

Vladimir Nabokov ou pourquoi se retraduire ?

“I shall be remembered by *Lolita*,” Nabokov predicted in 1966, “and my work on *Eugene Onegin*.” In size and in effort expended, his controversial translation of Pushkin’s masterpiece and the twelve hundred pages of accompanying commentary dwarf all his other works. He devoted as much time to making Pushkin available to English-speaking readers as he would need to compose all three of his own English masterpieces, *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Ada*. (Bryan Boyd, Vladimir Nabokov: *The American Years*, Vintage, 1991, p. 318,

I. Traduction d’*Alice au pays des merveilles*

1/ Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* :

[Alice :] ‘... you had got to the fifth bend, I think ?’

[Mouse :] ‘I had not !’

[Alice :] ‘A knot ! ... Oh, do let me help to undo it !’

Trad. Henri Parisot :

2/[Alice :] “tu en étais arrivée, je crois, à la cinquième courbe.”

[Souris :] “Hein ? ne...” [...]

[Alice :] «Un nœud ? [...] Oh ! laisse-moi t’aider à le défaire !”¹

3/ *Anya v strane chudes*, trad. Vladimir Nabokov (1923) :

[Anya :] “Vy, kazhets’a, doshli do p’atogo pogiba ?”

[Mysh’ :] “Nichego nodobnogo, nikto ne pogib ! [...]”

Nikto. Vot By teper’ men’a sputali”.

[Anya :] : “Akh, dajt’e ja rasputaju ... Gde uzel ?”

4/ Traduction (Michaël Oustinoff) :

[Anya :] Vous étiez, semble-t-il, arrivée au cinquième tournant ?

[La souris :] Rien de la sorte, personne n’a succombé. Personne. Et voilà, maintenant vous m’avez embrouillée [= emmêlée].

[Anya :] Ah, alors laissez-moi vous démêler... où est le nœud ?

(*Anya v strane chudes*, tr. V. Nabokov, New York : Dover, 1976 (1923), p. 27)

1. Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland/Alice au pays des merveilles*, traduction Henri Parisot, Paris, Aubier-Flammarion, 1970, pp. 117-119.

II. *Otchayanie* / *Despair* / *La Méprise* et sa retraduction dans *La Pléiade*

1/Original russe (1934)

My vyjacnili kak-to, chto slovo "mistik" ona prinimala vseгда za umen'shitel'noe, dopuskaja takim obrazom such'ch'estvovanie kakikh-to nastojach'ch'ikh, bol'shikh "mistov", v chernykh togakh, chto-li, so zvezdnymi litsami.

(Jane Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, O.U.P., 1977, p. 61. Abrégé en NT).

2/Traduction (Michaël Oustinoff)

Nous avons appris un jour que le mot "mystique", elle le prenait toujours pour un diminutif [valeur du suffixe "-ik" en russe], admettant ainsi l'existence de vrais grands "mists" [mot n'existant pas en russe], vêtus de toges noires, le visage rempli d'étoiles.

3/Auto-traduction nabokovienne

We discovered one day that to her the term 'mystic' was somehow dimly connected with 'mist' and 'mistake' and 'stick' [...].

(*Despair*, Londres, Penguin, 2000 (1965), p. 29)

4/(Re)traduction française dans *La Pléiade*

Nous avons appris un jour que pour elle le mot *mystic* était en quelque sorte obscurément lié à *mist* ("brouillard"), à *mistake* ("méprise") et à *stick* ("bâton") [...].

(*Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, éd. Maurice Couturier, Paris, "La Pléiade", 1999, p. 1093)

5/Commentaire de Jane Grayson

"Structurally, E1 makes two important changes, both concerning the stick which is to play such a key part in the plot. In Chapter 2 of *Otchayanie* Hermann gives as an illustration of his wife's stupidity, her interpretation of the word 'mystic' [...]. This association of 'stick' and 'mistake' and 'stick', which is here purely verbal, will be borne out by the later development of plot." (NT, p. 61.)

