

Thinking Russian/Writing English: Textual Traces of an Émigré's Conflict

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ABSTRACT

*Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov (1899-1977) is considered a bilingual writer because, after having published in Russian for the first twenty years of his career, he switched to English to write his first English-language novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941). On the basis of a twofold analysis of (a) the reasons —emigration and exile— which made this radical change necessary and (b) the consequences transculturation brought to Nabokov's life and art, my paper explores the interdependence between language and creativity, between identity and culture and, finally, between history and fiction. In dealing with Nabokov's individual biography it is possible to trace the conflicts and changes in cultural dominance that characterise the twentieth century and, more specifically, the relations between Europe and the USA. It is also possible to understand better those facts and factors which, being historical, penetrate fiction and develop it into a fiction of double identities and postmodernist ethics and aesthetics.*

KEYWORDS: *language and communication, migration and exile, bilingualism: code switching vs. identity switching, location/dissemination of culture, semiotics of culture and art.*

RESUMEN

*Este trabajo muestra las relaciones de estrecha dependencia entre lenguaje y creatividad por una parte, entre identidad y cultura por otra, y finalmente entre historia y ficción. He tomado como base de mi análisis una obra de ficción, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, la primera novela que el autor ruso Vladimir Nabokov escribió en inglés tras muchos años de haber escrito en ruso, para mostrar las huellas que la transculturalización deja en el personaje histórico tanto como en su contrapunto ficcional. Señalo los diversos motivos que condujeron a Nabokov al bilingüismo literario, entre ellos destaco la primera emigración impuesta por la Revolución Bolchevique y la segunda provocada por el auge del Nazismo en la década de los treinta en Alemania. También señalo las consecuencias que del cambiadrástico de lengua han de derivarse en dos ámbitos culturales relevantes: el cotidiano y el literario. En*

este recorrido queda recogida una trayectoria biográfica, la de Nabokov, que coincide con, y es representativa de, la trayectoria de los cambios culturales europeos más importantes de nuestro siglo veinte: la americanización de la vieja Europa, su postmodernización y la colonización lingüística que el Inglés ha ejercido sobre el mundo editorial en detrimento de las otras lenguas europeas de prestigio.

More sonorous **than sobbing**, sweeter than any **earthly** songs, and more profound than any prayer: That name is his father's.
(Andrew Field, 1987: 81)

0. Introduction

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov (1899-1977) is considered a bilingual' writer because, after **having** published in Russian for the first twenty years of his career, he switched to English to become an English-language novelist. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), Nabokov's first English-language novel, is a liminal text in two different senses: on the one hand it opens up the second phase of the author's literary production and, on the other, it deals with the change, death, transformation and renewal. As Michael Wood (1994: 29) puts it, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (*RLSK* from now onwards) "is a work about authorship and loss". More specifically, the novel is about the devastating effects brought on an author by the loss of a most dearly cherished **property**²: his mother tongue. This fundamental loss, caused by a previous one: the **émigré's** loss of a mother land, **deprives** the author from the very soul and heart³ of his art. English is a substitute for the lost language, Russian. *Sirin*, a mythological **bird** which represents the soul and **essence** of Russian art, **was** Nabokov's pseudonym for the work he wrote in Russian. Nabokov's **decision** to **give** up the pseudonym and use **his** own name to **sign** his English-language work seems to be coherent even if a bit paradoxical. The **gesture** can be interpreted as ritual, a mark of Nabokov's passage from the realm of the mother **culture/language** to the **realm** of a **non-native language/culture**, a step forward which allowed him to **regain** the name of the father'. His **transformation** is comparable to the **shirt-shedding** of snakes or the **metamorphosis** undergone by the pupa which **grows** into a butterfly. It is also comparable to the **reincarnation** of souls after death. All these **analogies** are presented in *RLSK* by **means** of a pattern of **inversions** by means of which Nabokov allegorizes that **parting** with one's own language, **like losing** one's home, is the **same** as being emptied of one's **heart** and deprived of the very soul of art, the most tragic **thing** that can **happen** to a writer. In the **wake** of **such** an identity crisis, the writer **develops** self-generating strategies which **include** the figure of the 'double' as *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* perfectly shows.

1. The émigré's conflict: Continuity/discontinuity in its relation to language, self, time and place.

Not **only** in his **prose** but **also** in his poetry, Nabokov elaborates the **theme** that uprooting, **culture** shock, and adjustment to a new language and a new world **feature** the émigré's experience. In his poetry Nabokov states it more briefly and not less poignantly:

But now thou too must go, just **here** we part,
 softest of tongues, my **true** one, **all** my own ...
 And **I** am left to grope for heart and art
 And start anew with **clumsy** tools of stone.
 (Vladimir Nabokov, "Softest of Tongues", *Poems and Problems*)

In RLSK Nabokov develops the manifold conflict of the émigré writer by centering **around** a particular experience, acculturation brought about by the loss of native language. For the **sociology** of knowledge this **is** an experience which entails a breakdown in reality which must be followed by a process of transformation and renewal based on a **partial reconstruction** of reality and a **partial redefinition** of the self. Berger and Luckmann (1967: 163) classify these **kind** of transformations along a **continuum** which **goes from** a **moderate** secondary socialization to radical re-socialization or **alternation**:

In re-socialization the past **is** reinterpreted to conform to the present reality, with the tendency to retroject into the past various elements that were subjectively unavailable at the time. In secondary **socialization** the present is interpreted so as to stand on a continuous relationship with the past, with the tendency to **minimize** such transformations as **have actually taken** place. **Put** differently, the reality-base for re-socialization is the present, for secondary socialization the past.

In this respect Nabokov's **situation** as an émigré is complex: in Berlin his reality-base for **socialization** was the past, we **shall see** how his **points** of reference were his old country, his native language, and his father's editorial **connexions** which offered a **continuity** solution to his life. **Later**, in the process of emigrating to the US and once there, Nabokov's reality-base for socialization was the present and, as we shall see, **switching languages** will be the tip of an iceberg of adjustments **leading** to a re-interpretation of **his** Russian past so as to conform to his present American reality. In this respect Nabokov's dropping of Russian and selection of English as a **means** for his **literary narrative** expression can be **seen** as **symptomatic** of a crisis of identity for whose resolution literature was **functional** as the stage onto which the **conflicts** of the émigré author can be represented as they are **transformed** into literary **matter**.

