formed quite a different picture of you in my mind—short, fat, with hornrimmed glasses, *though on the other hand your name always reminds me of an axe.*” (the last comment is, of course, present only in English, while the rest of the sentence can be found in both texts). The third group is that of Bruno’s family members, who gain even more common, familiar names than those they had in the Russian book, probably to underline the safety of the family life rejected by Albinus.

5.3 Content modifications

Laughter in the Dark, as a result of a work of self-translation, is obviously strongly connected to the original text, but it also departs from it in numerous ways. Translating *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov introduced changes on two main levels: at the level of contents of the story and at a formal level, modifying the stylistic features of the target text as compared with the source text. At a contents’ level, Nabokov, strong of the self-translator’s authority, freely introduced some major, very noticeable modifications, which change the way the plot develops, but also edited the structure of the novel (in *Laughter in the Dark* there are more chapters) and enhanced certain features in the characters’ portraits.

5.3.1 Major structural changes and plot modifications

Laughter in the Dark contains several major structural changes, which include a modification in the number of chapters. If Winifred Roy's translation had 38 chapters, Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark* has 39. In his translation of *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov maintained the division of Russian chapter 5 into two parts, just as Winifred Roy did. A large part of the first chapter was rewritten, so too were chapters 27-9 (R 26-7). A link chapter (Russian chapter 34) was cut. Chapters 37 and 38 were created from just one chapter in Russian (chapter 36). Chapter 37 was considerably shortened.

5.3.1.1 The opening chapter

The first chapter was reworked by the author by means of substitution of whole paragraphs and transposition in several key sentences.

The opening sentence of the source text sounds as follows:

Приблизительно в 1925 г. размножилось по всему свету милое, забавное существо – существо теперь уже почти забытое, но в свое время, т. е. в течение трех-четырех лет, бывшее вездесущим, от Аляски до Патагонии, от Маньчжурии до Новой Зеландии, от Лапландии до Мыса Доброй Надежды, словом, всюду, куда проникают цветные открытки, – существо, носившее симпатичное имя Чееру. (125)

Kamera Obskura starts by introducing the story of Cheepy, a cartoon guinea-pig: the opening sentence of the Russian novel contains an enumeration of peculiar geographical names, that culminates in a very Gogolian way (the summing up word “словом” at the end of an enumeration of futile details - see, for instance, the opening of “The Overcoat”). After the opening sentence, the narrator describes how a physiologist inspired a caricaturist to make a cartoon about Cheepy and how this idea brought fame and success to the caricaturist, a man named Robert Horn. The main character, Kretschmar, is therefore introduced in connection with this caricaturist, since Horn had

sued a cosmetics company for an advertising starring the actress Dorianna Karenina and his creature Cheepy. Kretschmar had to provide his opinion of an art expert to determine whether the central character of the ad was the actress or on the pig.

As one can easily notice, the introduction is rather twisted and involves many minor characters. All this was removed from the English text and substituted by Albinus' plans to make cartoons with the use of famous paintings. He got in touch with Axel Rex, a talented caricaturist, who seemed interested in the project.

The result of this change is a more linear introduction, which removes some secondary characters (no physiologist, no Dorianna Karenina, who however will appear later) and immediately focuses the reader's attention on the protagonist. Besides, a key character is immediately introduced, that of Udo Conrad, who inspired Albinus for the idea of his cartoon. Therefore, the order of appearance in Russian is as follows: Horn, physiologist, Bruno, some fashionable painter named "Kok", Dorianna Karenina, Max and Annelise. In English characters appear in the following order: Albinus, Conrad, some cinema people who refuse Albinus' project, Rex, Paul and Elizabeth.

The first chapter of the target text reports Albinus' artistic dreams quite in detail, not without a dose of irony and an accent on Albert's naive artistic ambitions. Here is an extract from the description of Albinus' dreams, very rich in pathos, taken from the entirely new part, which was added by Nabokov to the first chapter:

And the colors . . . they would be sure to be far more sophisticated than those of animated cartoons. What a tale might be told, the tale of an artist's vision, the happy journey of eye and brush, and a world in that artist's manner suffused with the tints he himself had found! (9)

The opening sentence of the target text recalls a passage contained in the middle of the first Russian chapter, which introduces Bruno Kretschmar as an "art expert".

However, this was also rewritten and not only because of the change in the plot.

Compare:

В начале 1928 года в Берлине знатоку живописи Бруно Кречмару, человеку, очень, кажется, сведущему, но отнюдь не блестящему, пришлось быть экспертом в пустячном, прямо даже глупом деле. (126)

with:

Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy; one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster. This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling; and although there is plenty of space on a gravestone to contain, bound in moss, the abridged version of a man's life, detail is always welcome. (7)

This opening sentence foreshadows two important characteristics of Nabokov's self-translation of *Kamera Obskura*, that are its "fable-like quality" (Connolly, 1995:215) and the direct intervention of the narrator in the storytelling. The former is here represented by the substitution of a precise year with the typical fairy-tale opening "Once upon a time", but also by the use of a plain name instead of a name+surname combination and the substitution of his profession with the simple definition "a man". Having introduced the main character, Nabokov provides his reader with a very short recount of the plot, from the beginning to the very end, leaving to his audience very little surprise about the fate of the poor main character. Why should a writer reveal the ending of the book in its very first sentence? Nabokov explains this immediately, it is because details are what matters in a story, details are what make a text beautiful and interesting to read:

As in life - and reading is effectively an act of life - everyone knows the end of the story, and what motivates existence is not the desire to know this end, but the pleasure of each moment. (Raguet-Bouvard, 1995:120)

Hence, the opening of *Laughter in the Dark* represents in a few lines the author's idea of good reading: one should not read for the sake of curiosity about the story's ending, but for the sake of artistic pleasure and poetic delight.

5.3.1.2 Other structural and plot changes

Other significant plot changes were introduced towards the end of the book. These changes are related to the way Kretschmar finds out about Magda's infidelity and her secret relationship with Horn: in the Russian version Kretschmar's friend Segelkrantz overhears Magda and Horn's intimate conversation on a train, while Kretschmar is sitting in another compartment (Chapter 26). Afterwards (Chapter 27) the two friends meet again and Segelkrantz, who happens to be writing a new novel, reads some passages aloud to Kretschmar; the latter immediately associates the two characters with Magda and Horn, who were faithfully portrayed by the writer, and thus acknowledges Magda's infidelity (Chapter 27). This episode teaches the writer a lesson: that one should not attempt to "preserve the fleeting experiences of life by transcribing them directly, without transformation, into the literary work" (Connolly, 1995:222). Russian Chapter 34, in which Segelkrantz can no longer stand the sense of guilt and flees Rougionard, was removed from *Laughter in the Dark*.

The English version of the story is simpler: Albinus meets his friend Conrad at the bar, while Rex and Margot are taking the bus. Conrad catches the same bus, while Albinus misses it and has to wait for next one (Chapter 27). In the following chapter (Chapter 28) Albinus is having a walk and meets his friend again, they have a small talk from which he finds out that Conrad, Margot and Rex were sitting close to each other on the bus. Chapter 29 was added anew to the novel's structure (here Nabokov made a separation of the parallel Russian chapter 27 in two parts): in this chapter, Albinus first finds

out from a French colonel that Margot and Rex are actually having an affair and use to “cuddle in corners”. Albinus returns to Conrad and asks whether he overheard the conversation between his two friends:

"Well," said Conrad, "it was the cheapest, loudest, nastiest amorous prattle that I've ever heard in my life. Those friends of yours talked as freely of their love as though they were alone in Paradise—a rather gross Paradise, I'm afraid." (221)

This accent on Magda and Rex's vulgarity, as observed by Conrad, was more developed in the Russian version, since the imaginary writer was given the possibility to describe the couple's appearance more in detail, but also to report the content of their conversation. Actually, despite their fine clothes and neat presence, Segelkrantz did not like the couple: as soon as Magda opened her mouth, the writer was reminded of a “beautiful and vulgar” dancer from Berlin he once had a relationship with. Nabokov effectively described the hideous aura both the man and the girl could not hide behind expensive garments:

И, несмотря на то, что эти двое были, по всей вероятности, из доброй бюргерской семьи, Герман почему-то почувствовал в них что-то от мюзик-холла или бара, смутную атмосферу сомнительных рассветов и прибыльных ночей. (197)

This point of view on the characters, as seen by Kretschmar's writer friend (or, better, by the imaginary character of the novel within the novel), was practically lost in the English version.

5.3.1.3 Literature

As a consequence of the major plot change in Russian Chapters 26 and 27, an interesting aspect of the novel was also significantly altered by the self-translator: the meta-literary content, present in both novels, but in slightly different ways.

The Russian text contains in Chapter 27 an embedded narrative with an elaborate literary parody: the text reveals that Segelkrantz was strongly influenced by Proust, and even knew him in person (“Он знал лично покойного Марселя Пруста, подражал ему и некоторым другим новаторам, так что из-под его пера выходили странные, сложные и тягучие вещи” (193)). In this chapter, Nabokov provides Kretschmar and the reader with a tasting of this “strange and difficult” text, written under the influence of a fashionable author. The encounter between the writer and the couple of lovers becomes part of Segelkrantz’s book and a little *mise en abyme* within Nabokov’s book: this meta-diegetic embedded narrative has two interesting implications.

In this chapter, a moment of real life influences a work of art, but then, conveyed by the work of art, returns to influencing real life. This series of coincidences, along with a moment of second-level narration, in which life becomes literature and then, accidentally, returns to life and changes real people’s existence, was lost in the target text.

This chapter also allows Nabokov to play a meta-literary game, in which a fictional imitator of a fashionable literary style shares his writings with a bored and uninterested listener:

«Однако», – подумал Кречмар, и внимание его стало блуждать. Голос Зегелькранца был очень равномерен и слегка глуховат. Нарастали и проходили длинные предложения. Насколько Кречмар мог понять, Герман шел по бульвару к зубному врачу. Бульвар был бесконечный. Дело происходило в Ницце. (196)

Nabokov’s irony here is obvious. Indeed, the self-translator might have dropped this chapter from *Laughter in the Dark* also because, as argued by Forster, by 1938 “his involvement with Proust had become much richer and more discriminating, and he probably felt he had outgrown this early response.” (Forster, 1995:76) Besides, the self-translator might have considered such a long and elaborate reference to a French author

unsuitable for an American target audience, hence the simplification and adaptation of the plot within the English version of the novel.

In *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov devised a simpler way for Albinus to find out about Margot's infidelity, and also added an interesting conversation between Albinus and Conrad about the difficulty for an émigré writer to reach a reading audience in his homeland, a difficulty that Nabokov has directly experienced in his own career.

Laughter in the Dark contains another scene, to which Nabokov added a series of new meta-literary considerations: these can be found found within the conversation that happens between Rex, Baum and Albinus during the dinner party. Compare:

«Но позвольте, господин Горн, – взволнованно кричал Брюк, написавший только что роман, действие коего протекало на Цейлоне, – нужно же осветить всесторонне, основательно, чтобы всякий читатель понял. Если же я описываю, например, плантацию, то обязан, конечно, подойти с самой важной стороны эксплуатации, жестокости белого колониста. Таинственная, огромная мощь Востока...»
«Вот это и скверно», – сказал Горн.
(167)

"But excuse me, my good sir," cried Baum excitedly—for he had just written a five-hundred-page novel, the scene of which was laid in Ceylon, where he had spent a sun-helmeted fortnight. "You must illuminate the picture thoroughly, so that every reader can understand. What matters is not the book one writes, but the problem it sets—and solves. If I describe the tropics I'm bound to approach my subject from its most important side, and that is—the exploitation, the cruelty of the white colonist. When you think of the millions and millions—"
"I don't," said Rex. (131)

«Я не знаю, господа, как вы относитесь к Зегелькранцу, – сказал Кречмар, проникая в разговор между Горном и Брюком. – По-моему, некоторые его новеллы прекрасны, хотя, правда, он иногда теряется в лабиринтах сложной психологии.»
(167)

"I don't know, gentlemen, what you think of Udo Conrad," said Albinus, joining in the fray. "It would seem to me that he is that type of author with exquisite vision and a divine style which might please you, Herr Rex, and that if he isn't a great writer it is because—and here, Herr Baum, I am with you—he has a contempt for social problems which, in this age of social upheavals, is disgraceful and, let me add, sinful. . ." (132)

In the first passage, the narrator reports Baum's answer to Rex's opinions about literature. In the previous dialogue (which I skipped because it is identical in both texts),

Rex had just told Baum that a single, well-written sentence describes India better than a long thick novel full of literary tropes such as tigers and serpents. Rex proposes the following sentence, which in his opinion tells everything about India in a few words: “Before turning in I put out my wet boots to dry and in the morning I found that a thick blue forest had grown on them” (131). Here Rex’s point of view is close to the author’s literary taste, whilst Baum’s and Albinus’ answers represent expressions of what Nabokov famously disliked in literature: the attempt to solve social problems and, actually, the attempt to solve any problem at all. These additions to the English text do not change significantly the general outcome of the conversation, but they analyse the meta-literary topic with further attention and examine more in depth Albinus’ superficial taste not only in visual art, but also in literature: Albinus was right in stating that Conrad has a “contempt for social problems”. The fictional writer will indeed show a complete ignorance in the field of politics when, in Chapter 29, he will ask Albinus who Mussolini is. Albinus’ superficiality is exposed by the fact that he searches for a social commitment in literature, while labelling as “disgraceful” and “sinful” the work of any writer who ignores political and social problems. This viewpoint is connected to Nabokov’s own opinion about bad and good literature: in his view, literature is not a tool people use to solve political issues. Nabokov’s art is a celebration of the beauty and richness of life, with constant attention to every detail: as Bruno Osimo put it, it is from Nabokov’s “attention to the detail, from this aversion towards generalisations, towards trivializations that the distant attitude towards any social or political message present, more or less explicitly, in a literary text” (Osimo, 1999:216). An attention to details that Albinus obviously lacks, both in art and in his life.

5.3.2 Characters

5.3.2.1 Albinus

Nabokov's portrayal of the main character of the novel does not generally depart from the Russian text: Kretschmar already was a rather silly and weak character. What Nabokov does in self-translation, however, is further enhancing his negative qualities through modifications and additions to his actions, inner thoughts and dialogues with other characters. In the first page of the novel we immediately read that Albinus "was not a particularly gifted man" (8); shortly after, the author will reveal to his reader that Albinus had "a slowish mind" (14).

