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The Sound Palette of V.Nabokov

(from the point of view of Phonosemantics)

V.V.Nabokov began from verses and wrote them till last days. Many researchers of his creativ work consider his poetry "as test of plume " of the great prose writer. The born poet, in opinion of many critics, his poems were close to Bunin's verses, which in " Other coasts " (Russian version of "Conclusive Evidence") has been figuratively defined as "streaming verses ". In the foreword to the collection "Krug" A.Bitov has precisely noticed Nabokov's inner connection with Bunin: the latter preferred poetry to prose, as though protecting own verses from own prose [V.Nabokov, 1990:17]. Their poetry is not only an addition to their great prose, but something equipollent it. It is important to understand, why being a foreman in prose, he did not cease to write verses?

Mutual penetrating of poetry and prose is obvious (for example, direct inclusion of verses in the novels " Gift ", " Look on Arlecines", cycle of the stories " Returning Chorba"). But it is much deeper: Nabokov's poems of Nabokov comprise the ciphered "program" of the prosaic texts. Preceding them, they give a key to understanding them, but the most experienced reader has to understand, what " door is opened with this key " and how to use it. By solving this "riddle", the reader will necessarily open for himself a new layer of text, which he could only guess. For the unsophisticated reader, who is not able " to work " with Nabokov's text, this feeling remains inaccessible.

The aesthetics of Nabokov as a classics of literary avant garde is based on another understanding of the Form, which is understood not only as the intermediary between the plan of the contents and recipient, but as expression of human experience, and beaur of the steady psychological influence. Therefore the search of a key to prosaic text is equal to search a man's of the sense of life. He seeks for his lost part of his "Ego", which was separated whith his by God's will. S.Davydov wrote about this nature of connection of poetry and prose [S.Davydov, 1982]. So, the poem "Lilit" is directly internally connected with the novel "Lolita". And though Nabokov himself inclined to mistifications, wrote in the foreword to the collection "Poems and Problems" with pleasure confusing the reader: " the clever quick-witted reader will refrain from searches in this abstract imaginative connection with my later prose ", the **quick-witted** reader, of course, has understood the author's hint. It's indicative, that practically in all editions, where "Lilit" was published, in the note the quoted above words were necessary adduced, and in brackets the editors necessarily mentioned the name of the novel, which has supposedly nothing to do with the poem.

The connection between Nabokov's poetry and prose is not limited to the system of keys. As a poet he is known less, but the reader, who has got acquainted with his novels and stories, will necessarily "come" to verses, and here the process of returning influence - begins on the part of prose.

In the Russian philology there is written much less about the Nabokov-poet, than about a prose writer. Perhaps, the exception are the works of poetic character, where the interaction of a verse and prose is considered from the point of view of creation of individual variant of metric prose [Orlitskii U.B, 1991]. Obviously the language of his poetic texts is insufficiently investigated, that, undoubtedly, will be corrected in the next years.

Nabokov thought, that the verse doesn't necessary "express" something, but "represent". This representation is also of double nature: the figurativeness, which "is necessary for a poem, as well as for a novel"; and "the sound world", comes from accuracy of the word, created not only by the author will but "by will of a Nature". Nabokov does not recognize something in the sound structure of poetry. He does not suppose anything deliberately "poetic" in the creative work. "The world is much older than poetry. Swallows drew sky in Nazareth - at dawn" [Nabokov V., 1991:17]. This aspiration to follow harmony of sounds of the nature is reflected in the sound structure of his verses.

I carried out experiment, aimed at revealing of the subjective recipients' estimation of the sound "redundancy", and 19 poems which were offered for analysis were not mentioned among "difficult" for perception in the sound organization. And besides, in all texts the presence of the semantisation of the sound sphere is marked expression. So, in the poem "The Rain Has Flown By" number of Ж (zh) is 4,7 times as much as the norm, in the poem "Christmas" Ц (ts) - 4,6 times, in "Verses" Х (h) - 3,6 times, in "There Is a Dream, It Repeats, as Strange ..." Э - 4 times. But nevertheless the analysis of the frequency of the sound-letters allows to make a conclusion, that alliterations or assonances are not present in Nabokov's texts And it is important that they are not striking.. His sound writing "is soft", but appreciable, because is always commensurable with the sense of the text: it accompanies the sense and simultaneously organizes the parallel meaning, which is discovered with the help of the original key "hidden" in the prosaic text.

For recipient the process of decoding of the author's sense in the aspect of sound-colour conformity is always laborous, as the keys to this system are in the theoretical works, which are difficult for most of the readers (for example, like "Glossaloliya" by Andrei Bely). In Nabokov's case this situation qualitatively varies, because his system of colour symbolism of a sound is presented in the novels "Gift" and "Other coast". Therefore the recipient, beginning to read the poetic text, is psychologically "prepared" for perception of the author's system. Accepting a signal of colour symbolism of a sound, he automatically slows down

reading, and two parallel systems, the author's and the individual one, enter into an argument with each other [Prokofieva, 1997]. Thus, the new convention of the author and the reader is ensuring the most favorable conditions for their dialogue.