6/Note de l'appareil critique de l'édition française

"Nous avons réintégré dans la traduction française le jeu de mots crucial, ajouté par Nabokov dans la version américaine, qui livre d'entrée de jeu le sens même de toute l'histoire qu'entreprend de raconter Hermann : sa "méprise" ("mistake") dans le "brouillard" ("mist") du 9 mars à cause du "bâton" ("stick") de Félix. (Voir à ce sujet la note n. 9, chap. XI.)"

Wladimir Troubetzkoy, au sujet de sa révision des traductions antérieures de Marcel Stora et de Gilles Bernedette (*Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, op. cit., p. 1651).

III. *Despair 1* (1937) vs *Despair 2* (1966)

Exemple 1

Otchayanie (1934)

V sirenevykh shelkakh, tomnaja NT, p. 63

Ja zashagal uzhe no m'agkoj, lipkoj zemle (*ibid.*)

Velikolepnyj kholm podnimals'a stenoj v nebo (*ibid.*)

Despair 1 (1966)

A languid lady in lilac silk

I trod upon soft, sticky soil

A hill, splendidly steep, sloped up into the sky

Exemple 2

Despair 1 (1937)

a) The mighty motorbus of my tale NT, p. 76

b) My vast wilderness (*ibid.*)

c) But found neither blood nor dirt, (*ibid.*)

d) Below, on the still surface of the water, there was reflected the rich tapestry of brown and rusty-red foliage. NT, p. 69

e) Absent dans l'original

Despair 2 (1966)

a') The bus, the motorbus, the mighty montibus of my tale

b') My vast inward wilderness

c') But found neither blood nor bird spat

d') Below, on the still surface of the water, we admired the exact replica (ignoring the model of course) of the park's autumn tapestry of many-hued foliage.

e') A procession of silver pencils marched down an endless tunnel of corruption. NT, p. 71

Exemple 3

Original

a) "Zerkalo" (=mirror) NT, p. 69

b) "Guashevoe zerkalo" (=gouache coloured mirror), NT, p. 69

c) (non donné par Grayson)

d) Absent dans l'original

Despair 1 (1937)

a') glass

b') Whitelead mirror

c') Looking through it

d') Absent dans la première auto-traduction

Despair 2 (1966)

a") Every speckly psyche

b") A looking-glass with one reflection

c") Looking through that trembling prism

d") Besides being silent before tea, I'm silent before eyes in mire and mirroring. NT, p. 69

Exemple 4

Otchayanie (1934)

A mozhët byt' (prodolzhaia ja dumat', soskakivaja s mysli na mysl') on izmenil'sia i bol'she ne pokhozh na men'a, i ja ponaprasnu s'uda priekhal.

Despair 1 (1937)

But maybe (I went on, skipping from thought to thought) he had changed and now was like me no more, and I had come in vain.

Despair 2 (1966)

But maybe (I went on, skipping from thought to thought) his features had altered and now were no longer like mine, and I had come in vain.

Commentaire de Jane Grayson

"In this last example, the word order of E1 introduces an unnecessary 'poetic' flavour into what is, in Russian, a stylistically neutral context. In E2 Nabokov reverts to a neutral, non-emotive word-order". NT, p. 187.

IV. Palimpseste de *Camera Obscura* / *Laughter in the Dark*

Camera Obscura tr. Winifred Roy (1936), avec les révisions effectuées par Vladimir Nabokov (1937)

Her 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 unceasingly, and he fell into a violent passion on the slightest provocation. Her mother was still 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 ~~hand~~kerchief 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.

Laughter in the Dark (1938/1961-9)

She was called Margot Peters. Her father was a houseporter *who had been badly shellshocked during the war*: his grey hair jerked unceasingly *as if in constant confirmation of grievance and woe*, and he fell into a violent passion on the slightest provocation. Her mother was still youngish, but *rather battered too* — a coarse *callous* woman whose red palm was a perfect cornucopia of blows. Her head was *generally* tied up in a kerchief to keep the dust from her hair *during work*, but after her great Saturday clean-up — *which was mainly effected* by means of 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 insolence and the vicious way she had of *ordering people* to wipe their feet on the mat.