Nabokov's social self before the Bolshevik revolution was that of a well-educated upper class young **man** who **knew** French, English, German and Russian and, was therefore well equipped and **prepared** to travel **and** adjust to **changes** since **birth**. **Although** his native language was Russian, Nabokov **had learned** to write **in** English before he did **in** Russian'. The **privileged**

situation of his family allowed an English governess **in** the household since very early **in** Nabokov's **childhood**, Miss Rachel Home **started** teaching him English when he was three years old. French and English governesses were **in** charge of the education of the household **children** much before they were introduced to formal Russian tutoring⁶. Quite naturally, Nabokov chose to write and **publish** his early work **in** his native **tongue**, Russian. He did so in Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution and in exile in Berlin where the family moved in 1919 after the revolution. Exile **after** 1919 turned the Nabokovs into a family of politically and editorially active Russian **émigrés** sent **in** Berlin, a situation which lasted for the long period of time extending between 1920 and 1935. In 1937, with Hitler's rise to **power**, Vladimir Nabokov, already married to Vera and father of a son, Dmitri, had to **leave** Germany.

Before Hitler, Berlin **meant** continuity to the Russian **émigré**: The cultural background of white Russian **aristocracy** was western European: especially French, but **also** English and **German** were the **languages** of high culture in the **court** of the tsars especially **after** Catherine the Great. **And** it was **common** for the Russian high classes to own land and spend holidays both in France and in **Germany**⁷. **Also**, marriage between members of aristocratic **families** across national **boundaries** was the **rule** rather than the exception. Therefore, were it not for the all-changing fact that a revolution had **taken** place which had made it **impossible** for the Nabokovs to return home, leaving Russia for Cambridge and London and then Berlin would not **disrupt** a familiar scheme of long trips and extended **stays** abroad. In exile, the family remained within the borders⁸ of an imaginary Russia, a **territory** which was delimited by their past holiday travelling. At least emigration **did** not **create** for the Nabokovs a situation comparable to that of the lower-class **uneducated emigrants**. Vladimir Nabokov's **experience** as an exile in Europe extends through three very well differentiated periods: 1. his years **in Cambridge** (where he passes his exams for Part I of the Cambridge Tripos with first-class honours and distinction in Russian) still under his parents' **tutelage exercised** from London; 2. his years **in Berlin** (**because** of the low cost of living Berlin had **become** a center of emigration) where his father helped to set up a Russian **daily** liberal newspaper (*Rul'*) and a Russian **publishing** firm (*Slovo*) to which Nabokov soon contributed **some** of his early Russian work. **Soon** after moving to Berlin, Nabokov's father **is assassinated** (1922) by Russian ultra-rightists, 3. after his father's death, Nabokov **starts searching** for **some** paid **occupation** which **allows** him to **settle** down now that his mother has gone to Nabokov's sister in Prague and left Nabokov to his **own resources**. Vladimir and Vera Nabokov get married **in** 1925. 4. between 1933 and 1937, which is the year Vladimir and Vera Nabokov **leave** Nazi Germany, the couple grow increasingly aware that the political situation is **rapidly deteriorating** in Berlin. Meanwhile Nabokov's Russian **texts** are well **received** in Paris where the **major émigré** writers gathered.

It is **essential** to **understand** that during the time his European exile lasted Vladimir Nabokov was able to keep **writing** in Russian for a Russian readership who **treasured** the belief that they could **eventually return** to their homeland. It was a testimonial use of a language which **perpetuated** national **identity**. In 1924, the emigration shift from Berlin to Paris had converted the latter capital into the Russian emigration centre in Europe but at **that** time Nabokov had not moved to Paris with **the current** 'partly' out of fear that his Russian [would] atrophy **in a country** where he **knows** the **local** language well' (Alexandrov, 1995: xxxvi). Nabokov's use of Russian **during**

the Berlin years was facilitated by the particular status of the language; Russian was the prestige language of a prestigious **minority** in exile. It offered the Russian émigrés an adequate means of **aesthetic** expression as **well** as of interpersonal **communication** at a **time** when they still maintained the hope that they would **soon** regain paradise. Russian was a **sign** of aristocratic distinction, both the remainder of a great social and economic past and the **reminder** that a better **future** could be expected. In the meantime, Berlin and Paris as centres of emigration, provided émigré writers with a present populated by an **avant-garde** artistic scene and a net of familiar and social relations which allowed them to preserve their identity and language.

These hopes and **expectations** were not to last; by the second half of the **thirties** it **became** clear that the Soviet states were there to last and this national group of exiles would **have** to find accommodation in **countries** which would eventually assimilate them. The glum phase of **European** exile was to come to an **end**. The rich, and still more the impoverished, exile ceased to be a welcome **presence** in Berlin, the capital then of a country plagued with unemployment, desperately **trying** to **redefine** its national identity, and therefore prone to xenophobia. The wind of change could be felt by the Nabokovs as early as 1935. It is then that “[u]nable to find [a] reliable **English** translator, and **beginning** to **sense** that Hitler's **plans** will put an end to the Russian emigration and might force him to switch languages, [Vladimir Nabokov] translates *Orchadianie* himself, as *Despair* (Alexandrov, 1995: xxxix).

The necessity to **leave** Berlin was the factor that **altered** Nabokov's relation with Russian and prompted his **writing** in English. Nazism, rather than the Bolshevik revolution, forced Nabokov to **reexamine** the past and see that what had **been** a plausible way of living between 1919 and 1937 **had become** impossible in Hitler's Berlin. The continuity with the past which Nabokov had cherished **all through** his Berlin years was **disrupted** by the emergent fascist ideologies. Emigration *per se* **cannot** be isolated as the factor that triggered Nabokov's abandonment of his native language for the simple reason that for years he was **simultaneously** an émigré and a Russian-language author. It was rather another factor, **nazism**, **that**, for two different reasons, placed Nabokov (and his **jewish wife**, Véra) in the **position** of **rethinking** their roles now that they were occupying the margins of society.

a. On the margins of German society.

Nazism justified itself on the basis of a nationalist ideology which **victimized** difference **and** the **stranger** and therefore **endangered** the Nabokov's **existence**. Nabokov and his **family** must **leave** Berlin and **also** the editorial **enterprise** his father had helped to build a decade earlier - the Russian **daily** liberal newspaper *Rul'* - and the Russian publishing **firm** *Slovo*. These Russian-language media had **been** addressed to a specific émigré readership guided by a clear nationalist **anti-communist** ideology. **Having** lost the hope **that** the émigré group could ever **return** to old Russia, publishing **in** Russian lost an essential part of its social projection. **Sacrificing** Russian in 1937 **was** Nabokov's **answer** to the new historical moment but **this** move meant personal tragedy (**giving** up out of hopelessness) rather **than** a change regarding his own sociopolitical **stance** and ideology.

b. On the margins of Russian society.