It is necessary to note, that synesthetic sensation of Nabokov is multidimensional. It's "colour hearing" and the whole scale of perceptions, working simultaneously: "the colour sensation becomes, in my opinion, tangible. To define the colour of the letter thoroughly, I have to savour (*prosmakovat'*) the letter, to give it to swell (*nabuchnut'*) or to let it radiate (*izluchat'sa*) in the mouth, while I visualize the sound" [Nabokov, 1991:464]. It's extremely important that Nabokov distinguishes the colour impressions of a sound of different languages. Nabokov freely spoke English, German, French and compared the colour associations, finding distinctions. The vision of the Latin alphabet he presented in the English original of the book "Conclusive Evidence" and "Speak, Memory".

The poet creates the most complete system of colour symbolism of a sound (except for the letters **Ъ**, **Ь** and **И**). It is reflected in 2 novels (the principle of "mirror", marked by all researchers of his creative work, is revealed even in this fact).. Nabokov's text requires especially attentive perusal, because it is a part of the whole, part of the metatext. And the reader's ignoring of the author's system prevents him from adequate perception of his prose and verses..

***Russian Sound-Colour Conformity of Nabokov
and Real Correspondences of Russian
(experimental results by Prokofieva L.P.)***

Russian letters	Nabokov's imagination	Correspond with color	Color of Russian letters In perception of 450 respondents
А	the group is black - brown: a rich without Gallic luster	Black	Red
Р	" rather smooth "	Black	Red
Г	" hard rubber "	Black	Blue
Ж	" Distinguished from the French J as bitter chocolate from dairy "	brown – black	Yellow
Я	" a polished dark brown"	Dark brown	Red

Л	" whitish group ":	yellow-white	Red-Yellow-Blue
Н	" pale Diet from		White-Blue
О	vermishelli		White-Yellow
Х	Smolensk mush	light-brown-white	White-Black
Э	milk-of- almonds	brown-white	Yellow-Green
	dry rolls	light-yellow-white	
Ч	and Swedish	White	Black
	bread "		
Ш	" intermediate	yellow – green	Black
Щ	grey group: a	(Dark)	White-Black
	clysteral		
Б		blue-green	White
	fluffy – grey	blue-yellow	
М	the same, but with		Red
В	yellow "	Red	Blue
Е	Red group: "		Green
	cherry-brick"	white-red	
Ё	"pink-flannel"	white – red	Green
Д	"pink-corporal""	yellow - red	White-Black
	yellow		
И	group:light-orange	red-brown	Blue
У	"ochr'anoje		Blue-Green
Ю	"palevoje" (light-	white – yellow	Blue-Red
П	yellow)	white – yellow	Black-White
	"pale-yellow"	Yellow	
Ф	"golden"	yellow – green	Red-Blue
Т	"brass"	Bright – green	Black-White
Ц	" green group: as		Yellow
	guash "	Green	
С	"dusty - alder"	white – green	Blue
	"pastel"	blue-black	
К	" dark blue group:		Red
З	tin "	white – blue	Green
	"damp – light-		
	blue"	Dark blue	
	"bilberry"	blue-red	
	"brilliant - lilac"		

• Alphabetical rainbow of Nabokov **Б Е Ё П С К З** (sound-letters)

• Real rainbow **К О Ж З Г С Ф** (colour of spectrum)

The fact of existence of the whole system of colour symbolism of a sound allows to assume, that it is reflected in Nabokov's creative work. Results of the

experiment [the description of experiment with special computer programm: Prokofieva L.P., 1991] have shown, that only 58 per cent of the 19 texts have regular concurrences in computer estimations of rhythm-intonational units (line, stanza, the whole poem) with colour nominations of poems. It shows, that author adequately perceives the colour symbolism of a sound of his native language and fixes it in the colour nominations of the text. A small number of concurrences (in comparison with 63 per cent of Alexander Block, 61 per cent of Konstantin Balmont and 91 per cent of Andrei Bely) possibly corresponds with the whole Nabokov's system, where only 5 colours of the sound-letters correlate with our data of the "objective" colouring of the Russian language. The availability of the author's system is given to the creative reader ", gifted by the special, reader's inspiration " (this Nabokov's definition can be applied to his own creative work), allows to assume, that it will find reflection in perception.

Let's analyse results of experiment of an example of the first stanza of a poem " *Àh, Ugon'at Ih v Step', Arlekinov Moih*".

