Translating Nabokov

Romanian Perspectives on World Literature

Anca Baicoianu

University of Bucharest

ancabaicoianu@gmail.com

Abstract

In 2008, the Romanian publishing house Polirom issued the first books in the newly established “Vladimir Nabokov author series.” During the next seven years, seventeen more titles have been added to the series, thus turning it into one of the most daring, costly and time-consuming local projects in the field of foreign literature in translation. Written from the perspective of a scholar, an editor and a translator, this article aims at retracing the history of the project against the background of earlier translations. Special emphasis will be placed on the changes in Nabokov’s reception due to the receiving culture’s specific circumstances at different moments in time, as well as on what those changes reveal about the Romanian engagement with world literature.

Keywords

Nabokov – world literature – translation – circulation – reception

When discussing the case of foreign literature in translation, there are several factors to be taken into account: the structure and dynamics of the book market (Even-Zohar; Heilbron and Sapiro; Sapiro “Globalization”), the power relations between cultures (Casanova; Venuti *Translation*), the translated writer’s position in the transnational literary system (Sapiro “Faulkner”), the various stages in the process of mediation between two different “worlds” resulting in “a text that exists in a relationship with both” (Bassnett *Translating*), and the “socialized conditions of the production and reception of translations” (Cronin 21). The present essay explores those issues by means of a case study: the Romanian translations of Vladimir Nabokov published between 1980 and 2015, with a special focus on the ambitious series devoted to him by the Polirom publishing

house since 2008. My analysis is articulated around three main questions. What historical and cultural factors presided over Nabokov's entry into the Romanian market? What decisions by which actors have inflected the construction of different images of the writer and his work for different audiences at different times? And finally, how do those images contribute to a better understanding of the receiving culture's changing perspective on world literature and translation?

The first section of the essay tackles the continuities and discontinuities in Nabokov's reception and promotion before and after 1989, while the second outlines the changes in translation policy introduced by the Polirom series and the various challenges the publisher faced. The concluding section argues that the case study presented here indicates the need to develop new strategies of mediation between languages and cultures based on the cooperation between book market actors and the publishing industry and other bodies or institutions involved with cultural communication and transmission.

Nabokov's Reception in Romania

Until the early 1990s, Nabokov's name remained unfamiliar to the Romanian general readership, due to political reasons. The first complete translation of one of his books (*Invitation to a Beheading*) was finally published in 1993. Prior to that moment, his works had enjoyed only a limited circulation in academic and literary circles by way of alternative channels (foreign lecturers, friends from abroad), in publications from other countries of the Eastern Bloc or local and western periodicals from the interwar period.

A notable exception is represented by the 1980 publication of a thematic triple issue of *Secolul 20* [*The Twentieth Century*] (nowadays *Secolul 21*), of which the first part (68 out of the 276 pages) is entirely dedicated to Nabokov. Subtitled *Revistă de literatură universală* [*Journal of World Literature*], *Secolul 20* was launched at the beginning of 1961, following the model of the Muscovite magazine *Inostrannaya literatura* [*Foreign Literature*], and has remained the least politicized literary journal in Romania. At the cost of myriad struggles against censorship, it has enjoyed unprecedented freedom in Romanian literary milieus. This journal was therefore the most appropriate—if not the only—space that could promote the work of an author whose biography and *œuvre* blatantly contradicted political directives.

The theme of the issue, announced on the front page but not on the cover, was “A New Age:” an instance of bitter irony for those who had already started to foresee that the 1980s would be the most dreadful decade of Ceaușescu's

regime, officially known as “The Golden Age” or, colloquially, *la Belle Époque*, disdainfully spelled in Romanian as *labele poc*, a vulgar-figurative rendering of “clap your hands” (with reference to the endless meetings, public gatherings, and festivals which Romanians of all ages were forced to attend). The issue presented a fair range of Nabokov’s work: three poems, three short stories, fragments from *Transparent Things* and an extended excerpt from his transgressive *Lolita*. Everything, including the pieces originally written in Russian, was translated from English (by Radu R. Șerban, Mihai Mîndra, and Radu Lupan). Together with a selection of photographs featuring Nabokov “in the streets of Berlin,” “in Switzerland,” posing “for the American passport” and so on, the choice of language showed very clearly just what kind of “new age” the journal’s editors were actually hoping for: one of unrestrained circulation of people and books. Carefully constructed so as to put forth as many aspects of Nabokov’s personality as possible, the issue was situated from the very beginning in the “horizon of translation;” the accompanying essays were authored by the translators themselves, and the final section was made up of several articles dealing with the status and function of literary translators. Hence, one may safely assume that the selections were meant to be more than an introduction to Nabokov’s work and to function also as preparation for future publication projects.