Nabokov's awareness of the emergence and quick strengthening of fascist ideas in Europe was accompanied by a reinterpretation of the exiled condition he shared with the group of Russian émigrés. Sharing a condition does not entail sharing one ideological model. It is necessary to remember that there were different ideologies within the group with which he could not identify. One was for example that of the ultra-rightist who had caused the death of Nabokov's father. In 1936, the same man, the assassin of Nabokov's father, was appointed second-in-command to Hitler's head of Russian émigré affairs, thus proving that extreme ideologies meet beyond nationality.

We can get a glimpse of what were Nabokov's thoughts on exiles and their sentimental nationalism about 1937, the time when he was writing RLSK, where we read:

There existed, as I discovered, a union of old Swiss women who had been governesses in Russia before the Revolution. They 'lived in their past' ... spending their last years - and most of these ladies were decrepit and dotty - comparing notes, having petty feuds with one another and reviling the state of affairs in the Switzerland they had discovered after their many years of life in Russia. Their tragedy lay in the fact that during all those years spent in a foreign country they had kept absolutely immune to its influence (even to the extent of not learning the simplest Russian words); somewhat hostile to their surroundings - how often have I heard Mademoiselle bemoan her exile, complain of being slighted and misunderstood, and yearn for her fair native land; but when these poor wandering souls came home, they found themselves complete strangers in a changed country, so that by a queer trick of sentiment - Russia (which to them had really been an unknown abyss, remotely rumbling beyond a lamplit corner of a stuffy back room with family photographs in mother-of-pearl frames and a water-color view of Chillon castle) unknown Russia now took on the aspect of lost paradise, a vast, vague but retrospectively friendly place, peopled with wistful fancies (RLSK: 18).

Nabokov uses two different strategies here: a man/woman inversion, and a geographical displacement, to disguise the Russian émigrés in Berlin/Paris under the personae of the old Swiss governesses in Russia. It is still easy to understand that the sentiment permeating the passage is the certainty that, in spite of nostalgia, for the émigré it was as impossible to go back to Russia now as to remain secluded where he was. Nothing remained for the émigré to do either for his old country or for himself. Inactivity and nostalgia were not a desirable state: it was necessary to change.

Nabokov saw that he could and should sever himself from the past and that the easiest way to achieve it would be to displace himself from an inherited social world, the European scenario. By emigrating to the US and by writing in English he managed 1. to detach himself physically as well as cognitively from his past and thus 2. to acquire the status of survivor and recorder of a dead past.

In moving to the USA Nabokov was stepping **outside** the family circle. His mother Helena had died in Prague in 1939 thus closing that **part** of his life which would now **become** 'the stuff of **dreams**'. He was saying goodbye to a well-ordered world, the old world, Sirin's world, and letting **Vladimir** Nabokov go to **America** to emerge **transformed** into a professional English-language novelist.

2. The role of language in the émigré's conflict.

In substituting English for Russian and **America** for Europe as his anchoring points Nabokov was **redefining himself** as **an individual and** as a writer. It was only **after** 1937 that Nabokov **started writing** novels in English. He kept writing lyrical **poetry in** Russian but switched to English for his **prose narrative**. It was a curious case of specialization which was motivated by the different **functions** language **fulfills within** each of the two **genres**. Narrative diegesis **necessarily incorporates** multivoiced or **polyphonic**⁹ discourse and it **cannot** occur without a measure of **complexity** and **perspectivization**. The language employed by the different voices **in** the novel lends the voices characterological **and/or** narrational entity and perspective. Therefore Russian could not **suffice** to express **experiences** which went beyond the world and world-view connected to Nabokov's Russian.

If we **start** from the premise that language **is** language **in** use, or performance rather than **competence**, Nabokov's situation can be better explained. Being a doubly émigré writer, uprooted from the **cultural** context **sustaining** his **language/text**, he **must eventually feel** the soul of his **linguistic** creativity **drain**. **After** his Berlin emigration years, when the referents for the **words** the writer used to speak and **write in** have disappeared, the émigré writer remembers a language whose **meanings** relate him to a lost world. It **becomes** a **phantasmagorical** language, a system of forms whose meanings are obsolete and **hardly meaningful** to anybody inside or **outside** the mother **country**. The exception would be represented by **the dwindling** émigré group he belongs to, which is a group of people who **have survived** a **revolution** and lost a land but not **their** language; for them Russian is the **embodiment** of a lost world. Then, **switching** to a new language **becomes** a disadvantage **in** more than one sense. Nabokov **needs** to come to **terms** not only with the fact that English is a new everyday language for him (new in the **sense** that it is disconnected from his **earlier** everyday experience as an individual), **but** especially with the fact that English is a new **literary** language for him and that he **wants** to excel in the practice of becoming as good a **novelist**¹⁰ in the new language as he was in his native **tongue**. Both Nabokov and **his** fictional double, **Sebastian Knight**, the protagonist of *RLSK*, are **Russian** writers who **have become** English-language writers, like **Conrad**¹¹ and others before and **after**; **theirs** is not treason **but adjustment** to a situation of vacated cultural and **linguistic** belonging. By writing in another language they are **breaking partially** free from an obsolete **mirror-image** produced by obsolete **demarkations** of **national identity and self-identity**. The **conflict** these, the writer and his fictional double, are associated with is twofold: on the one hand "the 'double' is the figure most **frequently associated** with the **uncanny** process of 'the **doubling, dividing** and **interchanging** of the **self**'" (Bhabha, 1994: 143-144) **resulting** from **emigration/dissemiNation**. On the other **hand**, the **writer** and his double **represent** repetition versus **transformation** on two **separate** but interdependent

levels: the **level** of aesthetic representation and the **level** of self-representation within a transformed and widened world.