Generally speaking, Nabokov develops Albinus' *poshlost'* through several moments and themes. Albinus is a wealthy man, who seems to belong to an artistic élite in Berlin: he is an art critic and, apparently an art expert, very self-confident about his social status. The reality, however, is quite different. Despite being full of himself and happy with his social position, the man is a tangle of fears, nasty little secrets and - as the reader finds out - he is not even good at his job: a series of new additions to *Laughter in the Dark* are focused on the topic of art and expose Albinus' professional flaws.

First, the presence of art was increased in Albinus' house. Nabokov added a "collection of miniatures" to the dining room and a "Ruysdael" above the sofa (instead of a Cheepy toy on the sofa in the Russian text). The self-translator also highlighted Albinus' interest in art through an increased use of art imagery in the main character's thoughts and ideas. In addition to the above-mentioned description of Albinus' plans to create a film made of paintings³⁹, Nabokov added an artistic simile to the letter Albinus wrote to his wife: in this letter, he begs for forgiveness and states that their family happiness was

³⁹ The author reveals us, however, that these plans were inspired by Conrad's original work, so they are not entirely Albinus' merit.

“bruised” by his little adventure “as the knife of a madman slashes a picture.” (91) In the source text Kretschmar described his betrayal without using any references to visual art: «разом испепелившее наше семейное счастье» (153). (of course, the pathos in both texts is ridiculous, rather than dignified and elevated).

A new dialogue added to *Laughter in the Dark* allows the reader to find out that Albinus’ art collection - of which he is very proud - is actually full of fakes, partially painted by Rex. Compare the Russian passage:

Кречмар повел его по комнатам; в каждой было какое-нибудь замечательное полотно. Горн, глядя на картину, слегка откидывался, вытянув вдоль живота руки и держа себя за кисть. (172)

With the parallel English passage, significantly longer:

Albinus led him through the rooms. Every one of them contained some fine painting—with a sprinkling of fakes. Rex gazed in rapture. He wondered whether that Lorenzo Lotto with the mauve-robed John and weeping Virgin was quite genuine. At one time of his adventurous life he had worked as a faker of pictures and had produced some very good stuff. The seventeenth century—that was his period. Last night he had noticed an old friend in the dining room, and now he examined it again with exquisite delight. It was in Baugin's best manner: a mandolin on a chessboard, ruby wine in a glass and a white carnation. "Doesn't it look modern? Almost surrealistic, in fact," said Albinus fondly. "Quite," said Rex, holding his own wrist, as he contemplated the picture. It was modern: he had painted it only eight years ago. (146)

Nabokov highlights this aspect because it has a primary connection with the character’s fate: as mentioned by J. Connolly (1995:216), Albinus’ “inability to distinguish the authentic from the false” is one of the levels of his “failure of vision”, of his blindness. This inability can be connected to his emotional blindness and his incapability to see that Margot’s love was also one big fake.

A trait that contributes to portraying Albinus as a rather ridiculous man is his clumsiness, enhanced in the English text thanks to the addition of a new list of elementary activities he never was able to perform:

He could not tie a dress-tie nor pare his right-hand nails, nor make up a parcel; he could not uncork a bottle without picking to bits one half of the cork, and drowning the other. (232)

Albinus' arrogance and snobbish attitude was also accentuated in the English text through the rewriting of the dialogue with Otto, Margot's brother. Albinus treats the boy with superiority, as the narrator points out when he states that Albinus spoke to Otto "very resolutely, very coolly - quite the patrician, in fact" (106), while in both books he pities the poor boy with "that kind of shallow sentimentality peculiar to his bourgeois set" (106), before offering him a ten-mark note. Interestingly, some new remarks, present in *Laughter in the Dark*, show that Albinus looked upon Margot's social background in a similar way. For example, Nabokov reports that Albinus noticed "her cheap sweet scent" (45), her bad taste in furniture, her bad writing and "bad spelling" (86). All these details denote a certain superiority mixed to a vulgar tenderness, not very distant from the feeling that motivated Albinus to offer Otto a ten-mark note.

In self-translation Nabokov expands through addition of further details the description of some key moments of Albinus' life, such as his daughter's death, as perceived by the character: we see the whole scene from Albert's point of view and the addition of numerous superficial details about the room and the people around him allows to convey Albinus' rather shocked state of mind.

Another new passage, in which the narrator switched to internal focalization, describes the moment when the man finds out about Margot and Rex's affair (twice) and prepares for his revenge. Here is an example of a newly added inner monologue:

As soon as she opened it he would shoot her down. He would not bother to ask her any questions. It was all as plain as death and, with a kind of hideous smoothness, fitted into the logical scheme of things. They had been deceiving him steadily, astutely, artistically. She must be killed at once. (224)

Nabokov also concentrates more on the gun, a key object for Albinus' revenge, perceived as a secret treasure. He adds thoughts about the gun ("there was almost a sensual pleasure in the thought of pressing back that incurved trigger."), he modifies all the description of the way Albinus hides the gun in a "treasure chest", and rewrites the description of the final scene of the novel, in which Albinus is shot by Margot.

5.3.2.2 Margot

This character was less modified in the self-translation: whilst Albinus became an even more unpleasant, silly and ridiculous character, Magda turned into Margot, but remained more or less what she already was in the Russian text. Khodasevich defined her as "Дрянная девчонка, дочь берлинской швейцарихи, смазливая и развратная, истинное порождение 'инфляционного периода'" ("a wretched girl, daughter of a houseporter from Berlin, cute and depraved, a typical product of the 'hyperinflation period'") (Khodasevich, 1934). J. Connolly defined Margot as "a remarkably meretricious and calculating young woman who has one consuming ambition: to live the life of a glamorous film star" (Connolly, 1995:223).

Magda/Margot's childhood was probably the most innocent and sincere phase of her life: Nabokov describes her as a "bright and high-spirited girl" ("веселая и бойкая девчонка") (25). He adds a rather tender sentence to the description of her childhood, in which he likens the girl to a kitten, when portraying her commonest self-defense movement (absent from *Kamera Obskura*):

A kitten's commonest movement is a soft little jump coming in sudden series; hers was a sharp raising of her left elbow to protect her face. (25)

Perhaps her happiest memories are related to her childhood, when she used to go swimming with her brother Otto and his friends (“Все это было так чудесно, так весело” (155)). She remembers her friend Kaspar shouting “the water is wet” and she would later scream the same words during her holidays in Italy with Albinus (this connection happens only in *Laughter in the Dark*: “The water is wet!” she cried, and ran into the surf (114)/«Пойдем в воду!» – крикнула она и побежала вперед. (161))

In the self-translation, Nabokov also underlined her childish side through the addition of further details about the games she played during her sickness (phone tricks): Margot is indeed a very young woman and, despite her tricky and false nature, Albinus cannot help but treat her as a child.

5.3.2.3.1 Pet names

Especially after Irma’s death, Margot openly substituted his daughter in Albinus’ life, as stated by the narrator:

Albinus, as he tried to console her, unconsciously used the very words with which he had once comforted Irma when he kissed a bruise-words which now, after Irma's death, were vacant. (192)

This aspect was emphasised in the English text: for example, when Margot was sad (or better, worried) because of her brother’s attempt to blackmail her, Bruno simply “обнял ее и нежно защекотал” (155), while in English Albinus treated Margot like a baby, he “rocked her to and fro; he would have crooned a lullaby had he known one” (101). Also, when Margot was desperate because of her bad film performance, a new sentence was added by Nabokov to the English scene, that describes how Albinus treated her like a child while she was crying: “Now let's take a fresh handkerchief and dry up our

tears for good”. The use of the personal pronoun “we” and of the possessive determiner “our” is a typical element of adult conversations with children. The scene goes on with Albinus trying to cheer Margot up:

Вот завтра ты пойдешь выбирать
автомобиль – весело же! (187)

Tomorrow you shall go and choose
yourself something. Shall I tell you what?
A big thing on four wheels. Have you
forgotten that? Now, won't that be fun?
(193)

The English version of this sentence was significantly enlarged and this enlargement stresses the childish aspect of Albinus-Margot relationship: the use of the periphrasis “big thing on four wheels” as a substitute for “автомобиль” is an especially obvious element, which enhances the childish tone of this passage.

Some critics have seen in Albinus’ obsession with Margot an anticipation of what Lolita would later become to Humbert Humbert. Nabokov did recognise some affinity between these two characters, but he pointed out that Margot was “a common young whore”, not an “unfortunate little Lolita” (SO, 83). As stated by J. Connolly, “while *Laughter in the Dark* separates the figure of mistress (Margot) and injured child (Irma), *Lolita* conflates the two: Dolores Haze becomes both mistress and abused child” (1995:220).

Another new element added to *Laughter in the Dark* is the increased amount of pet names used by Albinus and Margot as a substitution of their real names: Nabokov added a new sentence to Chapter 14, where there is a dialogue between Albinus and Margot and the narrator reveals that the former “had gradually got together quite a little menagerie of pet names” (125), while in the Russian version of this scene Bruno calls Magda “моя дорогая” (125). In the same dialogue Bruno calls Magda “мое сокровище” (165), while in English Nabokov translated this with a more childish “my pet” (125, present also on page 193). Interestingly, when Irma is ill, Annelise asks her:

“Горлышко не болит?” (175), while in *Laughter in the Dark* in the same passage Elizabeth asks: “Does your throat hurt, my pet?” (156). This addition is far from being casual and sounds like a reference to the way Albinus usually calls Margot: in *Laughter in the Dark* Nabokov often substituted real names with pet names; these include the above-mentioned and recurrent “my pet”, but also “child” (180), “little one” (194) and “bunny” (100, 138). Magda, in turn, calls her lover “a bad boy” and “woggy” (100, 180) in dialogues where the Russian text uses Kretschmar’s name instead⁴⁰.

5.3.2.3 Rex

Axel Rex’s character remained quite similar to that of Robert Horn’s in *Kamera Obskura*. He is the real villain of this story, a cruel sadist, but also a gifted and charismatic man, who, despite his talent, is openly condemned by the author⁴¹. A few tiny details were changed by Nabokov in *Laughter in the Dark*, such as his hometown (in Russian it was Hamburg, in English the detail is omitted); his appearance was described with a couple of new details, such as his hair (“longish and with an odd dry look about it, was certainly not a wig, although it looked uncommonly like one” (32), absent from *Kamera Obskura*) and his general attire, which seemed “rather foreign” (32).

The most prominent feature of Rex’s character that was developed in *Laughter in the Dark* is his passion for jokes, stories and anecdotes: both Horn and Rex constantly insert them into their dialogues, often disguising them as real-life stories about imagined acquaintances. This is an important part of the character’s perception of art and life in

⁴⁰ In the Russian text there are pet names as well, such as “заяц” or “моя маленькая”, but the use of pet names was emphasised in *Laughter in the Dark*.

⁴¹ V. Aleksandrov has noticed a certain affinity between Rex and Humbert Humbert. He states that the main difference between these two villains lays exactly in the narrative structure of the book: in LD the narrator’s wide presence within the text leaves no option to the reader but to hate Rex, whereas *Lolita* is not quite as straightforward: “*Laughter in the Dark* (1938) resembles *Lolita* in the way the villain Axel Rex views and treats all other human beings in terms of aesthetic criteria. However, the omniscient narrative structure of this novel allows Nabokov to condemn Rex overtly”. (Aleksandrov, 1991:248)

general. What's interesting about Rex is that, as opposite to Albinus, he does have some talent, wit, curiosity and a deeper understanding of art. His peculiar sense of humour is an important part of the character and is one of his most prominent traits. For example, Nabokov added a joke to the dialogue with Dorianna Karenina at the dinner party, in order to substitute an exchange of remarks about Cheepy:

"Haven't I met your sister once?" queried Dorianna in her lovely bass voice.

"My sister is in Heaven," answered Rex gravely.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Dorianna.

"Never was born," he added—and sat down on a chair next to Margot. (128)

His conversations are indeed cleverer and more charismatic in *Laughter in the Dark*: not that they already weren't in *Kamera Obskura*, but in the English text Nabokov sparkled Rex's remarks with new witty observations or rhetorically appealing statements (such as the ironic sort of *captatio benevolentiae* he uses when he speaks to the old Swiss maid, warning her that Albinus "had already seriously injured one old woman (much like you in many respects, though not so attractive)") (252)

Nabokov also added a new witty anecdote to the dialogue between Rex and Margot that follows the dinner party. In this story, Rex compared his reunion with Margot to the experience of a man who found a lost diamond cufflink in a fish:

"A certain man," said Rex, as he turned round the corner with Margot, "once lost a diamond cuff-link in the wide blue sea, and twenty years later, on the exact day, a Friday apparently, he was eating a large fish—but there was no diamond inside. That's what I like about coincidence." (135)

In *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov states that Rex "loved to fool people [...]. And at the same time this dangerous man was, with pencil in hand, a very fine artist indeed" (143). However, the presence of talent in this man only makes him a more multifaceted evil character: Nabokov attentively describes Rex's (and Horn's) idea of the art of caricature, closing the passage with the anecdote about "the blind beggar" (144), who sits

on a freshly painted bench: Rex's failure to prevent the blind man from sitting on the bench and his usage of this accident as a source of inspiration shows that the character's "notion of inspiration is fatally corrupted with a cold seed of sadism lying at its core" (Connolly, 1995:223).

Not only does Nabokov create new stories and jokes for Rex's dialogues with other characters, but he also tries to enrich already existing anecdotes with new details, thus highlighting the character's artistic sensitivity and his personal attention to the details of life (see, for example, the above-mentioned story of the young artist, who died after having cut himself with a can of preserved peaches).

One rather negative aspect of Rex's character that Nabokov expanded in *Laughter in the Dark* is his attention to money and his stinginess. For example, Nabokov did not translate literally the gifts Margot received from Rex: in the source text, Horn gave Magda "парижскую шляпу, часики" (135), while in the target text he gave her considerably smaller objects, such as "silk stockings" and "a powder puff". (36) This is no coincidence: Rex seems to be more attentive to money than Horn, although this trait was already sketched in the Russian text. For instance, only in the English text does Rex ask Margot to manage directly Albinus' money after the man went blind ("And as a general thing," added Rex, "it would be much simpler if I were the cashier." (248)), while in both texts he tells Margot to pay for the cab after the hockey match. In addition to this, he had a passion for gambling: in *Laughter in the Dark*, Rex's financial situation had declined severely because of his passion for the game of poker: "he would have had that money still — at least some of it — had he not been a gambler" (141). The topic was also further developed by Nabokov in *Laughter in the Dark*, when he expanded the description of a poker game in Rouginard, thus revealing us that, in addition to being a merciless sadist, Rex was also a cheater:

He was just contemplating doing a little palming at his next shuffle, or perhaps using in a certain private manner the mirror inside his cigarette-case lid (little tricks that he disliked and used only when playing with tyros), when suddenly beyond the magnolias, in the road near the garage, he saw Albinus' car (230).