Christine Raguet-Bouvard, "Vladimir Nabokov: *Camera Obscura* et *Laughter in the Dark*, ou la confusion des textes" in *Palimpsestes*, n° 9, "Textes de référence", p. 49.

N.B. : En gras, les substitutions ; en italiques, les rajouts et reformulations ; les passages supprimés ont été barrés.

V. Mashen'ka (1926) / Mary (1970)

Exemple 1

Original russe : Mashen'ka

Drugoj stul ... ischezal pod chernym pidzhakom, pavshim na nevo slovno s Ararata, tak on tjazhelo i rykhlo sel NT p. 126

Michael Glenny

The other chair ... had disappeared under a black coat which lay there so clumsily and untidily that it might have been a piece of flotsam.

Vladimir Nabokov : Mary

The other chair ... had disappeared under a black jacket whose collapse seemed as heavy and shapeless as if it had fallen from the top of Mount Ararat.

Exemple 2

Original russe : Mashen'ka

Jarche, veselee zvezd byli ognennye bukvy, kotorye vysypali odna za drugoj nad cherno kryshej, semenili gus'kom i razom propadali vo t'me. NT p. 126

Michael Glenny

Brighter and gayer than the stars were the letters of fire which broke out like a rash above a black roof, paraded in single file and vanished all at once in the darkness.

Vladimir Nabokov : Mary

Gaudier, gayer than the stars were the letters of fire which poured out one after another above a black roof, paraded in single file and vanished all at once in the darkness.

Exemple 3

Original russe : Mashen'ka

Veter napiral iz t'my t'azhelo i vlazhno. Mashen'ka, cid'a r'adom na oblupivshejs'a bal'uctrade, gladila emu viski kholodnoj ladoshkoj, i v temnote on razlichal smutnyj ugol ee promokshego banta i ulybavshijs'a blesk glaz. NT p. 131

Michael Glenny

Wet and strong, the wind blew from the darkness. Sitting beside him on the peeling balustrade, Mashenka caressed his temples with her cold little palm, and in the darkness he could just distinguish between the blurred end of her wet hair-ribbon and the smiling gleam of her eyes.

Vladimir Nabokov : Mary

Out of the darkness a humid and heavy pressure of gusty air reached the lovers. Mary, now perched on the peeling balustrade, caressed his temples with the cold palm of her little hand and he could make out in the dark the vague outline of her soggy hairbow and the smiling brilliance of her eyes.

VI. Retraduction et intertextualité dans *Eugene Onegin*

One of the complications attending the translation of *Eugene Onegin* into English is the necessity of coping with a constant intrusion of Gallicisms and borrowings from French poets. The faithful translator should be aware of every such authorial reminiscence, imitation, or direct translation from another language into that of the text; this awareness may not only save him from committing howlers or bungling the rendering of stylistic details, but also guide him in the choice of the best wording where several are possible. Terms that are stilted or antiquated in Russian have been fondly rendered in stilted and antiquated English, and a point has been made of preserving the recurrence of epithets (so characteristic of a Russian romanticist's meager and overworked vocabulary), unless a contextual shade of meaning demanded the use of a synonym.

(Vladimir Nabokov, avant-propos de *Eugene Onegin*, Princeton : Princeton / Bollingen, 1990 (1964), vol. I, p. x.)

In 1821 or 1822, Pushkin, attempting to translate without a crib the first fourteen lines of Byron's *The Giaour* into French (the choice of the "into" language is characteristic), renders "the Athenian's grave" as "la grève d'Athènes" — "the strand of Athens", a schoolboy's howler. In Pushkin's magic Russian this came out as *prah Afin*, "the dust of Athens".

(*EO*, vol. II, part 1, p. 16)