3. Textual traces of an **émigré writer's conflict**.

The idea of transformation is a **source** of **powerful** metaphors for Nabokov. Like a pupa becoming a butterfly, the transformation undergone by his **country** after the Revolution and his own linguistic (self)transformation¹² needed to find adequate expression in his writings. The theme of the double, always present in Nabokov's **mature** work, is a basic **literary** strategy that introduces a **second**, more or less transformed & more or less shady, version of the **source** self within the story. As Field (1987: 86) says: "[the double] is **also** the self gone into **emigration**"¹³. The **émigré's conflict** is **fictionally** transferred to the theme of the double, which in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is a **composite** figure halfway between 1. a "child of memory": that is, a psychological projection of the **reminiscing narrator**, and 2. a cinematic **transparency**¹⁴ or a ghost; in any of the two cases the **principle** of reality is violated.

3.1. The double as the narrator's ghostly projection.

The novel is plotted around two **sibling writers**, Sebastian and V., whose sense of identity (soul)¹⁵ and of reality itself depends on a void. Sebastian's sense of reality and identity is **shakily** founded on one vague memory of a dead mother, **while** V.'s identity rests on the **existence** of his brother. The **circle** is perfect: Sebastian's life lends **substance** and quality to V.'s memories and V. exists to let memory **speak** and to do his brother justice by **correcting** a **third writer/narrator** whose biography of Sebastian **seems outrageously inaccurate** to V.

V. is the **primary narrator** even if his authority, as well as his independent identity, is **questionable**. To V., Sebastian's **existence gyrates** around an essential drama. The **following** passage from *RLSK* shows the **faded/ghostly** quality of V.'s remembrance and **frames** Sebastian's drama:

Sebastian's **image** ... comes to me ... as if he were not a **constant** member of our **family**, but **some erratic visitor** passing **across** a **lighted** room and then for a long **interval** fading into the **night** ... I could **perhaps** describe the way he **walked**, or **laughed** or sneezed, but **all this** would be no more than **sundry** bits of **cinema-film** cut away by **scissors** and **having nothing in common** with the essential drama. *And drama there was. Sebastian could not forget his mother, nor could he forget that his father had died for her.* (*RLSK*: 15, **emphasis added**)

Sebastian's drama is that he **cannot** forget an absence, the absence of **mother**¹⁶ and father. His mother abandoned him and his **father** for a **lover** when Sebastian was too young to remember well. **Sebastian** saw his mother **only** once **again** when he **was** eight years old. The **visit lasted** for very few **minutes** and few **substantial words** were **said**. **Some years later** Sebastian's **father** dies in a duel **against** his former wife's **lover**. V., the narrator, presents the mother as the one to account for Sebastian's

losses: she indirectly causes the death of the father. We can transpose the mother's figure onto an allegorical plane. In a directly allegorical reading the mother's figure (she is Virginia Knight, an English lady) stands for English and the narrator betrays a love-hate relation towards her and towards English. In an inverted allegorical reading, the mother stands for a lost language, Russian, and a lost country, Russia, which has exiled her children and has caused the death of the father (Nabokov's father). The detectable feeling of love/hatred for the mother can find justification under the direct and the inverted readings. The narration subjects the mother/woman (and the languages they represent) to a double bind: Using English means treason to Russian, while using Russian when Russia has ceased to exist is sentimentalism if not plain nonsense. In an analogous way, siding with the mother means treason to the father and siding with the father, when the father is dead, means nothing.

Nabokov needs to process the past, his materials are memories and language and he is to build his literature out of them. The question is, how can memory supply or be supplied with a soul and how can memory supply and be supplied with the real? His answer is that "imagination is the muscle of the soul" (RLSK, 1995: 69) and he is thinking of the imagistic quality of memory. The content of our memory consists of detailed images perhaps more than propositions. Memory alters reality, like literature or the cinema, by focusing on details that acquire immense importance. For example, Sebastian's mother's visit fixes violets and English in his memory. Memory also provides the past with the quality of ghost-like transparency.

For instance, V. reminisces: "I could see the fair light of the lamp on the desk, the bright whiteness of paper brimming over the open drawer and one sheet of foolscap lying alone on the blue carpet, half in shade, cut diagonally by the limit of the light. For a moment I seemed to see a transparent Sebastian at his desk" (RLSK: 32). Knowing that Nabokov said: "Ghosts see our world as transparent, everything sinks so fast" (Appel, 1974: 298), makes it possible for the reader to draw the implication that V., the primary narrator, may be just a ghost reminiscing of a ghost. Very probably V. is Sebastian's ghost as well as his double. In that case *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is told from the point of view of its dead narrator, Knight, once he has become a wandering soul, by the name of V. This is so to the point that, in reading *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, the existence of both narrators, Sebastian and his brother V., can be doubted. Sebastian may be V.'s projection: V. is born as a narrator only after Sebastian dies, V. comes to supplant Sebastian in the same way as V. Nabokov, the English-language writer supplants former V. Sirin¹⁷. Nabokov used this pseudonym only as a Russian-language writer. S(irin) and V.(ladimir Nabokov) actually exist in a historical sequence which is a mirror-like inversion of V. and S(ebastian)'s fictional sequence. This play of inverted doubles stages two modes of the writer's life, as V. says about Sebastian, in RLSK(113) "Two modes of his life question each other and the answer is his life itself, and that is the nearest one can approach a human truth".

Soul migration is an idea which Nabokov entertains not only in RLSK, but also in *Transparent Things* and in his short stories. It is an idea which so many cultures entertain as a belief and part of their rites of passage from life to death and rebirth. Soul migration is also connected to the idea of water crossing. This is a connection drawn by Nabokov in different passages of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. For example, Sisson (in Alexandrov, 1995: 642) sees the association between death and water in the following passage,

The year of Sebastian's death, 1936, seems to V. "the reflection of that name in a pool of **rippling water**".... Water **imagery** saturates V.'s **journey** to join the dying Sebastian, as the **storm shifts from** rain to snow and to rain again. **During** V.'s night on the train, "the rain spat and **tinkled against** the glass and a **ghost-like snowflake** settled in one corner and melted away. Somebody in front of me slowly **came to life**..." (Sisson quoting Nabokov (RLSK, 190-191), in Alexandrov, 1995: 641).