*Àh, ugon'at ich v step', Arlekinov moih
V bueraki, k chuzhim atamanam!
Geometriju ich, Venetziju ih
Nazovut shutovstvom i obmanom.*

*Tolko ty, tolko ty vso divilas' vosled
Chornym, sinim, oranzhevym rombam...
"N pisatel neduzhinnyi, snob i atlet,
nadeleennyi ogromnym aplombom..."*

In the first line the colour nominations are not present, brightly expressed alliterations and assonances are absent, though the number of **X** is a little bit higher than the norm. Informant's opinions and "objective" estimation partly coincide, and there are precise correlations with the author's data. The black colour in Nabokov's texts is the colour of definiteness – of the definite subject, space and time It helps the reader to understand the author's thought clearly. We can easily connect his last novel "Look at the Arlekins" with the poem "Ah, Ugon'at Ih V Step' *Arlekinov moih* Most of the critics of Nabokov's creative activity blamed him in desire to mystificate the reader, in his coldness and estrangement from his characters. In verses Nabokov's usual game with the reader penetrates all the level of the poetic text, including the phonosemantic one. The informants' estimation of his line has shown that there exist the compromise and interaction of the Russian system of colour symbolism of a sound and the Nabokov's one.

The computer estimation of the second line is caused by the presence of assonance on **A**, but informants, though certainly feeling the assonance, interprete

the line as BLACK, it coincides with the author's estimation. Nabokov's A belongs to *black-brown* group and it prevails over *red* Russian A. This variant of interpretation is extremely frequent in the analysis of these 19 texts.

In the third line the colour of the Russian sounds on the contrary prevails over Nabokov's system. A computer estimation showed assonances on E and И perceived by recipients and have not only semantic, but melodic function. Probably, this "inner sense", is also fixed by informants. Let's note the tendency which has been found out in the course of the analysis of the Nabokov texts: the brighter alliterations, the clearer of correlations between informant's and the "author's" estimations. The similar meaningfulness of the assonances was not revealed.

In the fourth line assonance on O caused a WHITE computer estimation. The concurrence of all three parameters' frequently which are met in the experiment, demonstrates that ideal combination, which can be possibly called an adequacy of perception.

The interpretation of the first stanza corresponds with the first line: the explicit colour nominations are absent, however author's opinions and "objective" estimation partially coincide. At the same time the partial correlation of the computer and the "author's" estimations testify, that Nabokov's system of colour symbolism of a sound is perceived by recipients.

In the given poem the colour nominations are present only in the sixth line, and their number and heterogeneity prevent the reader from the adequate understanding. The analysis of the texts has shown, that the conformity of colour nominations with the "objective" estimations of rhythm-intonational units constitute only 18 per cent. More often they come to an argument with each other, thus the precise correspondence with the author's system of colour symbolism of a sound is traced. It seems, that Nabokov purposely "selects" colour nominations, which confirm to his own sound-colour associations of sounds, presented in the rhythm-intonational units.

The results of experiment have shown, that the way to a new level of understanding of the poetic text with the help of the author's table of colour symbolism of a sound is possible. Let's illustrate the given situation by the analysis of a poem "Zimy li seryje smyli. "

There are no explicit colour nomination (without "grey") in that text.

*Zimy li seryje smyli
Ocherk edinstvennyj? Echo li
Vso, chto ostalos' ot golosa? My li
Pozdno priechali?
Tolko nikto ne vstrechaet nas. V dome
Rojal – kak mogila na poluse. Vot tebe
Lastochki. Ver' tut, chto krome pepla est' ottepel'.*

64 % of concurrences of all three estimations and 91 % of concurrences of the "author's" and the auditor's interpretations are revealed. *Light-white* colour - is the colour of uncertainty and deceit. Let's note, that the characterization of this group of sound-letters is given with the help of the names of different kind of food. According to researchers, the meal in Nabokov's texts is always signal of lie and deceit [Davydov, 1982; Latuchina, 1990:75]. In the text the feeling of uncertainty, hopelessness is created, and it is illustrated with the help of phonetic devices. But on the background of LIGHT-WHITE the bright GREEN spot (4 line and 2 stanza) is clearly allocated. The contrast of colour (in the phonosemantic level) the author's idea of the value of the human life (in the semantic level). It is the main thought of most Nabokov's texts, that demonstrates the correctness of the given interpretation. Almost absolute concurrence of the auditor's perception with the "ciphered" sense is especially important. Whole poem is sustained in the pale tones, and the green colour is purposely emphasized. It is an example of the phonosemantic analysis of the colour symbolism of a sound in author's expression, which allows to open new semantic levels.

Thus, Nabokov's system of colour symbolism of a sound is consecutively coded in his poetic creative work and is possibly perceived by the recipients. Percent age of concurrences of the author's task and the readers' understanding allows to make a conclusion, that there is a fixed primary author's plan. The given kind of the analysis in a combination with others linguistic and literary types of interpretation text can give a new pulse for researches in the field of Fiction Text Analysis from the point of view of Phonosemantics.

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