

Vladimir Nabokov

THE ROOM

A Note from the Editor

Of all Nabokov's poems written in English, "The Room" (1950), is arguably the one that has been translated into Russian the most frequently. There exist at least five professional Russian translations of this particular poem, among these are the renderings by Grigorii Kruzhkov, Igor Zakharov, Maxim Kalinin, and Marina Boroditskaya (for a discussion of various poetic translations from Nabokov, see Seregei Ilyin's article, "Vladimir Nabokov: Komnata. Na perevod 'Evgeniia Onegina'," published in *Inostrannaya literatura* (2001, 10) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/inostran/2001/10/nabokov.html>>). Most of these translations are stylistically fine and convey the original in a faithful manner.

Today we present Andrey Vakhrulin's interesting take on Nabokov's popular English poem. Vakhrulin sees a major problem of the existing Russian versions in their lexicon – no one on the above list seemed "to look for specifically Nabokovian words and idioms in order to render the poem's gentle and serious sound." Vakhrulin, a graduate of the Moscow State University, explains:

I allowed myself a couple of licenses, which seem to me pardonable, and moreover carry some sense:

1. I changed the meter, which was deliberate and reminds me of

- the music of Vasily Shishkov's famous poem;
2. I added one stanza (alas);
 3. I believe I have made the first accurate Russian translation of the penultimate stanza, the most important in the whole poem.

When we pointed out the discrepancy between Vakhrulin's "Glossy Magazine" and Nabokov's "book of Bell" (i.e. the telephone directory: a neat combination of the sound of a ringing old apparatus and the name of the inventor of practical telecommunication), the translator defended his choice:

I agree that the Glossy Magazine variant is not indeed 'a book of Bell,' but I thought that I had to find an alternative pair for the Russian language, also based on the notions of High-Low or Sin-Soul. I wanted an image to be easily recognizable by Russian readers. It seemed natural to me that a tourist finds a cheap magazine about celebrities along with the Bible in his hotel room, a very disparate pair. Maybe I went too far. But if it were translated literally, this part of the poem would lose the witty sense it has in English.

Dmitri Nabokov usually kindly endorsed any translation of his father's poetic texts that was to appear on the pages of the *Nabokov Online Journal*. Vakhrulin's take on "The Room" was also, per our usual practice with Dmitri Vladimirovich, submitted to him for approval on 20 December, 2011. But the response never arrived and two months later, on 22 February, 2012, Dmitri Nabokov passed away.

-- Y.L.

THE ROOM

ГОСТИНИЧНЫЙ НОМЕР

The room a dying poet took
At nightfall in a dead hotel
Had both directories – the book
Of Heaven and the book of Bell.

It had a mirror and a chair,
It had a window and a bed,
Its ribs let in the darkness where
Rain glistened and a shop sign bled.

Not tears, not terror, but a blend
Of anonymity and doom.
It seemed, that room, to condescend,
To imitate a normal room.

Wherever some automobile
Subliminally slit the night,
The walls and ceiling would reveal
A wheeling skeleton of light.

Soon afterwards the room was mine,
A similar striped cageling, I
Groped for the lamp and found the line
"Alone, unknown, unloved, I die"

in pencil, just above the bed.
It had a false quotation air.
Was it a she – wild-eyed, well-read,
Or a fat man with thinning hair?

I asked a gentle Negro maid,
I asked a captain and his crew.
I asked a night clerk. Undismayed,
I asked a drunk. Nobody knew.

Perhaps when he had found the switch,
He saw the picture on the wall
And cursed the red eruption which
Tried to be maples in the fall?

Находит любой постоялец
Гостиничной этой норы
Журнала ничтожного глянец
И Библии древней дары.

Когда умирающий гений
В ту ночь в темный номер вошел,
Скитальческих двух утешений
Вниманьем он не обошел.

И зеркало видел без рамы,
И койку, и столик, и стул.
На алые слезы рекламы
Сквозь мокрые стекла взглянул.

Не страшно и даже не горько –
Одно лишь забвенье кругом.
И даже обычность каморки,
На самом-то деле, фантом.

Когда пролетает водитель,
И в окна проносится свет –
Всплывает на стенах обители
Ее обнаженный скелет.

А вскоре здесь я оказался.
Как узник, на койку я лег –
И стих на глаза вдруг попался
«Умру – безымян, одинок»

За пыльным светильником, слева.
(Фальшивой цитаты озноб!)
С очами горящими дева?
Уставший, толстеющий сноб?

Не помнит прислуга такого.
Не вспомнил за стойкою клерк,
Не помнит бармен. Записного
Пьянчугу будил, тот отверг.

<p>Artistically in the style Of Mr. Churchill at his best, Those maples marched in double file From Glen Lake to Restricted Rest.</p> <p>Perhaps my text is incomplete. A poet's death is after all A question of technique, a neat Enjambment, a melodic fall.</p> <p>And here a life had come apart In darkness, and the room had grown A ghostly thorax, with a heart Unknown, unloved – but not alone.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>1950</i></p>	<p>Возможно, войдя, он заметил – И проклял – пейзаж на стене С коростой кленовых отметин В кровавом осеннем огне.</p> <p>Работа в стилистике близкой К У. Черчиллю поздней поры – Опрятных деревьев обелиски От озера Грёз до горы.</p> <p>Возможно, там есть продолженье? Ведь смерть у поэта – обман, Уловка стихосложения, Изысканный анжамбеман.</p> <p>Той ночью здесь жизнь завершилась, Но в комнате, словно в груди, Меж ребер вдруг сердце забилося, И отклик сумело найти.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Transl. 2011</i></p>
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