5.3.2.4 Elizabeth, Irma, Paul

Albinus' family is made up of three characters - Elizabeth, Irma and Paul - who are in opposition to the three characters involved in the love triangle.

As far as Elizabeth is concerned, she is first and foremost a motherly figure: these traits were developed in the target text through some additions, such as a new sentence about her pregnancy (when she was pregnant “her eyes took on a vacant expression of contentment, as if she were contemplating that new inner world of hers. her careless walk changed to a careful waddle” (17)). She is introduced as a quiet woman with a “faint scent of eau-de-cologne” (120), which will return to Albinus' memory repeatedly after his betrayal. In the English text, Nabokov represents her love with a shade, “of the lily variety” (16). The additions he makes to this character are never negative: she has a very quiet inner world, mostly dedicated to her daughter and some new passages in *Laughter in the Dark* give space to their favourite pastimes, such as going to the zoo (she “set off with Irma to the Zoo to see the baby elephant, which turned out to have hardly any trunk at all and a fringe of short hair standing on end all along its back.” (70)). Nabokov also expanded the description of Elizabeth's shocked condition after Albinus' betrayal: in English, he compared her state of mind to one of “those long grotesque riddles that one is set to work out in the dream classroom of dull delirium. And, at first, she felt as if her husband were dead and people were trying to deceive her into thinking that he had only deserted her” (108) (while in Russian the sentence was considerably shorter: “что длится какой-то несуразный сон, или что она сошла с ума, или что муж умер, а ей лгут, что он изменил” (159)) . She is not the “gentle, brainless” wife the introductory

page to the edition of Winifred Roy's translation claims her to be. Quite the contrary, she is a proud woman, who nevertheless never stopped loving her husband:

Although she felt she could never forgive (not that he had humiliated her—she was much too proud to feel wronged that way—but because he had abased himself), still Elisabeth waited on, hoping from day to day that the door would open like the night in a thunderclap and that her husband would come in, pale as Lazarus, his blue eyes swollen and wet, his clothes worn to shreds, his arms wide open. (109)

(the underlined words and sentences were added anew to the English text).

What's most intriguing about Elisabeth (and Annelise) is that she develops an "almost telepathic sensibility" (155) after her separation from Albinus. When the time comes, she somehow perceives that her husband is in trouble with a sort of "multidimensional insight" as defined by J. Connolly (1995, 224). This sort of "clairvoyance", as Brian Boyd has defined it (1990:365), clashes with Albinus' blindness and allows Elisabeth to feel the very moment of her husband's accident. In other novels, Nabokov's favorite characters are sometimes able to experience a similar state of mind, like Fyodor's experience of "multilevel thinking" in *The Gift*:

The fact that Nabokov places Elisabeth at the center of this panoptic survey in *Laughter in the Dark* is a sign of the special status she enjoys in the work. (Connolly, 1995:224).

The author is also extremely sympathetic towards Albinus' daughter. Nabokov did not change Irma's name in translation and neither did he change a lot about her character in general. The girl's physical description was a little modified, but not significantly:

Ирма улыбнулась. Она была некрасивая, со светлыми ресницами, с веснушками над бледными бровями и очень худенькая. (139)

With a smile Irma disclosed a fistful of marbles. She was not at all pretty; freckles covered her pale bumpy forehead, her eyelashes were much too fair, her nose too long for her face (51)

A passage Nabokov enlarged more consistently is the representation of Irma's dream:

[...] и когда наконец заснула, ей приснилось, что она играет с отцом в хоккей, и отец, смеясь, толкнул ее, она упала спиной на лед, лед колет, а встать невозможно. (176)

At length she fell asleep and dreamed that she was playing hockey with her father. He laughed, slipped and fell on his bottom, losing his top hat, and she bumped down too. The ice was awful, but she could not get up and her hockey stick walked away like a looping caterpillar. (160)

Interestingly, in the English text both the characters fall on ice: perhaps it is a pointer to the fact that both Irma and Albinus will not live a long life.

As noticed by J. Connolly, Nabokov portrays Irma with a “rare faculty that marks her as a Nabokovian favorite” (Connolly, 1995:223). This faculty is the ability to take pleasure from the simple fact of being alive:

It was just a quiet delight in one's own existence with a faint note of humorous surprise at being alive at all—yes, that was the tenor of it: mortal gaiety (18).

Whilst Elizabeth and Irma acquired new details, Max, having turned into Paul, has lost a whole passage dedicated to his past and present life, his occupation and his hobbies:

В молодости он как-то упустил жениться, жил один, был давно в связи с пожилой женщиной, увядшей актрисой, которая все еще ухитрялась ему изменять и потом всякий раз валялась у него в ногах, несказанно его этим смущая; дельно заведовал театральной конторой, слыл отличным гастрономом и немного этим гордился; писал, несмотря на свою толщину, стихи, которые никому не показывал, и состоял в обществе покровителей животных. (146)

This character, just like Elizabeth, feels compassion for his brother-in-law and plays an important role when rescuing Albinus from the Swiss chalet, the “torture chamber”, in order to take the blind man home.

The changes introduced by Nabokov to the portraits of his characters are “of the same order as the changes which he makes in the structure: in stylising his characters he shifts his point of view, he views them from a greater distance and with greater detachment” (Grayson, 1977:47). This stylisation results in more formalised negative traits for the first three characters, but as far as Albinus’ family is concerned, these remain more or less what they already were in *Kamera Obskura*: loyal and able to love and forgive.

5.4 Formal aspects of the text

Whereas the previous group of divergences between the Russian and the English text showed how the self-translator modified the very contents of the novel, such as its plot’s development and the characters’ portraits, the following section will analyse the modifications found in the target text, which can be justified by the self-translator’s attention to the formal aspect of the text.

As seen in paragraph 4.2.3, which compared the approach of the standard translator to that of the self-translator, Nabokov managed to convey to the target text more specific features of his style, such as alliterations and metaphors. The self-translator’s authority allowed him to add and modify elements of a sentence in order to improve its general sound. There are, however, more categories of modifications in the English target text which can be attributed to Nabokov’s attention to the formal aspect of his translation. Not only did he choose particular words for the sake of sound, but he also intervened at a larger scale with bigger modifications of the general pattern of the text, involving entire sentences and even paragraphs.

5.4.1 The pattern of the text

If compared with the source text, the target text does not appear to have been rewritten in a completely parallel way. According to Barkhudarov (1975:223) four types of transformations can be used in translation: *perestanovka* ('transposition'), *zamena* ('substitution'), *dobavleniye* ('addition') and *opushcheniye* ('omission'). Nabokov modified the general pattern of the text by using all these types of transformation, applying them to single words, sentences and entire passages.

Relevant groups of omissions and additions were already analysed in Part Four.

Here are some more examples of the above-mentioned processes:

Omission and substitution of details	Между тем Магда сняла приглянувшуюся ей квартиру, наняла кухарку, накупила немало хозяйственных вещей, начиная с сервиза и кончая туалетной бумагой, заказала визитные карточки и занялась прихорашиванием комнат. (147)	Meanwhile Margot had rented the flat and proceeded to buy a number of household articles, beginning with a refrigerator. (74)
Transposition of a sentence within a dialogue	«Скажи, Макс, – спросила Аннелиза, когда девочку уложили, – у меня почему-то чувство, что произошло там что-то, мне было так беспокойно дома. Макс, скажи мне?» Он смутился. После разговора с мужем у Аннелизы развилась прямо какая-то телепатическая впечатлительность. «Никаких встреч?» – настаивала она. – «Наверное?» «Ах, перестань. Откуда ты взяла?» «Я всегда этого боюсь», – сказала она тихо. (175)	"Tell me, Paul," said Elisabeth, when Irma was safely tucked up, "I've a feeling that something happened. I was so restless while you were away. Paul, tell me!" "But I've nothing to tell," he said, growing very red in the face. "You didn't meet anyone?" she ventured. "You really didn't?" "What put such an idea into your head?" he muttered, thoroughly disconcerted by the almost telepathic sensibility which Elisabeth had developed since the separation from her husband. "I'm always fearing it," she whispered, slowly bending her head. (155)

Transposition of a sentence to another paragraph	Господин, о котором шла речь, не был ни провинциалом, ни скромным человеком, ни даже Мюллером (фамилия, под которой он представился) . [...] сегодня показала фотографию улыбающейся девочки, и Мюллер потребовал смотрин (133)	Now the gentleman referred to by Frau Levandovsky was anything but a shy young man from the country. [...] the procuress had merely showed him a snapshot of a smiling girl with the sun in her eyes and a dog in her arms, and Miller (that was the name he gave) merely nodded. (32)
Substitution	Кречмар вышел и вступил в малиновую лужу – снег таял, ночь была сырая, с теплым ветром . (130)	Albinus stepped into a blood-red puddle; the snow was melting, the night was damp, with the fast colors of street lights all running and dissolving . (22)
Substitution	Он так пристрастился к Магде, что часто, уже собираясь уходить, вдруг бросал шляпу в угол (эта привычка обращаться с дорогой шляпой ее немножко удивляла) и оставался. (135)	He, for his part, developed such a taste for Margot that often, when he was on the point of going, he would suddenly shove his hat into a corner (incidentally, she had discovered from its inside that he had been to New York) and decided to stay. (36)

The first example shows that the self-translator substituted an enumeration of actions with a shorter sentence, thus losing some details, but maintaining a similar meaning. The next two examples contain instances of operations of transposition operated by Nabokov within the text: the two passages are very similar translations, but rewriting the English text, Nabokov decided to move a part of it further down in the text, thus achieving a more natural sequence of facts in the target text.

The last two examples show that Nabokov used substitution of series of words or entire sentences in the text when rewriting the novel. In the first example Nabokov substitutes a detail for another: it doesn't change the meaning of the passage, but modifies its form. The second sentence was probably substituted because of internal coherence: in *Laughter in the Dark* Rex was portrayed as a stingy man, so seeing him shoving an expensive hat into a corner could have seemed strange.

Just as *Laughter in the Dark* contains numerous omissions, some of which were inherited from Roy's translation (as seen above), it also contains countless additions. As mentioned above, Nabokov further enriched the visual content of the novel in order to underline its contrast with Albinus' blindness. The visual impressions also come in contrast with the final scene of the novel, in which the omniscient narrator switches to internal focalization in order to filter through Kretschmar's/Albinus' blind point of "view" the description of the fight with the girl:

Падая, он выронил браунинг, мгновенно нащупал его, но одновременно почувствовал быстрое дыхание, холодная проворная рука пыталась выхватить то, что он сам хватал. Кречмар вцепился в живое, в шелковое, и вдруг – невероятный крик, как от щекотки, но хуже, и сразу: звон в ушах и нестерпимый толчок в бок [...] (223)

As he fell he dropped the pistol, but found it again at once. At the same time he was conscious of rapid breathing, a smell of scent and sweat hit his nostrils, and a cold, nimble hand tried to wrench the weapon from his grasp. Albinus seized something living, something that let forth a hideous cry, as though a nightmare creature were being tickled by its nightmare mate. The hand he was catching twisted the pistol free and he felt the barrel prod him; and, together with a faint detonation that seemed miles away, in another world, there came a stab in his side [...] (291)

This passage is an example of a scene that was expanded by means of little additions (adjectives, a simile). Both texts are filtered through the senses of the blind man: the scene contains only Kretschmar's/Albinus' impressions, so there are no visual elements here, but only tactile, auditory and olfactory perceptions (actually, plenty of them). This is not the case of the rest of the novel: translating *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov enhanced the visual dimension of the target text and often enlarged the descriptions of nature and places (as already seen in paragraph 4.2.3), but also paid a special attention to the definition of colours.

5.4.2 Chromatic pattern of the novel

5.4.2.1 Translating colours

Both *Kamera Obskura* and *Laughter in the Dark* contain a carefully defined colour palette; the English text, however, is characterised by a generally increased presence of colours within descriptive passages; many colours were added, substituted or intensified. In her 1977 book, Jane Grayson had already noticed the presence of this category of modifications in the target text. Her idea is that *Laughter in the Dark* “reinforces a colour symbolism which is already present in the Russian version” (Grayson, 1977:38). According to her statement, both texts contain a set of three recurrent colours - black, white and red - used to “stylise the relationships of the characters” (Grayson, 1977:38). The presence of these particular colours was, in her view, especially intensified in *Laughter in the Dark*: black is the colour of Albinus’ blindness, white is the colour of his marriage to Elizabeth and his family life, while red is a symbol of Margot’s passion. As will be analysed below, these colours often appear in association with the elements detected by Grayson. However, symbolic interpretation of colours in a Nabokovian text should be applied with caution: as Julian Connolly (2006:51) has pointed out, Nabokov disliked the simplified aspect of symbolic colours which, in his view, are contrary to the impressions of real life.

There exist novelists and poets, and ecclesiastic writers, who deliberately use color terms, or numbers, in a strictly symbolic sense. The type of writer I am, half-painter, half-naturalist, finds the use of symbols hateful because it substitutes a dead general idea for a live specific impression. I am therefore puzzled and distressed by the significance you lend to the general idea of “red” in my book. When the intellect limits itself to the general notion, or primitive notion, of a certain color it deprives the senses of its shades. [...] Only cartoonists, having three colors at their disposal, use red for hair, cheek and blood. (The Annotated Lolita, 364)

Hence, an analysis of the colour palette of the novel's self-translation should start from Nabokov's personal approach to colours in literature: in my view, translating *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov attempted to "rewrite" the colours per se, to convey them as a part of the world his characters are immersed in. The colours' importance is a primary one: in both novels colours are a contrasting element with the darkness of the main character's blindness. The bitter irony of the situation - a blind art expert - was highlighted by Nabokov in the English text in several ways, and one of them is the generally enhanced presence of colours. In particular, as far as modifications are concerned, colours were either added as a new detail to already existent descriptions, or modified in their shade. The latter is a particularly interesting phenomenon for a scholar of translation studies: why should a self-translator change the colour of an object or a situation when translating the same passage? Another direct Nabokov's statement, which sums up the story of *Kamera Obskura*'s creation and self-translation, can help us answer this question:

I wrote this book in Berlin. First I composed it completely in my mind, which is a very exhausting business, but quite indispensable in my case. This took me about half a year, after which I had the book so that I felt every page of it much as a botanist feels the flora of a given place mentioned in his presence - a compound impression which he knows he can at once put down into full detail. The actual writing of the book I did by hand, as I always do. [...] All this refers of course to the Russian original. When translating it, I again had to rewrite it by hand, changing a lot, because I saw it all *in another English rhythm and color*⁴². (Italics are mine)

Nabokov was famously a synaesthete, i.e. he saw letters in colour and he "possessed a very rich appreciation of gradations in color variations" (Connolly, 2006:53). He even once declared in an interview that he loved colour so much that he could have

⁴² Statement published in several American newspapers, including the *Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia) and the *Times* (Portsmouth, Ohio), 1 May 1938. Quoted in Raguette-Bouvard (1995).

become a painter: “I think I was born a painter—really! ... the sense of color, the love of color, I’ve had all my life” (SO, 17). In both versions of his autobiography (*Drugie Berega* and *Speak, Memory*), Nabokov provided the reader with a detailed account of his audition colorée, or his “freakish gift of seeing letters in color” (SO, 17).