Despite the editors’ intentions, however, the impact of this issue of *Secolul 20* appears to have been minimal. In later years it is mentioned only once, and in passing (in Emil Iordache’s afterword to *Glorie* [*Glory*], in 2003). None of the initial translators (all of whom continued their activity in the 1990s) was ever used again, and their essays have not been republished. The only form of discernible continuity between this early engagement with Nabokov’s *œuvre* and some of the subsequent projects is what Mathieu Hauchecorne calls a “politicized reception” (in Sapiro *Rapports de force* 314). The persistence of this mode of reading through the 1990s can help explain editorial decisions that otherwise might seem puzzling. Such is the case of the first “Nabokov moment” in post-1989 Romania, namely the five-book project carried out by Universal Dalsi Press, a general trade publishing house, between 1994 and 1997.

In stark contrast with the 1980 issue of *Secolul 20*, this series focused mainly on Nabokov’s “Russian years.” Apart from *Lolita*, whose prominent position was undoubtedly due to the novel’s international notoriety, the publishers’ choice was set on the memoir (covering the writer’s life from 1903 until his emigration to the USA in 1940) and three of the early novels: *Mary* (1926), *The Defense* (1930), and *Invitation to a Beheading* (1938). A surprising choice in many respects: firstly, because it goes against the common editorial practice of introducing

a previously unknown foreign author to the general public by means of his more recent works, deferring the translation of the earlier ones until a stable readership has been established. Secondly, in the case of a country that was still transitioning from a Soviet-inspired totalitarian regime to liberal democracy, readers would have been expected to be more interested in an “American” Nabokov than in a “Russian” one. What could have led the publishers to favor a strategy that was radically different from the previous one and to opt for the early, less accomplished novels of a writer who achieved international recognition mainly on account of the books published in the last two decades of his activity?

Based on the essays accompanying the series, it appears that the choice of titles was, at least in part, a matter of addressability. While *Secolul 20* was intended for avid, discriminating readers who, despite Romania's political and cultural isolation in the early 1980s, managed to follow what was being published abroad through personal contacts and alternative channels, the translations published by Universal Dalsi immediately after 1989 were targeting a general readership that had not been prepared for an adequate reception of the “Nabokov phenomenon” by the study of literary theory or by extended exposure to world literature. Hence, the publishers’ selection focused on relatively unsophisticated texts whose fictional worlds were considered to be familiar to the Romanian public by virtue of shared historical experiences. Moreover, in keeping with the concern for wider accessibility, the critical essays accompanying the translations were no longer authored by the translators themselves, as it had been the case with *Secolul 20*, but by “professional” commentators—namely, by well-known literary critics and university professors.

Despite such differences, the Universal Dalsi editions share with the earlier selections of *Secolul 20* the inclination towards a political reading of Nabokov's works, resulting from a similar perspective on foreign literature in translation. The insistence in the editorial paratext on *confined space* as a recurrent trope in Nabokov's work, and the interpretation of the writer's emphasis on creative freedom as expressing a “strong anti-totalitarian resistance” (Grigorescu “Nabokov's” 7), point to an understanding of world literature as a space of freedom, and of translation as an “instrument of literary and political reform” (Barnstone 123). At the same time, the overarching image of an anti-totalitarian Nabokov reveals a good deal about the general attitude with regard to Romania's recent past. If, as Michaela Wolf puts it, “text selection automatically filters the representation of a given culture and is, therefore, a key agent in the reception process” (Wolf 50), one can maintain that, while the “American” Nabokov of *Secolul 20* was a radical *rejection* of (Soviet) Russia, the “Russian” Nabokov of Universal Dalsi represented a *farewell* to the USSR and, at the same time, a fic-

tional “guide” towards a better understanding of the political regime imposed upon the entire Eastern Bloc.

The persistence of the political mode of reading might help explain the erroneous claim made in the commentator’s afterword to the Universal Dalsi edition of Nabokov’s most famous novel, that *“Lolita ... starts with an image that cannot be ignored under any circumstances: a monkey has been taught how to draw and the first thing that it manages to picture is the bars of its cage. Even a zoo can provide Nabokov with the stage set for his essential dilemma: how free is the writer and, at a broader level, the artist, to go beyond the bars that are always in front of his eyes?”* (Grigorescu “A Poem” 357; my translation).¹ The unacknowledged concern—which was perhaps not even entirely understood as such by the commentator himself—to preserve at any cost the political coherence of an author whose only narrative constant is the play with masks reveals the role assigned to Nabokov by the agents mediating his encounter with the Romanian public: not merely that of a literary model, but also that of a gatekeeper of memory and guardian of political and cultural emancipation—in short, a role that is not very different from the one projected by Nina Khrushcheva in the context of post-Soviet Russia.² Interestingly enough, this image of the writer sometimes resurfaces in reviews written ten or even twenty years later, despite the fact that it goes against Nabokov’s resistance to using literature as a tool for social or political transformation and against the prevalent aesthetic concern in Romanian literary criticism, which has been used from the mid-1960s onwards as a strategy for defending the autonomy of literary production against the “social command” advocated by the Communist regime, and later on against the increasing “commercialization” of the local book market.