Crossing the Atlantic in the process of **emigrating** to the USA in the 1940s was **rebirth**, a new and liberating experience for the European **immigrant**. In that precise decade, when **immigration**, **imported** difference, was not the exception but the **rule** in the **American** melting pot, the Nabokovs could retain their identity as minority **émigrés** and **still not become** marginal but privilegedly central to **American culture**. **Teaching** Russian literature to **American university** students most of whom could not read it in its original language probably **confirmed** Nabokov in his idea to write his narrative work in **English**. In any case **writing in English** had the **definite advantage** of liberating Nabokov from the need to revise the work of **his** translator. Nabokov **became** his **own** translator into English of his **early narrative** work in Russian. The assumption at this point is that Nabokov could write in English as proficiently as in his native language, Russian, and therefore **translate** himself into English **better** than anyone **else**, but this **does not mean** that Nabokov considered **himself to be bilingual**¹⁸. On the **contrary there** is plenty of textual **evidence**, which we shall discuss in brief, that in writing his books in **English**, Nabokov was going **through** a process of 1. **thinking/speaking** Russian and **using** Russian **cognitive schemata** in the production of **his** image-word **texts** and then 2. suspending this production in the act of **converting, translating**, all these code-linguistic and **inferential rules** into **written** English. We find a perfect **fictional** statement of this **kind of conflict** in RLSK:

Sebastian used to indulge in an **orgy** of corrections; and sometimes he would ... recopy the typed sheet in his **own slanting** un-English hand and then **dictate** it anew. **His** struggle with words was **unusually painful** and this for **two** reasons. **One** was the common one with writers of his type: the **bridging of the abyss lying between expression and thought** [...]

This, however, was not **all**. I know, I know as **definitely** as I know we had the **same** father, I know **Sebastian's Russian was better and more natural to him than his English**. (70-71, emphasis added)

The narrator is Sebastian's brother, V., who explicitly comments on Sebastian's double struggle, **his** struggle after adequate literary expression and his struggle after adequate English, a non-native language. The **former** he shares with all other writers of his **kind while** the latter is **idiosyncratic of the exile writer**. The **question remains** who **may** **ali** **those** writers of Sebastian's kind be. The **narrator, V., has** alluded to the group of writers **characterized** by their preoccupation with:

[T]he **bridging of the abyss lying** between **expression** and **thought**; the **maddening feeling** that **the right words**, the **only** words are **awaiting** you on the opposite **bank** in the **misty distance**, **and** the **shudderings** of the still **unclothed** thought **clamouring** for them on this **side** of the abyss. He had no use for **ready-made phrases** because **the things** he wanted to say were of an

exceptional **build** and he knew moreover that no real idea can be said to exist without the words made to measure (*RLSK*:70).

This was the conflict of the modernist **writers**, for whom "Writing becomes a **reminder**, a presenter of the **absent**, a **making** continuous of the discontinuous, a **monument** to ambivalence (...) **Melancholia** arises from lucid awareness. From the awareness of the obscure and **futile** nostalgia for **presence** which **inhabits** the **subject** when (s)he experiences power to conceive and powerlessness to present. (...) **this** is a **typically modern** and modernist **ambivalent** combination, a **source** of the sublime that **would remain** "inexplicable without the incommensurability of **reality** to concept which is **implied** in the Kantian philosophy of the sublime" (Penas, 1996: 643-644). But, even more specifically, **this** was the **conflict** of the modernist **Aesthetes**. **John Dos Passos**, in his book of **memoirs** *The Best Times* (1966), **reminds** us of the **existence** of a modernist debate between "aesthetes and Realists". While the former defended experimental avant-garde art of a **highly** elitist **kind**, the latter disregarded difficult forms of experimentalism in favour of an easy **kind** of **literary** "realism" open to the **understanding** of the popular masses, more useful from the point of view of the social **requirements** for didactic literature art¹⁹.

According to the **narrator's** comments, Sebastian Knight is a modernist aesthete **besides** being an émigré and his conflict with literary expression is not reducible to the **difficulty** entailed by his writing in and translating into a non-native **language**, although the latter is the **kind** of linguistic **difficulty** that the émigré **writer** is **bound** to **suffer**. Kiely expresses Nabokov's **difficulty** as follows: "for the exile, **immigrant**, or refugee, translation is a necessity that **carries** with it a permanent reminder of a **partial gain** that has **been** purchased by **means** of an **irretrievable loss**. Separation from language is not merely **analogous** to a separation from **kin** and **environment** but coincidental with it" (1993: 124). An **example** of the specifically **linguistic conflict** occurs when V. goes **through** his dead brother's **effects** and is **surprised** by the existence of a letter of Sebastian's in Russian. V. regards Sebastian's **Russian** as "**purser** and **richer** than **his** English ever was". On a different occasion V. recalls that: "**Sebastian's English**, though fluent and idiomatic, was definitely that of a foreigner" (*RLSK*: 40). Regarding his **opinion** of Sebastian's **grasp** of English, V. agrees with the fictional critic who thought of Sebastian "Poor Knight! he really had two **periods**, the **first** - a dull man **writing** broken English, the second - a broken man **writing** dull English (*RLSK*: 6). The fictional critic, though ironically portrayed, accurately spots the twofold dimension of the émigré **writer's** conflict: one **linguistic/literary** and the other experiential.

A combination of the need to **overcome these difficulties** and the need to **recall** the past, which **came** to the émigré **mind** in the **shape** of **images** rather than words, gave Nabokov's texts their image-word quality. Nabokov's literary **imagination** relied **heavily** on the presentation strategies of visual²⁰ **textualities**, among which I **count** landscape as well as the **written** page **and** the **texts** of the cinema, among others:

The answers to all **questions** of **life** and **death**, "the absolute solution" was **written** all over the world he **had known**: it was **like** a **traveller** **realizing** that the wild **country** he **surveys** is not **an** accidental **assembly** of **natural** phenomena, but the page in a book where these **mountains** and **forests**, and fields, and rivers are disposed in such a way as to **form** a coherent sentence;

the vowel of a lake fusing with the consonant of a sibilant slope; the windings of a road writing its message in a round hand, as clear as that of father; trees conversing in dumb-show, making sense to one who has learnt the gestures of their language. [...] Thus *the traveller spells the landscape and its sense is disclosed, and likewise, the intricate pattern of human life turns out to be monogrammatic, now quite clear to the inner eye disentangling the interwoven letters* (*RLSK*: 150, emphasis added).

Nabokov could insist on the themes of life and death by dwelling on a visual detail which he promoted from the level of descriptive curiosity to the level of essential metonymy, thus making it into a revisited image and a repetition pattern operating powerfully within his work. For example, in the previous quotation, Nabokov draws an analogy between two visual texts, one natural (landscape and the world) and the other cultural (the written text): Landscape is compared to a page in a book and human life to a letter in a written page. Within this scheme, the writer is compared to a traveller who spells the sense of human life and what seemed a difficult pattern becomes as simple as a monogram, a simple letter.