What’s interesting for the sake of our analysis is that the same letters, when considered in a different language, were associated by Nabokov to different colours: the writer’s account of his synaesthetic experience shows that Nabokov was aware of this phenomenon; he describes how he associates all the letters with precise colours, but every language he speaks (Russian, English, French) is characterised by a different chromatic association⁴³. In *Drugie Berega*, Nabokov reflects upon this peculiar phenomenon:

Чрезвычайно сложный вопрос, как и почему малейшее несовпадение между разноязычными начертаниями единозвучной буквы меняет и цветовое впечатление от нее (или, иначе говоря, каким именно образом сливаются в восприятии буквы ее звук, окраска и форма), может быть как-нибудь причастен понятию «структурных» красок в природе. Любопытно, что большей частью русская, инакописная, но идентичная по звуку, буква отличается тускловатым тоном по сравнению с латинской.” (DB, 441)

He provides examples, comparing the same letters in different languages he knows: “Ж, отличающееся от французского J, как горький шоколад от

⁴³ Thoughts about this topic were introduced by Nabokov in his fiction. For example, in *The Gift*, Fedor ponders over synaesthesia within an imaginary dialogue and also confesses a similar tendency to colour the same letters with different colours: “К примеру: различные, многочисленные “а” на тех четырех языках, которыми владею, вижу едва ли не в стольких же тонах – от лаково-черных до занозисто серых – сколько представляю себе сортов поделочного дерева. Рекомендую вам мое розовое фланелевое “м”. Не знаю, обращали ли вы когда-либо внимание на вату, которую изымали из майковских рам? Такова буква “ы”, столь грязная, что словам стыдно начинаться с нее.” (66) (For instance, the various numerous ‘a’s of the four languages which I speak differ for me in tinge, going from lacquered-black to splintery-gray—like different sorts of wood. I recommend to you my pink flannel ‘m.’ I don’t know if you remember the insulating cotton wool which was removed with the storm windows in spring? Well, that is my Russian ‘y,’ or rather ‘ugh,’ so grubby and dull that words are ashamed to begin with it.)

молочного” (DB, 442) or “the long a of the English alphabet [...] has for me the tint of weathered wood, but a French a evokes polished ebony” (SM, 34-35).

Attention to precise definitions of colours is a typically Nabokovian signature, for these colours are an important part of the complex diversity of our world:

For me the shades, or rather colors, of, say, a fox, a ruby, a carrot, a pink rose, a dark cherry, a flushed cheek, are as different as blue is from green... (The Annotated Lolita 364).

But Nabokov was also a self-translator, for whom every language had its own shades and sounds: in my view, Nabokov’s additions and modifications of colour in the English text should be interpreted from this point of view before being attributed to a pattern with a specific symbolic meaning.

Here are some examples of colours associated with visual images and descriptions added or modified by Nabokov in the English text:

(absent from <i>Kamera Obskura</i>)	“Then, too, you could try the Italians: the blue cone of a hill in the distance, a white looping path , little pilgrims winding their way upward.” (9)
“были, наконец, прекрасные, нежные вечера, когда Кречмар с женой сидел на балконе и думал о том, как незаслуженно счастлив” (128)	“...and many beautifully soft evenings at home when he sat with her on the balcony high above the blue streets with the wires and chimneys drawn in Indian ink across the sunset , and reflected that he was really happy beyond his deserts.” (19)
“Было около восьми, легкие сумерки оживлялись нежными оранжевыми огнями, небо было еще совсем голубое , и от него кружилась голова”. (148)	“It was half past seven. Lights were being put on, and their soft orange glow looked very lovely in the pale dusk. The sky was still quite blue , <u>with a single salmon-colored cloud in the distance</u> , and all this <u>unsteady balance between light and dusk</u> made Albinus feel giddy.” (77)

<p>Оно было действительно очень голубое. Когда поднималась волна, то на ее блестящей крутизне кобальтовыми тенями отражались силуэты купальщиков. Мужчина в оранжевом халате стоял у самой воды и протирал очки. (160)</p>	<p>It really was blue: purple-blue in the distance peacock-blue coming nearer, diamond-blue where the wave caught the light. <i>The foam toppled over, ran, slowed down, then receded, leaving a smooth mirror on the wet sand, which the next wave flooded again.</i> A hairy man in orange-red pants stood at the edge of the water wiping his glasses. (113)</p>
<p>“...вспоминая уже другое – небо, зеленые холмы, на которые он так мало, так мало смотрел, и онять поднималась волна могильного ужааа”. (206)</p>	<p>“He visualized the sky, blue distances, light and shade, pink houses dotting a bright green slope, lovely dream-landscapes at which he had gazed so little, so little.” (246)</p>
<p>(absent from <i>Kamera Obskura</i>)</p>	<p>“I never knew how blue blueness could be.” (291)</p>

These examples represent enriched or newly added descriptions of art (first example) and nature: here colours were described with greater precision and in some cases modified in the target text, while many of them were added anew. Not that the source text was poor in colour: the Russian text contains some very precise definitions of colour such as “кобальтовый”, but the parallel English passage doubles in precision when defining the shades of blue of the seawater.

Random objects here and there also received a new or different colourful identification in *Laughter in the Dark*: one of Albinus’ lovers “during the War, had sent out to him at the front purple socks” (14), while Margot was standing by a “horribly purple” (21) curtain when Albinus saw her for the first time in the cinema hall (he will later try to recall this colour, when enlisting a series of visual memories from his past life: “Margot in a figured apron drawing aside a purple curtain (how he yearned for its dingy color now!” - the remark in brackets is also absent from *Kamera Obskura*); Albinus’ daughter Irma had a “purple” plush elephant, a substitute for the Cheepy toy of the

Russian text; also, in English, the sky Margot sees outside the window of the Rouginard hotel is “plum-coloured” (131) instead of the Russian blue (синева). At the very end of the novel, when Albinus will no longer be able to see, but only to smell, Margot will wear a perfume called “L’heure Bleue” (289) (clearly, not exactly a colour, but a reference to it and a moment of the day with very particular colours). Then, there are new yellow things: the bus, which takes Conrad, Horn and Margot to Rouginard and which Albinus fails to catch; Albinus’ camel’s hair overcoat; the yellow blinds in the Swiss chalet (in Russian there was a “желтый абажур” (213) instead - probably for the “ж” alliteration); the electric light in Margot’s room after their first night together is defined in *Laughter in the Dark* as a “death-cell yellow” (84), while in Russian it was “оранжевый”; Margot is wearing a “yellow” (146) bathrobe when Rex sees her at Albinus’ place for the first time after the dinner party (in Russian it was a “пестрый халат” (171)). A yellow detail was also lost from *Laughter in the Dark*: the above-mentioned “желтое платье жены”.

5.4.2.2 Recurrent colours

In addition to precisely defined shades, used by Nabokov within descriptive parts, the novel contains a set of very simple recurrent colours, which include red, but more importantly black and white, often combined together. The repetitive use of these basic colours in the novel is probably not strictly “symbolic”, but represents a stylistic device chosen by the author to enhance the novel’s connection with cinema:

Because color films barely existed in those days, I decided to render the seven main colors the way that tinctures in heraldry are rendered by means of lines or dots placed in this or that way. That scheme proved to be much too ambitious and very soon I was putting in the bright colors of stained glass windows⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Quoted by Alfred Appel, Jr., in Nabokov’s Dark Cinema 258–59

Here the author explains both the presence of rich shades, a result of his natural tendency to define colour with great attention (see the examples illustrated above), but also his attempt to use a basic colour palette, which ultimately would have conveyed a full picture thanks to a well-designed pattern.

Kamera Obskura's self-translation contains many variations on the theme of simple chromatic definitions as well: these basic colours were sometimes modified by the author, instead of being literally translated. The following example is taken from the passage that describes the main character's recollection of his car accident, where a sequence of basic colours was significantly altered by Nabokov:

В памяти у него, в стеклянной памяти, глянцеvито переливался как бы цветной фотографический снимок: загиб **белой** дороги, **черно-зеленая** скала слева, справа – **синеватый** парапет, впереди – вылетевшие навстречу велосипедисты – две пыльные обезьяны в **красно-желтых** фуфайках; (204)

In his memory he retained a picture that was, in its gaudy intensity, like a colored photograph on glass: the curve of the glossy **blue** road, the **green** and **red** cliff to the left, the **white** parapet to the right and in front of him the approaching cyclists – two dusty apes in **orange-colored** jerseys. (240)

The Russian text contains a set of such basic colours as (in order) white, black, green, blue, red and yellow. In *Laughter in the Dark* the colours were changed: we have a “blue” road instead of white, “green and red” rocks instead of green and black, and “white” parapet instead of blue, while red and yellow blend together and become “orange”. It is hard to find a proper justification to this phenomenon, i.e. to find a meaning in these colour switches⁴⁵, but probably there is no meaning to find: colour alterations

⁴⁵ Jane Grayson (1977,35) has stated that the road has turned from white to “blue-black” (p.150) because black is the colour of Albinus' darkness and the road foreshadowed the accident. This interpretation is a bit of a stretch in my view: why otherwise, when mentioning the road again in the selected passage, did Nabokov define it as “glossy blue” and not “blue-black”. Besides, in Russian Albinus' car was described as a “маленький черный автомобиль” (203), while in English it became a “blue” car. If black symbolises Albinus' blindness, why change the car Albinus' crashed during the accident from black to blue?

might be related to the way the self-translator perceived the sound of the passage (“different colour and sound”) in the target language or to the way he saw the scene five years later, when he was rewriting the novel in English (or, perhaps, both).

5.4.2.2.1 Red

According to Jane Grayson, red is the colour that symbolises Margot and Albinus’ passion for the girl; the colour comes in contrast with the whiteness of his family life and his house. Red is indeed a colour that is often associated with Magda/Margot. Many of the things surrounding her were already red in Russian, some others were enhanced in their redness or added anew to the English text. Several shades of red have been added by Nabokov to the English description of the girl’s recollections about her past: her mother had “red” hands, a boy took her once for a ride on a “red” motorcycle (in Russian the colour is not mentioned) and then there was another “redhaired boy who always used to trip her up at play kissed her”. In both texts Margot used to wear a “short red frock” (59) as soon as she grew up a little (“короткое ярко-красное платьице” (131)). The same dress appears the first time Margot meets Rex and the first time she enters Albinus’ house (a little piece of red cloth will dangerously get stuck between Albinus’ shelves). Later on, red will continue being a recurrent colour in her wardrobe: in the first Albinus’ apartment Margot is seen wearing a “red silk wrapper” (90) and has her nails “polished a brilliant red” (92). She will also own a “brilliant red jumper” (253) (“ярко-красный джемпер”) by the time they will move to Switzerland with a blind Albinus. The first time Margot was almost killed by Albinus at the Rouginard hotel, she was dressed in white after a game of tennis, but in both texts Nabokov added a little red detail to her looks, thus creating a visual contrast with her clothes (“На пятке было красное пятно, кровь просочилась сквозь белый чулок.” (199)/“She had a sore place just above her heel

and the blood had soaked through her white sock.”(227)). However, Margot is not always associated with red clothes: the girl wears a black dress the first time she sees Albinus - in the cinema hall - and the first time she sees Rex at the dinner party (both are very important moments). Another relevant detail for the group of reds: scarlet lights were lit outside the small cinema, where Albinus saw Margot for the first time. An interesting change occurred here - in Russian, the cinema was just in front of the café where Bruno had to wait for a meeting, but in the English text Albinus ended up in front of that cinema almost by chance, after having strolled about “aimlessly” (19) through the city. The impression is that these scarlet lights were responsible for catching the main character’s attention on the place. Also, in both novels the last stopping place of the holidays in France is Rouginard, a clear reference to the colour “rouge”.

Another completely new sentence was added by Nabokov to *Laughter in the Dark* within the passage that reports Elizabeth’s reaction to her husband’s unfaithfulness (see below). The English translation gives more space to Elizabeth’s inner thoughts, describing her state of mind. Here the woman is seeking for clues of Albinus’ unfaithfulness in her memory: these clues happen to be red and are paired by the author with rather unpleasant words (stains, sticky), which highlight her disgust for the whole situation.

Большую часть дня она проводила в каком-нибудь случайном кресле – иногда даже в прихожей – в любом месте, где ее настигнул туман задумчивости, – и тупо вспоминала ту или иную подробность супружеской жизни, и вот уже ей казалось, что муж изменял ей с самого начала, в течение всех этих девяти лет. (160)

The greater part of the day she sat in one of the rooms or sometimes even in the hall—in any place where the heavy mists of her thoughts happened to overtake her—and pondered over this or that detail of her married life. It seemed to her he had always been unfaithful. And now she remembered and understood (as one learning a new language might remember once seeing a book in that tongue when one did not yet know it) the red stains—sticky red kisses—which she had noticed once on her husband's pocket handkerchief. (110)

5.4.2.2.2 Black and white

There is an interesting recurrence of black and white colours within the book, colours that can appear both separately and in combination. As J. Connolly has observed, “Nabokov enhanced the prominence of the black-white pattern in the English version of the novel” (Connolly, 2006:55). If red predominantly shows up in relation to Magda/Margot’s appearance, the combination of black and white colours was assigned a leading role by Nabokov, since they tend to appear in very particular moments of the book.