Nabokov was interested in the visual contour of the letters and other typographical symbols in the Roman and Cyrillic alphabets. For instance, in *Lolita*, Humbert compares sleeping Lolita to to a "Z" or an "?", and in the case that occupies us here, Nabokov uses the monogrammatic symbol "V"²¹ as the key to an essential riddle connected to the reader's task of understanding the meaning of life and death in *RLSK*. The answer to the riddle is dependent on the ability on the part of the reader to discover a key letter hidden in the text, the letter is monogram "V". In Russian, the sound /v/ is represented by means of the symbol "B", which is a kind of false friend of the English symbol "B" for the sound /b/. The narrator, also called V., makes the discovery that a "v" is hidden where it would be less expected, within the very name of Sebastian. This happens when V. becomes a reader: that is, when he receives a telegram and reads the misspelling it contains:

"Sebastian's state hopeless come immediately Starov," It was worded in French; the "v" in Sebastian's name was a transcription of its Russian spelling; for some reason unknown, I went to the bathroom and stood there for a moment in front of the looking-glass (*RLSK*: 160, emphasis added).

A double anagnorisis takes place at the end of the narrative when the narrator, V., discovers the "v" within his brother Sebastian, when V. recognizes himself in the slightly altered form of an alter ego and runs to the mirror. It is a recognition of Sebastian's Russianness, but also a recognition, forced on V. by accident, that V. is v, that they are both the same, that there may be a true Russian soul behind the façade of an English name, and a true core behind the literature written in a non-native language.

V.'s reluctance to acknowledge Sebastian's Russianness surfaces again when V. reaches the hospital Sebastian is dying in. Once there V. causes a misunderstanding by asking for Sebastian Knight, an English gentleman; the staff take him to the wrong room and he waits by the wrong patient. It is only later that V. realizes that, had he asked the right question, he would have met his

brother in time for a last embrace. V, should **have** asked for a Russian gentleman named **like himself**, and even better, he should **have** asked for **himself** for, as we see **from** the following quotation,

[T]he soul is **but** a **manner** of being - not a **constant** state - that any soul maybe yours, if you **find** and **follow its undulations**. **The hereafter maybe** the full **ability** of consciously living in any chosen soul, in any **number** of souls, all of them unconscious of their interchangeable **burden**. Thus, *I am Sebastian Knight* (RLSK: 172, emphasis added).

Here, V, **affirms** that he is Sebastian Knight and **makes** this **affirmation** depend on the idea that souls are interchangeable: It is the **unexpected presence** of letter "v" in Sebastian's name that **triggers** V,'s recognition of his and Sebastian's **sameness**. Sebastian's Russian soul had remained veiled to V,'s eye by the English letter b.

The reader's recognition of Sebastian as a Russian gentleman **takes** place near the end of the novel but since the very **beginning** the fiction **provides** the reader with clues that "V" is a letter essentially connected to Sebastian's identity: Sebastian's **mother's** name is Virginia, she abandoned him and the only **thing** Sebastian **remembers** of her is her brief **visit** when he was eight years old when she brought him a **small muslin** bag of violet sweets. The same **muslin** bag that years **later** V. discovers among the other **small treasures** that Sebastian **keeps** hidden **from** him: a photograph of his **first love**, and his **first** English poems. **Mother** (Virginia), **Mother tongue** (Russian "V" **behind** Roman "B") and **first love** are all treasured together with the violet sweet bag. In one of his **writings**, a fictitious letter **from** a man **saying good** bye to his **woman**, Sebastian **speaks** of the sound "v" in the following, loving alliterative **terms**: "Life with you was lovely - and when I say lovely, I mean **doves** and **lilies**, and **velvet**, and that **soft pink 'v'** in the middle and the way your tongue **curved up** to the long, lingering 'l'" (RLSK: 93).

The letter v **symbolizes** all that is **dear** to Sebastian's soul which is at the same time **all** that he has to **part** with **in** migrating to a different country. To help the reader of RLSK to **disentangle** the niddle, the same monogram, "V", is explicitly connected to migration and the need to say goodbye to **first loves**: "Must you go?" asks his voice. A last change: a V-shaped flight of migrating cranes; their tender moan melting in a **turquoise-blue sky** high above a **tawny birch-grove**... Is this the end? (RLSK: 114).

The **parallelism between** geographical migration, and the **migration** of the soul, between death and rebirth on the one hand and loss of **one's** native **language** and tradition on the other, is very **powerfully designed** and **defines** RLSK's concern with liminality, with **beginnings** and **endings**. This is Nabokov's first novel in English, his **burning** of bridges with Russian **shortly** before he emigrates to America in 1940. The **historically liminal character** of Nabokov's first English novel is incorporated and **reinforced within** the fiction at different **moments** of the narrative, for example, at its very **beginning**, where the reader **finds** that the **opening lines narrate** Knight's **birth** on the last **day** of the last month of the last year in the last **century**: "Sebastian Knight was born on the **thirty-first** of December, 1899, in the **former** capital of my **country**".

This simple sentence **manages** to **communicate** on different levels: On the **discourse** level the sentence conveys that I. the reader is **on** the verge of a story which is only **just starting** to **unravel** before **his/her** eyes. The reader is **placed** at a borderline whose **crossing** will **allow him/her** to be born

to a fictional world within which he is going to **remain a witness**. And also that 2. the narrator (V.) **positions himself within** the fiction as a teller of someone **else's**, Sebastian Knight's, story. The **narrator** lets the reader know that his is not Sebastian Knight's voice, that the "I" who narrates in the **first person** ("my") is **writing** a story about a **third party**, a "he". But between the two subjects ("he" and "I") there is **again a tenuous** existential borderline whose trespassing as we **have seen** eventually **takes place** at the end of the novel, which **closes** with the **following words** by V.: "Sebastian's mask clings to my face, the likeness will not be washed off. I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows" (RLSK: 173).

Sebastian's mask (his persona) is V.'s and **because** of the **existence** of the mask, V and Sebastian are both someone they don't know. Nabokov's **text removes** the self, or rather the knowledge of the self, from the **realm** of the **graspable** and **decenters** the knowing of the self to the marginal knowledge of the **marginal** mask. The self is **displaced** by its **representations**²² from the centre of epistemological **enquiry**. Thus, RLSK is a narrative which falls within the realm of the postmodern even if one of its protagonists (Sebastian) is a modernist and an aesthete.

There are aspects of RLSK that seem quite conventional, but they are inscribed in a wider and more **innovative construction**: for **instance**, the narration **starts** at the most natural point of departure, the **birth** of a central character, and thus the recit vs. diegesis **chronological levels** are matched at a point which marks the **beginning** of this **parodic**²³ **biographical** fiction which **eventually** discloses itself as autobiographical fiction: when the reader discovers with V. that V. and Sebastian are one, V.'s biography of Sebastian **becomes** V.'s, the narrator's, fictional autobiography. There only **remains** a **further** boundary to trespass, it is the boundary between history and fiction. RLSK is informed by biographical materials **extracted from** Nabokov's life history.

Sebastian, like Nabokov, "was brought up in an atmosphere of intellectual refinement, **blending** the **spiritual** grace of a Russian household with the very treasures of European culture" (RLSK: 13). Sebastian **writes** his literature in **English** and uses **his** mother's English **family name** (Knight) as a **kind** of **literary** pseudonym that he **transforms** into the black chess **knight** with which he signed his early **poems**, just as Nabokov signed his Russian **writings** under the pseudonym **Sirin**. Later on Sebastian Knight, like Nabokov, **studies** in Cambridge, and leads an **erratic** life as a consequence of his **own** personal **circumstances**, which are coincident with Nabokov's. Sebastian Knight was bom, **also** like Nabokov, **in** 1899, the **last year** of the **century** which brought an **aristocratic** and decadent world near the verge of **extinction**, in Saint Petersburg, "the **former** capital of my country" (as Nabokov says in the **opening line** of RLSK). The implicit reference to a change of capitivity **carried** by the word 'forme?' can be **easily retrieved**: **History teaches** that **Saint Petersburg** (**later** Leningrad) was discarded and the post **revolutionary** capital of the USSR was to be Moscow in an effort to **erase** even the most casual reference to a cultural past. **Here** again one name, Leningrad, veils another, St. Petersburg, (**just like** the "b" in Sebastian veils the Russian "v" in **Sebastian's** name). **This** double change, change of capitivity from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and change of **denomination** of the former capital, from St. Petersburg to Leningrad, is a **kind** of surgical **removal** operation. The second case is especially relevant to **this paper** because it is an operation of **linguistic removal** of the past. It is not only a **city's** name that has **been lost**. With the name **disappears** a city **landscape** once populated by a people who **have deserted** the city and emigrated.

The émigrés inhabit a world marked by the absence of a world of origin but the absence of a world of origin in the case of the Russian émigré was radical, geographical as well as historical. After the Revolution, the old order of reality was gradually banished and the émigré writers, Nabokov himself, as well as his fictional counterparts (V. Sebastian in *RLSK*), were dispossessed of their property, the most basic one being their own past: dissociated from their past selves and displaced in space and time from their worlds of origin, they must learn to belong to a different geography and a different history, they must cope with the loss of a landscape which has become forever somebody else's. They must be reborn to the present and learn to inhabit it thus leaving the past to the past. It is a second kind of emigration, the migration of the soul from a past to a present self. It is a process of relearning, of self-translation and after all of self-duplication in an inverted form. Those who will not forget can only remember and become the gatekeepers of a world of reminiscence populated by lost souls, ghosts like V. and Sebastian, or Nabokov himself. The historical and the fictional ends of this literary narrative become twin inverted worlds just as Russian and English are the twin linguistic models that both, V. Sebastian and V. Nabokov, must use in order to reconstruct²⁴ their world and their own selves on the basis of continuity with their past. This process involves complex interactions of meaning and symbolic structurations that function without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life within a culture.

NOTES

1. See Klosty Beaujour (1989: 90) on the topic of bilingualism and the creative mind: "Nabokov slowly moved toward a redefinition of himself which would recognize the centrality of the polylinguistic matrix of his creativity".
2. Nabokov writes his poem "K Rossii" (To Russia) in Paris late in 1939, about the time he had finished writing *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, which was still unpublished. There is a strong intertextual current between both texts. They exploit the idea that the writer's abandonment of Russian is the worst of amputations, a tragedy. Compare V's dream of Sebastian's maimed hand in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1995:157-159) and the following verses from "K Rossii": "To be drained of my blood, to be crippled, to have done with the books I most love, for the first available idiom to exchange all I have: my own tongue. [...] do not grope for my life in this hole".
3. This is not an exception with Nabokov, on the contrary, there is plenty of evidence, and Nabokov himself has commented on the fact, that much of his fiction is allegorical: for example, in his foreword to the English edition of *The Gift* (1963), Nabokov declares that *Russian literature* is his heroine (emphasis added). Again, Nabokov says, in "On a book entitled *Lolita*" (in Appel, ed. 1974: 318), "an American critic suggested that *Lolita* was the record of my love affair with the romantic novel. The substitution 'English language' for 'romantic novel' would make this elegant formula more correct" (emphasis added).
4. While Vladimir Nabokov was still a student at Cambridge, he started using the pseudonym Vladimir Sirin, which he kept through 1939, in order to eliminate the possibility that he could be mistaken for his illustrious father (V.D. Nabokov).
5. In Vyra, the Nabokov Summer home, in 1906 Nabokov's father discovers that his son, who can read and write in English, cannot do so in Russian, then he hires the village schoolmaster (Vasily Zhernosekov) to teach him.
6. It is as late as 1907 that VN graduates from governesses to the first of his Russian tutors, Ordyntsev.
7. For instance, VN's uncle Vasily Rukavishnikov had a castle in Pau (France) that Nabokov's parents visited in 1901, when Nabokov was a two year old toddler. In 1903 the family travels to Paris and Nice where they visit grandfather D. N. Nabokov. In 1904 the family travel to Rome and Naples. In 1905 they travel to Wiesbaden (Germany, where VN meets cousin Baron Iury Rausch von Traubenberg, who visits him back in Vyra in 1914). In 1907, 1909 the family travels to Biarritz for their summer vacation. In 1910, the family travels to Bad Kissingen and Berlin where Nabokov,

his brother Sergei and tutor **Zelensky stay** over the fail for orthodontic work. These **data have been extracted** kom Alexandrov's (1995) **chronology** of Nabokov's **life** and works.