Jane Grayson has analysed them separately, stating that “white is the colour of Albinus’ marriage”, and his homely family life (1977, 37). There are indeed passages, in which Nabokov added the adjective “white” to things and moments related to Albinus’ family. For instance, white was the hospital, where Bruno/Albinus waited for his child to be born. In the English translation of the book, this whiteness was multiplied in an almost obsessive description of the soon-to-be father’s surroundings, a description that very well conveys his impatience and nervousness. Compare the Russian text, where there is a white corridor:

Кречмар ходил взад и вперед по длинному **белому** коридору больницы, отпраплялся курить в уборную и потом опять шагал и потом опять шагал, сердясь на румяных шуршащих сестер, которые все пытались загнать его куда-то. (128)

With the English translation of the corresponding scene, where things and people are four times as white (although, what other colour should we expect them to be in a hospital?):

Albinus walked up and down the long, **whitewashed, white-enameled** passage with that nightmare palm in a pot at the top of the stairs; he hated it, hated the hopeless **whiteness** of the place and the ruddy-cheeked rustling hospital nurses with **white**-winged heads who kept trying to drive him away. (17)

More white details are related to Albinus' family life: both in the Russian and English texts, white is the door of Irma's bedroom. In *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov adds some more white details to Albinus and Elizabeth's house: in Russian their bedroom phone was black ("черную трубку" (139)), but in English it becomes white ("the white receiver" (50)). As a matter of fact, the description of their bedroom is far more detailed in English: here a whole sentence was added to the target text, perhaps in order to emphasise that crucial moment of Albinus' life, when he was about to leave this home-ly dimension and switch to Margot's sneaky world. This new sentence, describing the main bedroom of the house, also contains a white detail: the room was "dimly lit, quietly furnished, with, as usual, part of the central heating apparatus (painted white) reflected in the mirror" (46) (in Russian the room was simply "мирно освещенная" (138)).

Also, in both texts, white is the family doctor's hair (the above-mentioned Dr. Lampert), seen from Irma's point of view, when she's already very sick ("Ирма рассматривала его белый бобрик" (175)/"Irma gazed at the white hair" (157)), while in that very moment Irma's body was "very white and thin" (or she was "очень беленькая и худенькая"). Of course, there are other colours at Albinus' house as well: for example, a hanger covered in "red silk" (46) (absent from the Russian text) and a "red cushion" (124), whose presence was emphasised in *Laughter in the Dark*.

The target text also contains a passage, in which Nabokov transformed an originally red detail into a white one: in the ice-hockey match scene, the Russian text contained the following sentence: "На лед вылетела женщина в **красном**, описала изумительный круг и сделала пируэт". In *Laughter in the Dark*, however, the author dressed the woman in white and added some more details to the scene: "A girl in **white** tights with a **silvery**, fluff-hemmed short skirt had come running across the ice on the toes of her skates" (150).

An important chromatic change made by Nabokov is related to the main character's name: white is the colour of Albinus' name, as opposite to the name Bruno, which contains a reference to a dark shade. The author repeatedly added white details whenever the main character's life came to a turning point: for instance, when leaving the girl's house for the first time, the main character sees white butterflies, fluttering in the night air (another white butterfly appears in the English translation, at the end of the chapter 25: in the Russian text there were some "ночницы" (192), whereas in English a "white moth fluttered round the lamp and fell down on the tablecloth." (206) - a more explicit little pointer at Albinus' gloom future). Also white is the rug and the door of the hotel room, as described by Nabokov during Albinus' first attempt to kill Margot, and white are her clothes in that very moment (the rug detail is present only in the English text; interestingly, the self-translator removed the red mattress from the same setting, the "красный матрац" (201) seen by Horn on the double bed when he entered the empty hotel room).

References to black and darkness are another recurrent presence in both novels. When rewriting *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov has completely changed the title of his novel, but he has chosen to maintain the element of darkness in the new title and, in fact, made it even more straightforward.

Having emphasised the presence of colours in the English text, the author has also put a stress on the darkness that pervades the protagonist's life (first, his feelings - inner darkness - and, later, literally his whole world). When analysing Albinus' inner thoughts, the author has indeed emphasised the dark side of his obsessive dreams. For instance, in the scene where pregnant Annelise had been taken to a nursing home and Bruno lived home alone for three weeks, the Russian text contained the following description of the main character's thoughts:

Наконец ее увезли в клинику, и Кречмар недели три жил один, терзаясь, не зная, что делать с собой, шалея от двух вещей, – от мысли, что жена может умереть, и от мысли, что, будь он не таким трусом, он нашел бы в каком-нибудь баре женщину и привел бы ее в свою пустую спальню. (128)

In English Nabokov translated the whole sentence quite faithfully, but added some details (the brandy) and the element of darkness, stressed by the use of a repetition:

Then one day she was taken to a nursing home and Albinus lived for three weeks alone. He did not know what to do with himself; took a good deal of brandy; was tortured by two **dark thoughts**, each of a different kind of **darkness**: one was that his wife might die, and the other that if only he had a little more pluck he might find a friendly girl and bring her back to his empty bedroom. (17)

Both texts are indeed full of references to darkness and dark environments (the cinema, the permanent night in which the main character finds himself immersed after the accident), but some new sentences about darkness were added anew to *Laughter in the Dark*. An example of such an addition is the description of Paul's reaction to the news of Albinus' blindness. As mentioned above, this moment was completely rewritten by Nabokov in the target text, even though the outcome of the situation remains the same: Max/Paul, having found out that the man's went blind, decides to travel to Switzerland and check out the situation. In English, however, Nabokov put a stress on Paul's compassion for Albinus' situation with the following sentence, absent from the source text:

He pictured to himself Albinus, alone with his dangerous mistress, completely at her mercy, in the **black** house of his **blindness**. (272)

Dark colours were added to the English text in descriptions of nature as well. Here is an example of a sentence that is entirely new to the target text, which contains a repetition of the adjective "dark" to define colours:

An hour's drive took one to a beautiful sand beach set in **dark red** rocks against the **dark blue** sea. (207)

Another example of a new “dark” element, which Nabokov added to *Laughter in the Dark*, is the name of the director, who worked on Margot’s disastrous film. When Bruno tries to comfort Magda, who is desperate because of her awful performance as an actress, he doesn’t mention the director’s name (“Ведь фильма-то моя, я платил за эту ерунду... то есть, за ту ерунду, которую из нее сделал **режиссер**” (187)), but in English Nabokov adds a simple German name, which contains an obvious chromatic allusion:

The film belongs to me. I've paid for the rubbish—I mean the rubbish **Schwarz** has made of it. (193)

Black also appears in a direct combination with white: according to J. Connolly, “black and white in *Laughter in the Dark* frequently occurs in association with scenes of death or destruction” (Connolly, 2006:56).

The first death is the death of a child, the protagonist’s daughter. This crucial moment was expanded through several additions in the target text:

Он пошел по **белой** панели и все никак не мог освоить, что случилось. «Умерла», — повторил он несколько раз и удивительно живо вообразил Ирму влезавшей к Максу на колени или бросающей о стену мяч. Меж тем как ни в чем не бывало трубили таксомоторы, небо было **черно**, и только там, далеко в стороне Гедехтнискирхе, **чернота** переходила в теплый коричневый тон, в ~~мутное электрическое зарево~~. (182)

He walked along the **white**, soft, crunching pavement, and still could not quite believe what had happened. In his mind's eye he pictured Irma with surprising vividness, scrambling onto Paul's knees or patting a light ball against the wall with her hands; but the taxis hooted as if nothing had happened, the snow glittered Christmas-like under the lamps, the sky was **black**, and only in the distance, beyond the dark mass of roofs, in the direction of the Gedachtniskirche, where the great picture-palaces were, did the **blackness** melt to a warm brownish blush. All at once he remembered the names of the two ladies on the divan: **Blanche** and **Rosa von Nacht**. (176)

The English text contains one new direct reference to darkness (dark mass of roofs) and a few more additions, including the one about the two ladies' names, which substitutes the character's simple inner thought "умерла". Interestingly, these names also contain chromatic allusions, since they translate in different languages as white and pink, while the surname refers to black (the reference to darkness in the surname von Nacht is straightforward).

The scene where Elisabeth is mourning her daughter's death also contains (in both texts) a combination of black and white ("Аннелиза, выйдя утром на балкон, заметила как раз такого мороженника, и странно было, что он – весь в белом, а она – вся в черном." (203)/"Elisabeth stepped onto the balcony and noticed one of these ice-cream vendors, it seemed strange to her that he should be dressed all in white and she all in black." (238)). It's not irrelevant that in *Laughter in the Dark* Nabokov paired these two colours in the final scene of the novel, right after Albinus' murder.

In Russian the description of the room contains a white object and a glove with no colour specification:

На столике, где некогда, во дни Аннелизы, **белела** фарфоровая балерина (перешедшая затем в другую комнату), лежит вывернутая дамская перчатка. (224)

In English, Nabokov removed the direct references to the statue's whiteness, but the glove became black and white:

On the other (small) table, on which ages ago a porcelain ballet-dancer stood (later transferred to another room) lies a woman's glove, **black outside, white inside**. (292)

It seems probable that Nabokov added these details to the glove intentionally, in order to repeat this combination of black and white, that is recurrent in scenes associat-

ed with death or destruction. These two colours⁴⁶, which are actually non-colours, come in contrast with the beauty of life and nature, a beauty Nabokov can't help being tempted to describe in all its richness, despite his initial idea of simplifying the colour palette of the book: the novel, especially in its English version, contains a mixture of typically Nabokovian precise description of shades and a series of recurrent basic colours, which the author most frequently associates with certain important moments or characters. This basic palette is closer to key moments of the plot's development, while all the other colours are part of Nabokov's personal literary style and his world-view.

5.4.3 The narrator's presence in the text

Quite in line with the general tendency of *Kamera Obskura*'s self-translation to become more stylised and fable-like, Nabokov increased the presence of the narrator's voice in the target text. As far as the narrator's direct remarks are concerned, many of these elements were added anew to the English translation, while some of those present in the Russian text are no longer found in *Laughter in the Dark*. The majority of cases, however, is represented by newly added comments, which can bear different functions. One is the explanatory function: in these remarks the author explains in a clearer way what remained implicit in the source text or was mentioned just in passing. Here is an example:

⁴⁶ Connolly (2006, 55-63) has analysed how the pairing of black and white is also recurring in *Lolita* in quite a similar way.

Отто кашлянул и развязно проговорил:
 «Мне нужно с вами потолковать о моей
 сестре, я – Магдин брат».
 «Да почему именно со мной?»
 «Вы ведь господин...? – вопросительно
 начал Отто, – господин...?»
 «Шиффермюллер», – подсказал
 Кречмар с облегчением. (157)

Otto coughed and said with a confidential
 huskiness in his voice: "I must talk to you
 about my sister. I'm Margot's brother."
 "And why to me particularly, may I ask?"
 "You are Herr . . .?" began Otto in a ques-
 tioning tone. "Herr . . .?"
 "Schiffermiller," said Albinus, rather re-
 lieved to learn that the boy did not know
 his identity. (104)

In the episode about Magda’s brother a dialogue takes place between the boy and Bruno, in which the latter hopes for his real identity to remain unknown. The newly added remark was introduced by the author in order to explain to his readers the reason behind the protagonist’s relieved reaction to the boy’s question, whilst in the source text this reason was not explicated by the narrator.

5.4.3.1 Fate and its tricks

A series of remarks were added with the narrator’s voice to the target text and are aimed at pointing out the coincidences and the little tricks fate has played with the novel’s characters, and especially with Albinus. These remarks are usually not very long and partly bear an explanatory function - they help the reader noticing these little clues; but more importantly, they increase the narrator’s control over the story, who seems happy to intervene with his ironic and witty voice, while he manipulates his characters’ lives. This manipulation “sharpens the authorial irony” (Hokenson and Munson,2007), and distances the narrator from his characters as an “artificer” and an external narrator: Jane Grayson has noticed that this increasing presence of the narrator in the English text makes the characters resemble to “caged mice” running through “a carefully constructed maze” (Grayson 1977:47). She has stated that the ultimate effect of these additions is “to

intensify the pathetic or despicable aspects of characters, comparatively stylising or typifying them, while distancing the narrator”. This is true mainly with regards to the Albinus-Margot-Horn triangle, because, if anything, the narrator’s positive attitude towards Albinus’ family was increased in the target text.

One funny coincidence happens when Bruno had not yet become Magda’s lover and was obsessed by the mere idea of her beauty. He knew nothing about her previous modelling job, but was once shown Magda’s nude portrait that an art student had drawn back in her modelling days. The funny thing is that Bruno is not perceptive enough to recognise the object of his desire from the portrait and even dislikes it. In the English text the same scene was described with more details and an additional explanatory comment from the author, which underlines the coincidence:

Но об этих скучных ~~солнечных~~ часах в студиях Кречмар ровно ничего не знал. ~~Малю-то-то~~, на днях старый доктор Ламперт показывал ему пачку рисунков углем, сделанных за последний год его сыном, а среди них был портрет *голой стройной девочки с ожерельем на шее и с темной прядью вдоль склоненного лица*. (142)

But of those dull hours in the studio Albinus suspected nothing, although, by a queer trick of fate, he had unwittingly seen her nude form already: the family doctor, old Lampert, had shown him some charcoal drawings which his son had made *two* years ago and among them was a girl with *bobbed hair, her feet curled under her on the rug where she sat, leaning on her stiff arm, her shoulder touching her cheek*. (29)

This paragraph was considerably altered by the author. Along with the completely new remark about the “trick of fate”, Nabokov has rewritten the portrait’s description: in the target text, the drawing was described with more personal details such as the girl’s pose, her haircut and body parts (feet, arm, shoulder cheek), while in Russian the description was substantially more general. As a result of these changes, Albinus’ lack of at-

tention to details becomes even more hilarious, since the main character happens to be quite a successful art expert.

This is far from being the only time Nabokov evoked fate's direct intervention in his characters' lives. Another example can be found in the episode, where Max finds out about Bruno's young lover while trying to call him on the phone - an absolute coincidence. In English the scene was translated quite faithfully, with the addition of a direct remark in brackets about "fate's classical method":

Когда, через несколько дней в истории со взломщиком, телефонная Парка соединила его с Кречмаром, пока тот говорил с кем-то другим, Макса так ошеломили невольно перехваченные слова, что он проглотил кусочек спички, которой копал в зубах. (146)

When, some days later, he was put through on the telephone to Albinus, while the latter was still talking, and so overheard certain words (fate's classical method: eavesdropping), he almost swallowed a piece of matchwood with which he was picking his teeth. (71)

Generally speaking, Nabokov emphasised the presence of fate in the English text. For example, in a paragraph concerned with the main character's inner thoughts about his obsession for the girl, the Russian text goes as follows:

Ведь пять месяцев назад я был примерным мужем, и Магды просто не существовало в природе вещей. Как это случилось быстро. (157)

In *Laughter in the Dark* the self-translator replaced the underlined sentence with another one, which bears a similar meaning, but contains a reference to fate:

Six months ago I was a model husband in a Margot-less world. Quick work fate made of it! (103)

Comparing these two sentences, the readers will get different impressions from each text: in *Kamera Obskura* things seem to happen by themselves, whereas in *Laughter in the Dark* the author highlighted once again the presence of a sort of prearranged design in Albinus' life.

In the English text three newly added comments are concerned with the doors' role in the plot development. The door theme was already outlined in the source text and further developed in the English translation. The first addition is related to the moment when Bruno, Magda and Horn arrive to Rouginard, where two double bedrooms share a bathroom and the girl, having locked the bathroom door, visits her lover. However, a flood in the bathroom is noticed by Bruno (Magda didn't close the tub), so he goes to the locked door and shouts:

«Магда! Магда!» – крикнул он, и ~~снежинки засохшей мыльной пены заноржали вокруг его лица.~~ (192)

When translating *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov removed the remark about the shaving foam floating around Bruno's face and focused his attention on the door:

“Margot, Margot!” he shouted, rattling the handle (and quite unconscious of the queer part doors played in his and her life). (205)

As Leona Toker (1989:114) has argued, doors represent a form of “framing structure” in the novel, in the sense that it appears recurrently in key moments of the novel. However, doors are often locked and thus they appear only to betray Nabokov's characters. Margot ran away with Horn, after the latter had locked Frau Levandovsky in the lavatory. She would later replicate her former lover's trick with a locked door during her first visit to Bruno's house. The nasty game scared the man to death: in the target text Nabokov added a further accent on the image of the locked door by introducing a new sentence in which Albinus “tried some keys he had in his pocket; then, losing his temper, shook the door violently” (62 - absent from *Kamera Obskura*). Albinus found another locked door in the Swiss chalet, that of his mistress' bedroom, during a desperate nocturnal attempt to enter her room (“If I could just stroke her head and then go away. Perhaps she has forgotten to lock the door.’ Without much hope he pressed the latch. No,

she had not forgotten". (256)). Particularly interesting for the sake of this analysis is a new sentence present in the target text, reported with Albinus' voice. This sentence goes hand in hand with the author's remarks about the role played by doors in the protagonist's life, while putting a further accent on the presence of this image in the novel:

The touch of that key against his palm, its slight weight in his pocket, seemed to him a kind of Sesame that would—he was certain of it—one day unlock the door of his blindness. (283)

As mentioned above, the passage this sentence is quoted from was completely rewritten in English. It refers to the moment, when the main character - already blind and rescued by his brother-in-law - returned home to his wife. In the source text, Bruno kept his gun directly in his pocket, while planning to kill Magda in Berlin. However, in the English text, Albinus decided to hide the gun in a chest of drawers and keep its key in his pocket - hence the strong image, in which he imagined his blindness as a door to be unlocked through revenge.

The only wide-open door comes at the very end of the novel. In his much coveted attempt to shoot Margot, Albinus will have to fight with a door for the last time, this time trying to lock it, in order to imprison the girl within the space of one room. In Russian the sentence goes as follows, reporting Bruno's stream of thoughts:

Запереть за собой дверь, тогда будет свободнее. Ключа не оказалось. (223)

A remark spoken with the narrator's voice was added anew to the target text:

"Better lock the door," he thought. No, there was no key (doors were always against him). (286)

Here Nabokov, in addition to playing with the preposition "against", points out that Albinus "spends much of the novel in states of suspension, waiting behind literal and metaphorical closed doors for surprises he rarely wants" (Dobbin, 2011). Shortly after, the blind man was shot by Margot: the closing passage of the book is presented in a sort

of theatrical style, with “stage directions for the last silent scene” (sentence added to the target text, but the same style was already present in the Russian version). The setting contains two “wide open” doors: the door of the room, where the dead man’s body lies, and the entrance door of the apartment (the very last sentence of both texts is focused on this door: Дверь из прихожей на лестницу тоже осталась открытой./The door leading from the hall to the landing is wide open, too). As noticed by J.Connolly, only after Albinus’ death does the door “lie open, but now he is unable to make use of it. His soul, however, may finally be released from the self-imposed constrictions of his obsessive desire” (Connolly, 1995:225).

5.4.3.2 Ironic remarks

The author’s voice, whose presence was generally increased in *Laughter in the Dark*, is often filled with an ironic or humorous attitude. Here is a list of new comments, added to the English text, which belong to this category:

Между этими довольно неудачными, вялыми романами, и во время них, были сотни женщин, о которых он мечтал, с которыми не удавалось как-то познакомиться и которые проходили мимо, оставив на день, на два ощущение невыносимой утраты. (127)

Blunders, gropings, disappointment; surely the Cupid serving him was lefthanded, with a weak chin and no imagination. And alongside of these feeble romances there had been hundreds of girls of whom he had dreamed but whom he had never got to know; they had just slid past him, leaving for a day or two that hopeless sense of loss [...]. (15)

«Я понимаю, в чем дело, – проговорила Магда холодным голосом. – Ты, вероятно, все-таки женат, как я и думала сначала. Иначе ты не был бы со мной так груб по телефону». (140)

"You're a liar, a coward and a fool," said Margot (summing him up rather neatly). "And you're married—*that's why you hide that ring in your mackintosh pocket*. Oh, of course, you're married; else you wouldn't have been so rude on the phone." (54)

«Счастье мое, счастье», – бормотал Кречмар.
«Неужели ты не презираешь меня? – спросила она, стараясь улыбнуться сквозь слезы, что было очень трудно, ибо слез-то не было. (156)

"Oh, my poor, poor, hunted little bunny," murmured Albinus (who, incidentally, had long ceased to believe that he was her first lover).
"And you really don't despise me?" she asked, smiling through her tears, which was difficult, seeing there were no tears to smile through. (100)

All these additions are used to highlight the general *poshlost'* of a given situation and particularly the *posholost'* of the novel's two main characters. The last example is part of an already funny scene: with this remark, the narrator points that Albinus no longer sees in Margot an innocent girl (however, his understanding of her deceptiveness would stop here for too long a time). The first comment makes fun of Albinus' first love affairs, while the second one is an ironic observation, in which Nabokov underlines how easily Margot has grasped her lover's cheap nature.

5.4.3.3 Cinema

A whole sequence of humorous comments added to *Laughter in the Dark* makes fun of bad cinema and bad acting: this aspect goes hand in hand with the novel's general attention to the topic of cinema and the presence of cinematic settings.

Nabokov found room for these additions, when translating the scene that describes the premiere of Margot's first film: the Russian description of this scene was already very ironic, but irony was a little more implicit, although quite strong anyway. In English the parallel scene becomes openly hilarious: the author has maintained the description of Margot's film almost identical, but added his own remarks in brackets which are meant to highlight some trite common places used by bad film directors, and ulti-

mately to make the reader laugh about Margot's failed attempt to become a cinema star.

Через некоторое время невеста появилась снова: она шла крадучись, вдоль стены, тайком шла в кафе, где светлая личность, ~~друг семьи~~, видел ее жениха в обществе женщины из породы вампиров (Дорианна Каренина). [...] К счастью, экран перемигнул, появился столик в кафе, герой, дающий закурить (*интимность!*) [...] Вошла невеста. Рукоплескания умолкли. Невеста открыла рот, как Магда никогда не открывала. [...] (186)

After a short absence Margot reappeared: she stole furtively *along house-fronts*, patting the walls *and looking over her shoulder* (although, queerly enough, causing not the slightest surprise to the passers-by) and then crept into a cafe where a good soul had told her she might find her lover in the company of a vamp (Dorianna Karenina). [...] Fortunately, there came a timely fade-in, and there was disclosed a little table in the cafe, *a bottle in an ice-pail* and the hero offering Dorianna a cigarette, then lighting it for her (which gesture, in every producer's mind, is the symbol of newborn intimacy). [...] Then Margot appeared, the applause was hushed. Margot opened her mouth, as in real life she never opened it, and then, with drooping head and dangling arms, came out into the street again. [...] (189)

Драма подходила к концу. Герой, покинутый вампиром, шел под сильным дождем в аптеку покупать яд. Невеста в деревне играла с его незаконным ребенком, младенец к ней ластился.
(186)

The drama was drawing to a close. The hero, deserted by the vamp, made his way to a chemist's, in a good cinematic down-pour, to buy himself some poison, but remembered his old mother and went back to his native farm instead. There, among hens and pigs, his original sweetheart was playing with their illegitimate baby (it would not remain illegitimate long now, judging by the way he peered over the fence). This was Margot's best scene. (190)

Nabokov himself was not uninterested in cinema and had expressed opinions about it several times: whereas he admired some actors and filmmakers⁴⁷, his friends re-

⁴⁷ According to Brian Boyd, "Nabokov loved the comedy of Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, and the Marx brothers, and more than thirty years later could reel off scene after scene in sharp-focus detail. He admired a few serious features like Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, Rene Clair, or the best of German Gothic (*The Hands of Orlac*, Murnau's *The Last Laugh*)." (Boyd, 1990:363)

ported that Nabokov would at times select an “intentionally inept American film” in the cinema and would “literally shake with laughter, to the point where he would have to leave the hall.” (quoted in Wyllie, 2005:217 and Boyd, 1990:363). These additions to the scene have therefore allowed the author to give space to his own opinions about directing clichés and bad acting.

As a matter of fact, Nabokov added a few more authorial remarks about cinema to *Laughter in the Dark*. One is the moment when Albinus is terrified by the idea that his wife has died giving birth to Irma. In the target text the reference to a film becomes much more detailed: here Nabokov is probably describing a documentary film of Tolstoy’s death (1910), since a reference to Kitty’s childbirth in *Anna Karenina* is contained in the passage.

«Все кончено». У Кречмара перед глазами появился мелкий черный дождь, вроде мерцания очень старых кинематографических лент. (128)

"Well, it's all over." Before Albinus' eyes there appeared a fine dark rain like the flickering of some very old film (1910, a brisk jerky funeral procession with legs moving too fast). (18)

A few more new comments with references to cinema are sparkled here and there in the English text. One of them is especially worthy of note, because it corresponds to Nabokov’s own opinion about silent cinema. Before Margot’s disastrous attempt to become an actress, the two lovers were talking about films and Albinus noticed the girl’s interest in this field:

Он порадовался ее любви к кинематографу и, думая ее заинтересовать, стал развивать перед ней некоторые излюбленные свои теории о фильме немой и о фильме говорунье. (164)

He was delighted at her interest in the cinema and began to unfold a certain favorite theory of his regarding the comparative merits of the silent film and the talkie: "Sound," he said, "will kill the cinema straightaway." (122)

In *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov expressed his preference for silent films, arguing that they give more space to the viewer’s inner thoughts, imagination and associations:

The verbal part of the cinema is such a hodgepodge of contributions, beginning with the script, that it really has no style of its own. On the other hand, the viewer of a silent film has the opportunity of adding a good deal of his own inner verbal treasure to the silence of the picture. (SO, 175)

5.4.3.4 Pointers

As mentioned above, the narrator’s control over the characters’ lives has consistently increased in *Laughter in the Dark*. Another way for Nabokov to create a pre-arranged “maze” for his “mice” is the addition of pointers to the future developments of the plot. These pointers were left here and there by the author for the careful reader to notice them. Their mechanism is somehow similar to the one triggered by the author’s remarks, pointing the reader’s attention towards the tricks fate plays with its characters. These pointers, however, are like small clues, which indicate the character’s future, but go mostly unnoticed by the characters themselves.

A comparison of the two versions of the novel shows that there are several examples of newly added pointers in the target text. One is the poster hanging outside Margot’s cinema: right before entering the building and seeing the girl for the first time, Albinus notices this poster and buys a ticket (after hesitating for a moment, though only in the target text):

Кречмар мельком взглянул на афишу (*пожарный, несущий желтоволосую женщину*) и взял билет. (129)

He glanced at the poster (which portrayed a man looking up at a window framing a child in a nightshirt), hesitated—and bought a ticket. (19)

The Russian poster contains no particular references to the future (there are no blondes, no firemen), while the English one foreshadows with great precision a scene

from the book, only described by the author from a different perspective: later on in the story, the reader will see Irma standing by the open window at night, looking down at a man in the street and hoping to see her father (the scene will subsequently lead to the little girl's sickness and her death).

Shortly after, Nabokov added a pointer to another death, still curiously framed within a cinematic context (that very remark, which Roy's translation had omitted):

Глядеть на экран было сейчас ни к чему – все равно это было непонятное разрешение каких-то событий, которых он еще не знал (...кто-то, плечистый, слепо шел на пятившуюся женщину...). (129)

He had come in at the end of a film: a girl was receding among tumbled furniture before a masked man with a gun. There was no interest whatever in watching happenings which he could not understand since he had not yet seen their beginning. (20)

The pointer was already present in the Russian text, and was actually pretty clear, although it lacked details. What's interesting in the Russian text is the explicit reference to the attacker's blindness ("слепо"), a reference which Nabokov chose to remove from the English translation. Instead, he described quite precisely the whole setting of the crime scene shortly before Albinus' death: tumbled furniture, the gun in the man's hand, while blindness is substituted with a mask.

Another pointer, again contained within a film: when Albinus returns to Margot's cinema hoping to see the girl again, he watches a random film. In both texts Nabokov described what was being screened:

На экране, одетая в тютю, резвилась морская свинка Чипи, изображая русский балет. За этим следовала картина из японской жизни «Когда цветут вишни». (130)

A car was spinning down a smooth road with hairpin turns between cliff and abyss. (22)

In Russian, Bruno sees things with no particular meaning (Cheepy - the guinea pig removed from the English text - and a Japanese scenario), while in *Laughter in the Dark* an unaware Albinus was allowed by the author a little glimpse into his own future: he sees the moment right before the car accident that will cause his blindness.

5.4.4 Cultural References

Kamera Obskura/Laughter in the Dark is one of Nabokov's Russian novels to be set in a completely non-Russian environment (*King, Queen, Knave* is another example, also set in Berlin). Characters don't have Russian names, they are not Russian and they never lived in Russia.