8. Andrew Field (1987: 5) also **notices** that "[Nabokov's] Russia was very much a pnvate Russia, which may be properly temed the **Kingdom** of Nabokov".

9. Lyrical **poetry**, if we **abide** by Mikhail **Bakhtin's** (1981, 1986) **seminal analysis** of the difference **between poetry** and the novel, is a **monologic genre when compared** to the novel's **dialogism (polyphony)**. See however Leitch vs. **Bakhtin** in Leitch (1992).

10. This **essential conflict cannot** be **simplified** to a **mere clothing** of **literary meaning** in **English wording**, as Nabokov **explicitly states** in *RLSK* (1995: 70): "**no** real idea can be said to exist without the words made to measure. So that (to use a **closer simile**) the thought which only seemed naked but was **pleading** for the clothes it wore to **become** visible, while the words **looking afar** were not **empty shells** as they seemed, but were only **waiting** for the thought they already conceded to set them **aflake** and in motion".

11. Klosty (1989: 214) notes **down** that "Nabokov **frequently distinguished himself** kom Conrad; for Conrad had written in his **fourth** language, but never in his first".

12. Klosty (1989: 6) argues that "although the process of their **linguistic metamorphosis** was **often exquisitely painful** for Russian bilingual **writers** while they were undergoing it, many of them **eventually came** to realize that what at first seemed a **sacrifice, a treason, often a self-murder**, was in fact merely a step in a much more complex process that, over the long run, was not **destructive** or **subtractive** but, on the **contrary**, **generative and positive**".

13. The same author **reports** that in 1971, while discussing with Nabokov the émigré years, "Nabokov **stopped short** in his **conversation** and said quite **simply** about himself, "The past is my double, Andrew'" (Field, 1987: 86).

14. Fading, a technique of **filmic narrative** used in order to **provide continuity within** an **overall pattern** of **yuxtaposition**, was typically employed by **German expressionism**. Nabokov **confessed** he adored the cinema and watched **motion pictures** with great keenness (Field, 1987: 122). Its **influence** can be perceived in passages like: "Let the **beautiful olivaceous house** on the **Nova embankment** **fade out gradually** in the **grey-blue frosty night**, with **gently falling snowflakes lingering** in the **moon-white blaze** of the **tall street lamp** and **powdering** the **mighty limbs** of the two bearded corbel figures which support with an **Atlas-like effort** the **oriel** of my father's room. My father is dead, Sebastian is **asleep**, or at **least mouse-quiet**, in the next room - and I am **lying in bed, wide awake, staring into darkness**" (RLSK: 18).

15. The **Faustian theme** of an **evil pact causing the loss** of the soul is a strong **intertextual current** underlying *The Real Life* of Sebastian Knight. The **implicit idea behind** that **reading** would be that **Vladimir Nabokov feared** he had sold his Russian soui to **unspecified** interests.

16. Sebastian's mother **Virginia (nee Knight)** **elopes** with another man and **abandons** husband and son when the **latter** is too young to remember her. **Probably** for **this very reason**, Sebastian, **who has** to make do with the **lost love** of his mother and the **surrogate love** of a **step mother (whom** he calls **maman** in French - thus **isolating** her from his father's Russian and his mother's English worlds -) **becomes fully aware** of a deep lack. **This existential blank** he mes to **compensate for** by **appropriating all kind of things** that connect him to his mother and **differenciate** him from V., his haif-brother: the **differential factor is** his mother's language, English.

17. While **Vladimir Nabokov** was **still** at Cambridge, he switched to the pseudonym **Vladimir Sirin**, which he kept till 1939. *The Real life* of Sebastian Knight **is** the **first** narrative Nabokov **signs under his real** name, Vladimir Nabokov. In Sfrong *Opinions* (1990: 161) Nabokov **explains** that he had **chosen Sirin** as the name to **write under** because the **srin** is, like the **Greek "siren"**, a **Russian mythological creature**, a **multicoloured bird** with a woman's face and bust, a "**transporter of souls** and **teaser of sailors**" **which made such an** impression on the people's **imaginations** that its **golden flutter** became the very soul of Russian art.

18. Klosty's (1987) **thesis** that Nabokov is a bilingual **writer cannot** be **tested**. A **bilingual speaker is** not the same as a **writer in two languages**. If we **acknowledge** Nabokov's words in Sfrong *Opinions* (1973: 5) "I was bilingual as a baby (Russian and English) and added French at five years of age", we could agree with Klosty. **Nevertheless, there is plenty** of **evidence**, also by Nabokov, that Nabokov did not **handle** the **different** languages with the same facility.

19. The decade of the 1930s **had been** a time of **expansion** for the ideas of **Lenin** and **Trotsky** (*Literature and Revolution*) on the **social function** of **Literature**, **which** they thought should be a **revolutionary art**, an art of themes against technique.

20. In *Strong Opinions* (1973: 14), Nabokov says "I don't think in any language. I think in images, and now and then a Russian phrase or an English phrase will form with the foam of the brain-wave, but that's about all."

21. V is an important letter in *RLSK* (a fiction) as well as in Nabokov's world (history): his father's name and his own is Vladimir, the family's summer residence was Vyra: it is there that the family retreats for the 1905 winter to avoid turmoil in St. Petersburg and there Nabokov's cousin von Rausch impresses VN (who is fifteen) with his sexual exploits, Vasily Zhemosekov teaches him to write in Russian for the first time at the age of seven, Poet Vasili Gippius teaches him Russian Literature at the age of seventeen, Uncle Vasily Rukavishnikov dies and leaves him an important legacy: the property of two-thousand-acre estate worth several million dollars (after the Revolution it becomes lost property), Vereteno (the Spindle) is the name of his literary group during émigré Berlin's most volatile artistic period, finally, his wife's name is Véra.

22. In more specific terms, these representations should be called representamens (Peirce, 1955) or supplements (Demda, 1974)

23. The postmodern parodic character of *RLSK* is worth another paper. Let it suffice to say that the novel parodies different narrative subgenres: biography, the detective story, the literature of psychoanalysis based on the Freudian interpretation of dreams, and existentialism.

24. In Greenblatt's (1980: 9) terminology, the work of reconstruction of the self is considered as one of self-fashioning, and "Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language". Although Greenblatt's terminology is not so adequate to the description of 20th century culture, the concept it sustains is perfectly relevant to our discussion of the writer re-fashioning himself as the writer's double.

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