Therefore, the book's translation did not require a mediation between two rather distant cultural environments, such as Russian and American cultures are. The story takes place within a European geographical context, but it can hardly be assigned to a precise cultural background: the book is set in Germany, Italy France, Switzerland, but these countries work only as a background for the development of the characters' relationship. Of all characters, Margot is most tied to Germany and Berlin in particular: in both texts Nabokov describes her neighbourhood, her family background and her social context (Albinus is part of an élite and has many international friends, while Horn is a cosmopolitan man, who has lived in New York for a long time). The writer repeatedly underlines the fact that Margot belongs to a working-class family from Berlin, through such small details as her "vulgar" accent (noticed in both texts by Albinus and in Russian by Segelkrantz) or her mother's German dinner made of "potatoes and sauerkraut" (this detail is present only in *Laughter in the Dark*). Here Nabokov is creating a background for his character and generic German references are intentionally maintained. Elsewhere, more characteristic and difficult references to culturally specific elements were

removed: for example, when the Russian text describes Annelise's memories about her past, she recalls an old actor, who used to visit her father and would imitate the Saxon accent at dinner (“... девочкой была тайно влюблена в старого актера, который приходил в гости к отцу и смешно изображал говор саксонца” (42)). In the target text, the self-translator replaced the Saxon accent with “beautiful imitations of farmyard sounds” (70), since probably most American readers have never heard a Saxon accent in their life. (Winifred Roy's translation skipped the problem by shortening the sentence: “as a little girl had been secretly in love with an old actor who used to visit her father.” (63)).

Nabokov removed here and there some German names of things and places from the target text: for example, Annelise read a magazine called “Die Dame”, while Elizabeth “looked at gowns and things in a women's magazine” (23) (this choice is similar to Roy's translation, in which the name of the magazine was omitted and remained an “illustrated paper” (19)). Nabokov also dropped the name of the Tiergarten park (“One hot summer day when they had gone to the Park they watched a small monkey” (110) - Tiergarten present in Roy's translation). There is, however, a general tendency to removing precise names of geographical places, that is not only connected with an attempt to “domesticate” the text for an American audience, making it sound less difficult without German words: Nabokov removed specific names of Italian (Ragusa, Abbazia) and Swiss (Zurich) places as well. This choice might be also related to the increased fable-like quality of the English text, since in fairy tales we rarely get to know precise cities or places, so probably Nabokov follows this tendency on purpose.

Following the development of Rex's character, who often engages in new funny or witty dialogues with other characters of the novel, Nabokov added another small dialogue

happening between Rex and Dorianna Karenina, in which he explicated an obvious reference to a Russian novel:

"By the way, do tell me, my dear, how did you come to hit on your stage name? It sort of disturbs me."

"Oh, that's a long story," she answered wistfully. "If you come to tea with me one day, I shall perhaps tell you more about it. The boy who suggested this name committed suicide."

"Ah—and no wonder. But what I wanted to know . . . Tell me, have you read Tolstoy?"

"Doll's Toy?" queried Dorianna Karenina. "No, I'm afraid not. Why?" (191)

An explanation of the reference to *Anna Karenina* in Dorianna's name would have seemed superfluous to a Russian reader. In the target text, the self-translator added a joke based on a pun that works only in English and that allowed him to make fun of the actress' ignorance.

Even if the contents of the novel are not particularly loaded with culturally specific elements, any source language inevitably comes along with some cultural background, that needs a proper translation. This background can be expressed through gestures, expressions, units of measurement, untranslatable language-specific idioms: since the source text is written in Russian, it contains several Russian elements that required a proper translation.

An example of gestures' translation can be found in the first chapter of the novel, in the dialogue between Kretschmar, Max and Annelise. Annelise's gesture was translated by Nabokov differently from Winifred Roy. Here it is possible to observe how the standard translator (not a native speaker) failed to translate such a typically cultural element as a gesture. The Russian expression and gesture "махнул/а рукой" usually means "nevermind", as it does in the following scene. In this dialogue, Kretschmar's wife communicates him with her hand that it's alright, she already remembered the topic of their conversation:

Камера Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
«Что ты, с луны, что ли, свалилась?» – воскликнул он, а жена махнула рукой и сказала: «Ах да, я уже вспомнила». (126)	“Have you dropped from the moon?” he exclaimed. And his wife made a gesture with her hand and said soothingly: “Oh, yes, I remember now.” (9)	"Just dropped from the moon?" he inquired roughly, and his wife glanced at her fingernails and said soothingly: "Oh yes, I remember now." (15)

Roy translates “махнула рукой” in a vague way (“made a gesture with her hand”), while Nabokov, instead of literally translating a Russian gesture and expression, substitutes it with something else, a short moment of pensiveness, during which Elizabeth looks at her fingernails and remembers who they were talking about at dinner. Interestingly, in the same dialogue Nabokov decided to keep Roy’s literal translation of the expression “свалиться с луны”, that was used by Kretschmar to communicate to his wife that she’s not been paying attention to the whole conversation and asked a stupid question (as if she had “dropped from the moon” in the middle of the conversation, instead of having been present from the very beginning).

Units of measurement were converted into American ones:

Камера Obskura	Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
Магда и Горн лежали рядышком на диване и курили, а в двух саженьях от них Кречмар, неподвижный, как сова, сидел в кожаном кресле (214)	Magda and Horn lay side by side on the sofa and smoked, and two feet away from them Kretschmar sat in a leather armchair. (266)	As usual, Margot and Rex sat side by side on the sofa and smoked, and half a dozen feet away from them sat Albinus in his leather armchair. (269)

Here again there is a difference between the two English texts, because Roy had already “translated” Russian fathoms into feet, but she did not convert the unit of measure: since two sazhen’ are equivalent to fourteen feet, two feet is too short a distance for

Kretschmar not to notice Horn's presence smoking in the room. Nabokov did not convert the units with precision either (probably paying attention to the formal aspect of the sentence - "half a dozen feet" sounds better in this context than "fourteen feet"), but he increased the distance to a more realistic one.

As far as the translation of cultural elements is concerned, *Kamera Obskura* is for its very nature not a good study-case to see whether Nabokov opted for a foreignising or domesticating strategy. Nevertheless, in the details discussed above, it is possible to see that Nabokov tends to domesticate what otherwise would have been incomprehensible for an American audience or removes foreign words for artistic purposes, such as sound or style of the text. As noticed by Akikusa (2010:112), the novels which include "many Russian realia and allusions to Russian literature - *Mary*, *The Defence* and *The Gift* - were translated after EO", i.e. after the "switch to literalism". It is possible that Nabokov started by self-translating in English some of his "less Russian" novels, which include *Despair* and *Laughter in the Dark*, avoiding such works as *Mary* and *The Defence*, which are centred around Russian characters and filled with cultural references to Russia, thus posing further problems in translation.

5.4.5 Flora and Fauna

Comparing *Kamera Obskura* with its self-translation, another category of modifications stands out, that is related to the presence of plants, trees, animals and insects in the novel. Below, Table 3 enumerates a list of cases, in which names of botanical elements, animals and insects were translated in a particular way or added anew to *Laughter in the Dark*:

		Камера Obskura	Winifred Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
Flora	1	утесника и дрока (161)	broom (109)	broom and ulex (115)
	2	сирень (150)	the lilac (78)	the Persian lilac (83)
	3	среди кустов (161)	among the shrubs (270)	among the syringa shrubs (264)
	4	сквозь кусты сада (201)	between the shrubs (223)	beyond the magnolias (230)
	5	шоссейная дорога, обсаженная яблонями (190)	the highway bordered with apple-trees (193)	Roads bordered with apple trees, and then roads with plum trees (200)
	6	под тенью платана (201)	in the shade of the plane trees (223)	in the shade of a giant eucalyptus (230)
	7	[absent from KO]	[absent from CO]	walk toward the oleander shrubs (223)
	8	[absent from KO]	[absent from CO]	feathery foliage of a mimosa tree (213)
	9	[absent from KO]	[absent from CO]	The dull sweetish smell of a fig tree weighted the air (117)
	10	[absent from KO]	[absent from CO]	Three tall poplars grew in front of the big brick house (77)
Fauna	11	кузнечики (161)	grasshoppers (109)	crickets (116)
	12	мертвыми пчелами и стрекозами (190)	dead bees and dragon-flies (193)	dead bees, and dragon-flies, and meadow-browns (200)
	13	ангорских кошках (165)	her six Angora cats (121)	her six Persian cats (128)
	14	мускулистая, как змея (221)	strong, like a snake (280)	like some anaconda (287)
	15	ночницы (192)	moths (198)	a white moth (205)
	16	[absent from KO]	[absent from CO]	A clumsy moth (116)
	17	[absent from KO]	[absent from CO]	an adventurous Alsatian was insistently following a tiny Pekinese (179)

Table 3. Instances of modifications of plants' and animals' names

Examples Nr. 1 and 11 show that Nabokov corrected Winifred Roy's imprecise translation of plants and insects' names. Example Nr.1 restores the gap in Roy's text (in the Russian novel there are two bushes, in Roy's just one. In *Laughter in the Dark* Nabokov reintroduces the ulex bush). In the example Nr. 11, Roy translated "кузнечики" with "grasshoppers", while Nabokov opted for "crickets". The self-translator's choice is more correct, since кузнечики's scientific name is *Tettigoniodea*, a species that in English is commonly called "bush cricket" and is distinguished from grasshoppers by the length of their antennae.

In examples Nr. 2, 3,4 and 15 Nabokov substituted common plant names with more precise or scientific definitions of this or that plant or tree. Thus, сирень (Nr.2) becomes Persian lilac (a smaller, garden variety of the common lilac, which fits the context, since the plant is located "in the front gardens"). The generic shrubs of the original text in examples Nr.3 and 4 become respectively "syringa shrubs" (the latin name of lilacs, Nabokov places them near the Swiss chalet) and magnolias, a southern plant, which, in this passage, grows in front of the Rouginard hotel. Another more detailed definition: the strong "snake" from the example Nr.14 becomes an "anaconda".

Nabokov added several new animals and plants to *Laughter in the Dark*: examples Nr. 5 and 12 show that the self-translator, while rewriting a sentence that already contained trees' or insects' names, added a new species (meadow-browns butterflies) and trees (plum trees) to the list. Examples Nr. 7,8,9 and 10 represent sentences or parts of sentences that were added anew to the English text. These are all focused on very specific types of plants or trees. The last three examples were already mentioned in this analysis: examples Nr. 15 and 16 are indeed rather symbolic because the moth reminds in its context of Albinus, while the latter is a detail that belongs to a descriptive passage

(typically, Nabokov didn't add just some "dogs" to his description, but defined precise dog breeds).

Table 3 also contains examples of non-literal and apparently unfaithful translations, in which Nabokov replaces one species or genus with another: in example Nr. 6, Nabokov substituted the plane tree with "a giant eucalyptus" (while elsewhere in the text he normally translated *платан* with plane tree), and in example Nr. 13 Angora cats were translated by Nabokov as "Persian cats".

The analysis of Table 3 shows that Nabokov substituted or modified in translation many names of plants or animals: since such changes do not alter the content of the story or the plot's development, what is the reason behind these specific modifications? Considering Nabokov's attention to details in literature and translation and his scientific background as a lepidopterist, the explanation can hardly be found in a lack of precision or attention to natural elements. As a matter of fact, Nabokov did pay a special attention to accurate translation of plants: twenty-one years after the translation of *Kamera Obskura*, in his 1959 article "The Servile Path", Nabokov dedicated a whole paragraph to the "Problems of Flora". This article is focused on Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin*: in the introduction to the "Problems of Flora", the writer points out how important it is to carefully translate the trees' names and reports his students' ignorance in this field:

Among fifty college students whom I once happened to ask [...] the name of the tree, an American elm, that they could see through the classroom windows, none was able to identify it: 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.
(103)

Here, once again, Nabokov's attention to details in literature and translation needs to be mentioned: it was unacceptable for Nabokov that details, "even the anatomi-

cal, biological and botanical ones are often overlooked or misinterpreted by critics and translators and consequently by readers” (Osimo, 2013). Therefore, names of plants and animals are as important as any other detail in a novel and shouldn’t be mistranslated.

Interestingly, the need to define botanical names more precisely and his students’ impossibility to do so, due to previous lack of interest in the topic, recalls a scene from *Kamera Obskura/Laughter in the Dark*, in which a blind Kretschmar/Albinus wishes he could remember more specific names of plants and birds he can no longer see:

If, for instance, he recalled a landscape in which he had once lived, he could not name a single plant except oaks and roses, nor a single bird save sparrows and crows, and even these were more akin to heraldry than to nature. (257)

Albinus’ lack of curiosity and precision corresponds to the disinterest in plants and trees for which Nabokov criticised his students.

Nabokov’s attentive approach to the translation of natural elements has already been studied by some scholars (see Akikusa, 2010; Boyd, 2010; Osimo, 1999; Osimo, 2013), who commented upon the interesting case of *racemosa*, a term coined by the writer for the translation of a line from *Eugene Onegin*:

Под сень черемух и акаций (6, VII)

In the above-mentioned article, Nabokov analyses the translation of this line and provides us with interesting information about how, in his view, the translation of botanical names should be properly handled. When explaining how he translated the word “акаций”, Nabokov states that a translator can follow two roads: one is to “stick to the dictionary” and therefore translate “акация” with “acacia”, the other is “examine the word” from a double perspective: from its contextual habitat and in light of the literary device applied by the author. Needless to say, Nabokov advocates for the second road: he analyses the habitat of the tree mentioned by Pushkin, which is northwestern and central

Russia, and points out that the plant defined by the English word “acacia” does not grow there. According to Nabokov, the actual acacia, a “genus of tropical mimosaceous trees”, was sold under the common name of “мимоза” in St. Petersburg flower shops at Nabokov’s time. The writer, strong of a naturalist’s background, defines the Pushkin’s plant to be “a yellow-flowering *Caragana* species, namely *C. arborescens* Lam., imported from Asia and cultivated in gentlemen's bowers and along garden alleys in Northern Russia. French tutors called it “l’acacia de Sibérie”” (105). He supports his hypothesis by analysing the literary device used by Pushkin: Nabokov states that this line is a parody of an 1817 poem entitled “Беседа Муз” (Bower of the Muses), which uses the word “акаций”, but contains a description of the plant that suits the flowers of the Caragana. Having therefore analysed the word from a scientific and a literary perspective, Nabokov concludes that the best translation for “акаций” in this case is “pea trees”.

As far as черемуха is concerned, a lot has been written about Nabokov’s translation of this word. The case is indeed fascinating: it turns out that the Russian word “черемуха” doesn’t have an exact English matching term, so Nabokov had to “propose a new one, *racemosa*, which matches the technical species name, and will be both exact and have the right romantic sound” (Boyd, 2010). In order to understand the writer’s approach to this translation, it will be useful to follow his 1959 article step by step.

Having acknowledged that the bilingual dictionaries’ translation is, as if often happens, too vague and imprecise, Nabokov’s analysis turns its attention to the study of черемуха’s role in the source language:

Dictionaries usually translate черемуха as “bird cherry,” which is so vague as to be practically meaningless. Specifically, черемуха is the “racemose old-world bird cherry,” Fr. putter racémeux, *Padus racemosa* Schneider. The Russian word, with its fluffy and dreamy syllables, suits admirably this beautiful tree, distinguished by its long racemes of flowers, giving the whole of it, when in bloom, a gentle pendulous appearance. A common and popular woodland plant

in Russia, it is equally at home among the riverside alders and on the pine barren; its creamy-white, musky, May-time bloom is associated in Russian hearts with the poetical emotions of youth. (104)

Here Nabokov, as a bilingual writer-translator, explains to the English native speaker that черемуха is not a random tree: it has a deeply rooted cultural background, its particular smell and name being associated by Russians with spring and love. The trouble is, a perfect correspondence in the target language does not exist:

This racemose bird cherry lacks such a specific English designation (it has a few generic ones, all of them either uncouth or homonymous, or both) as would be neither pedantic, nor as irresponsible as the nonsense names which harmful drudges carefully transport from one Russian- English dictionary to another. At one time⁴⁸ I followed the usually reliable Dahl Dictionary in calling the tree "mahaleb," which proves to be, however, another plant altogether. Later I coined the term "musk cherry," which renders rather well the sound of черемуха and the fragrance of its bloom, but unfortunately evokes a taste which is not characteristic of its small, grainy, black fruit. I now formally introduce the simple and euphonious "racemosa" used as a noun and rhyming with "mimosa." (104)

Hence, considering all the tree's botanical characteristics and its literary and cultural background, Nabokov avoids the existing name and creates a new word that combines "his poetic imagination with a scientific name" (Akikusa, 2010:112): the neologism *racemosa* is a rendering of черемуха from the latin nomenclature, which at the same time has a sound that satisfies the translator.

Nabokov's special attention to this tree can be explained by his detailed approach to translation and literature in general, by his scientific interest in nature, but also by the way he treasures his memories from his Russian childhood in the family country estate, surrounded by northern trees and flowers: in an interview, when asked whether he

⁴⁸ Here Nabokov refers to *Conclusive Evidence* (the word can be found on page 148). In the corresponding passage, "mahaleb" was replaced by cheremucha in the self-translation *Drugie Berega*.

wanted to return to Russia, Nabokov answered “As to my special northern landscape and the haunts of my childhood - well, I would not wish to contaminate their images preserved in my mind” (SO, 148). These trees and plants were placed by mature Nabokov, who already knew he would never again return to Russia, in the gardens of his novels: according to Mason, “throughout *Ada* trees are intimately associated with the description of Ardis” (the garden where the protagonists Ada and Van live). Interestingly, the racemosa stands out among Ardi’s trees: when Ada recollects the first summer she spent with Van in this garden, she mentions the racemosa (“their swans, plucking ballads on their seven-stringed Russian lyres under the racemosa in bloom” (409)). Here Nabokov the naturalist meets Nabokov the émigré writer, whose difficult relationship with his motherland is present throughout his work and life: as stated by B.Boyd (1991:78), Nabokov’s “searches for lost time succeeded most when he stood among alpine butterflies and trees reminiscent of the flora and fauna and flavor of his remote Russian north”.

Despite being one of the earliest self-translations in Nabokov’s bibliography, *Laughter in the Dark* already contains several aspects that will represent Nabokov’s signature in his works of translation and self-translation. One of these traits is his very personal approach to the translation of names of trees, plants, insects and animals, which was further developed in time.

Today we cannot follow Nabokov’s translation process as far as every plant’s and animal’s name in *Laughter in the Dark* are concerned, not as thoroughly as we are able to do with the line from *Eugene Onegin*. Nabokov’s 1959 article, however, is an excellent and detailed explanation of his methodology in translation of botanical names. As the writer himself stated, he had been pondering over the English translation of черемуха for many years. We can therefore suppose that a particular attention to plants’ and ani-

mals' definitions was already part of his translation methodology back in 1938: this explains the presence of the increasing precision in defining species in translation, but also the substitution of some species of plants and animals.

Conclusions

The analysis of *Kamera Obskura*'s translation presented in this work has shown that Nabokov - who was both a translator and a self-translator - approached the rewriting of his own novel with a very personal methodology, which resulted in numerous alterations in the target text. It is therefore understandable why scholars have defined Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* as a "literal" translation, in opposition to his self-translations, described as non-literal and "unfaithful", favouring form over content. However, in his later interviews, Nabokov consistently insisted that his self-translations are basically "faithful" (SO, 296). Despite the presence of a certain amount of superficiality and ambiguity in these terms, the contradiction here is obvious, but also misleading.

As analysed in Part 1 of this work, the most recent studies in translation theory have moved away from the concepts of faithfulness and literalism - which are indeed very tricky concepts - towards an analysis, that is focused on purpose, function and status in the target culture of the translated text. Besides, the term "literal translation", used by Nabokov himself, is a rather controversial one. The notion is famously attributed to Cicero, who called it word-for-word translation and advocated for the segmentation of the source text into individual words in order to translate them one at a time. However, as argued by Robinson, (1998:125), "this ideal is often literally impossible [...] and, even when literally possible, the result is often unreadable". Hence, even the most "literal translations" are compromises with this ancient ideal: "looser renditions that replace individual SL words with individual TL words wherever possible, and cling as closely as possible to the SL word order in the TL".

Seen within the context of Nabokov's work, and as observed by Clayton (1983), the writer's literal translation can be rather considered as an "assertion of the impossibility of translation, resting on a belief in the uniqueness of a great original" (Clayton, 1983:99). As analysed in Part 2 of the present work, mature Nabokov intentionally favoured a rhymeless translation and refused to imitate Pushkin's style, thus avoiding to create a "double" and a "fake", all things which he famously loathed. The purpose of his translation was very different: it was created for scholars and students, not for casual readers; but the ultimate goal of this monumental work was to convey the literary genius and artistic value of Pushkin's masterpiece to an English-speaking audience⁴⁹, without distorting its unique characteristics. On the contrary, the translator wants to disclose them, with the support of a huge corpus of explanatory notes. Nabokov here deliberately puts on the hat of a "scholar who is eager to make the world appreciate the works of an obscure genius as much as he does himself" (LRL, 319).

Interestingly, the ultimate purpose of Nabokov's self-translation of *Kamera Obskura* is not so different: the self-translator wanted to provide the English-speaking target audience with a translation that contains all the particular characteristics of his literary production both in terms of form and content. His dissatisfaction with Roy's translation was due to its poor quality in style, language and precision: it wasn't a book he perceived acceptable as his own, hence the strong motivation to rewrite Roy's translation. In standard translation, Nabokov used notes as a tool to support his close rendering of the source text, which allowed him to explicate everything that language alone cannot convey to a foreign target audience: the rhetorical and stylistic devices used by Pushkin, in addition to all the immense cultural background of *Eugene Onegin*. In *Kamera Obsku-*

⁴⁹ Or better, ideally: to an audience who can read at least a little Russian in order to use Nabokov's EO as a supporting tool for the interpretation of the original text.

ra's self-translation, however, stylistic features were transposed directly within the text: the writer's very personal style and the source text's interpretive potential is present at an implicit level, inside the target text, a process that implies some modification, strictly and linguistically speaking. Whereas in *Eugene Onegin* Nabokov deliberately chose not to replicate Pushkin's style, in *Laughter in the Dark* this is one of the translation's main purposes: to recreate first and foremost a Nabokovian text.

As seen in Part 4, when Nabokov translated Pushkin's trees "черемуха" and "акация", he did not always choose linguistically correspondent morphemes - the translation is not strictly "literal" in that sense. A similar process can be observed in *Kamera Obskura*'s self-translation, but the purpose here is different. To justify such instances of translation as белый/blue or платан/eucalyptus with inaccuracy would be superficial, for the text we are talking about was handled by a very careful and attentive translator. In order to understand this phenomenon, Toury's theory about equivalence can be a good support: refusing the idea of intralinguistic equivalence, Toury (1995) shifted the focus of the translation's analysis towards intratextual equivalence, which studies equivalence between texts and not between languages. Seen from this perspective, linguistic equivalence between words is not a necessary condition for two texts to be considered equivalent, and the very concept of equivalence is here seen as a rather empirical one⁵⁰. Whereas in *Eugene Onegin*'s translation Nabokov carries out a careful cultural, artistic, bibliographical and scientific research about words in order to provide his reader with as efficient a translation as possible⁵¹, in self-translation his procedure is quite different: according to E. Beaujour, when Nabokov refuses to stick to a dictionary translation of

⁵⁰ Toury even argues that "the question to be asked in the actual study of translations is not *whether* the two texts are equivalent (from a certain aspect), but *what type* and *degree* of translation equivalence they reveal" (1980:47)

⁵¹ Not necessarily equivalent or literal in a linguistic sense, but faithful to the concept conveyed by the source word in the source culture.

some words, he means to “retain certain underlying principles of stylistic organization, including the frequent sacrifice of sense for sound” (Beaujour, 1995:720). The importance of form in the self-translated text is therefore deliberately chosen as a fundamental one: as analysed in the present work, Nabokov takes the freedom to modify adjectives and nouns for the sake of sound or his personal, perhaps renewed after several years, view of a certain passage.

Furthermore, Nabokov had a very personal creative methodology: before starting writing, he would usually form a very precise and detailed idea of the novel in his mind, that only afterwards would be translated into words⁵². As stated by Dmitri Nabokov in a 1989 interview, Nabokov’s approach to writing “was somewhat like that of Schopenhauer’s. To him what he was to write was like an undeveloped film, exposed but undeveloped. All he had to do was to develop it”. Of course, a writer develops his novel with the use of words. If, as theorised by Paul Ricoeur (2004), to think and to speak is already a form of translation of abstract ideas (and perhaps in Nabokov’s case, of mental images) into words of a given language, the self-translator is different from the standard translator in that that he translates himself, his inner idea of a novel into two languages in two different moments. The distance in time between the writing and the rewriting of source and target text is indeed an aspect that mustn’t be taken for granted. As argued by Umberto Eco (2013), it can explain many differences between a source text and its self-translation: “nel periodo passato tra la prima stesura e l’autotraduzione l’autore è maturo, ha ricevuto critiche, cambiato idee. Se il nuovo libro è diverso, le motivazioni spesso sono non linguistiche, ma teoriche” (during the period of time that has passed be-

⁵² According to B.Boyd, “Nabokov always saw a whole novel entire in his mind, long before he started writing” and as stated by Nabokov himself, “When I start the thing is more or less in my mind, I just have to fill in the gaps” (both quotations are taken from video interviews, included in a 1989 documentary available online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8171K40pJho&t=2175s>).

tween the first version of the text and its self-translation, the author has matured, he has been criticised and has changed his ideas. If the new book is different, the reasons are often of a theoretical kind, not linguistic). (Eco, 2013:27) This can explain some major plot changes in the target text: for example, following the evolution of his personal taste, but also keeping an eye on his target audience, Nabokov chose to remove the chapter with the parody of Proust. Hence, in the role of a self-translator Nabokov can intervene on the story in terms of content, novel's structure and even plot development. Is he "unfaithful" to the original text? Well, probably a self-translator can hardly be accused of unfaithfulness to his own work. Whereas a standard translator can only try to read the author's interpretive potential, the self-translator is more than anyone fully aware of his idea of a given literary text.

Hence, Oustinoff's definition "traduction autoriale" is really fitting for *Laughter in the Dark*, because it combines the double role of the self-translator's task, who is both a translator and author. Therefore, it is my belief that, while departing from the source text in many elements, *Laughter in the Dark* should not be considered unfaithful to the story told in *Kamera Obskura*, simply because it is another reflection, another translation of the writer's creative ideas. This concept can be reconnected to Elizabeth Beaujour's vision of source and target text as "avatars of a hypothetical total text", both of which are reflections of the writer's original idea, but in different moments and languages.

Therefore, as examined in Part 1, and according to the most recent research in translation studies, the bilingual text represents a fluid entity, in which neither the source nor the target text is to be considered hierarchically superior or inferior to its other half, because both texts come from the author's pen. The word-for-word comparative analysis, conducted for the present work, has shown that both texts are reflections of the

author's literary style, of his ideas and taste in two different moments of his biography and in two different languages and literary systems. Below, Table 4 compares the main features of the two translations, according to the categories, summing up the results of the translations' analysis.

From a literary point of view, *Kamera Obskura* and *Laughter in the Dark* complement each other (each text contains parts which his other reflections lacks and vice-versa), they interact with each other and invite the reader to an experience of bilingual reading, that allows him to appreciate the text in its completeness. Furthermore, the particular case of *Kamera Obskura* has shown how a self-translation can interact not only with its source text, but also with a previous standard translation: in addition to being an authorial translation, *Laughter in the Dark* is also a self-(re)translation (Oustinoff, 2004), which combines elements of creative rewriting and revision of a previous translation. Here an external translator's choices have directly influenced the self-translator's final text, even if the latter has ultimately replaced Winifred Roy's translation, a book that has never been republished.

	Winifred Roy's translation	Laughter in the Dark
Source language - target language	Russian-English	Russian-English
Text type	Prose	Prose
Stylistic features of the translation	Generally speaking, meaning predominates over form. However, at times meaning and content is lost as well (details such as single words, entire passages such as dreams and erotic scenes). A structural change is also introduced.	Form is conveyed to the target text, in the sense that the self-translator re-creates an original Nabokovian text with all the peculiar features of his style. Meaning is at times altered both in details (additions of details such as descriptions of nature and things) and at a larger scale: modifications in the way the story develops that are aimed at simplifying the plot. Omission, substitution and transposition are widely used to modify the general pattern of the text. A relevant quantity of omissions was inherited from Roy's translation. The structural change from the previous translation is also maintained, and new changes are introduced (new chapters). From the point of view of form, the translation is faithful to the original. From the point of view of characterisation and content, Nabokov intervenes upon them.
Culturally specific elements	German specific elements are generally maintained. A few culturally specific details that belong to the source language were not precisely translated (such as gestures).	Names of characters were modified, including long German names (Kretschmar, Segelkrantz). Many names of German streets and places were removed, tendency to generalise places. A long parody of Proust was removed, perhaps seen as too long and elaborate for an American audience.
Purpose	To translate a Russian novel for a British editor.	To translate KO as an English text by Nabokov for the American market.
Target audience	English-speaking audience.	American audience
Source-Target text relationship	Although the translator takes the liberty to introduce some modifications, the source text generally dominates over the target text.	Source and target text are products of the same author. Hence, they complement each other: they are different in many parts, but both are reflections of an idea of a story that the self-translator had in his mind and intended to convey to his readership.

Table 4. Comparison between standard translation and self-translation

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