In publishing terms, the following years witnessed a gradual decline of the impact that the political aspect had upon the manner in which Nabokov’s texts were presented to their Romanian readers. This change in strategy reflected the transformations of the publishing industry and of the reading public. The

1 Actually, it is not the novel that starts in this manner but Nabokov’s essay “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*,” written in 1956 as a response to the first wave of reactions to the novel and published in the April 1959 issue of the *Encounter* (73–6) and then as a postscript to subsequent editions—as it appears in the 1994 Universal Dalsi edition as well.

2 “Despite himself—‘It is not my custom to display my political credo’—Vladimir Nabokov became a writer indispensable to understanding the political and social developments of contemporary Russia. ... He is our textbook, and our road map for today’s transitional period from a closed and communal terrain to its Western alternative, one open and competitive” (Khrushcheva 19–20).

new legislative framework established in the mid-1990s, along with the influence of economic factors and the competition brought about by the entertainment industry, led to a decline in print runs, to which we might add the significant limitations in sales caused by distribution-related difficulties and changing patterns of cultural consumption. This situation presented the publishers with new challenges related to the design and promotion of their products. Also, the coming of age of an “anti-nostalgic generation” (in the words of Silviu Lupescu, general manager of Polirom publishing house), and the increasing internationalization and diversification of a local market which had been almost entirely cut off from the western world for half a century, called for editorial practices more attuned to the international context. Consequently, during the second “Nabokov moment” in 2003–2006, the publishers’ promotional strategies focused on Nabokov’s prominent position in the literary canon and on his status as a profoundly influential international author. A new image of the writer thus emerged, one that emphasized Nabokov’s stature as a literary landmark, and therefore suggested a view of world literature as a space of cultural rather than political emancipation. At the same time, in an attempt to ensure a wider readership, the publishers opted for “lighter” editions stripped of lengthy explicative essays, and provided instead more pragmatic enticements to buy and read the books on offer:³ concise bio-bibliographical notes, short summaries of the works, blurbs. Even so, their commercial success was modest: apart from *Lolita*, *Ada*, *Mary*, and *Invitation to a Beheading*, none of the novels sold out during the five years stipulated in the contract.

Small Market, Big Projects

Consequently, when Polirom began to release their Nabokov series in 2008, he was understood as a canonical world author whose work would nevertheless be difficult to sell in the peripheral Romanian market,⁴ which had undergone seismic upheavals during the previous two decades. While in pre-1989 Romania

3 *Lolita* (Polirom, 2003), *Glorie* [Glory] (Polirom, 2003), *Invitație la eșafod* [Invitation to a Beheading] (Polirom, 2003), *Ada sau ardoarea* [Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle] (Polirom, 2004), *Cursuri de literatură* [Lectures on Literature] (Thalia, 2004), *Apărarea Lujin* [The Defense] (Humanitas, 2004), *Mașenka* [Mary] (Humanitas, 2004), *Camera obscură* [Laughter in the Dark] (Humanitas, 2005), *Pnin* (Humanitas, 2005), *Vrăjitorul* [The Enchanter] (Humanitas, 2005), *Cursuri de literatură rusă* [Lectures on Russian Literature] (Thalia, 2006).

4 On the relationship between aesthetic complexity and commercial appeal, see (Venuti *Translation* 160).

the obstacles to translating foreign literary texts were mostly political and ideological, in later years the process has been hindered by cultural and economic constraints.⁵ Chronically undersubsidized and largely unprofessionalized, the Romanian book market is currently one of the smallest in Europe in terms of sales (€60 million in 2010 from the sale of trade editions), print runs (an average of 2,000–2,500 copies), and titles published per number of inhabitants per year (around 750). Against this background, Polirom's decision to devote a costly and time-consuming series to a notoriously difficult, hard-to-sell author seems all the more surprising. How is this ambitious project to be explained, and what is really at stake here?

The creation of the author series was not a *commercial gesture* dictated by a desire to adapt to public taste, but a *cultural initiative* meant to contribute to its formation. It was also the result of changes in translation policy, which reflected the publishing house's particular dynamics. Established in 1995 in Iași, in northern Romania, as a general trade publishing house (the only major one that does not have its headquarters located in the capital city, Bucharest), Polirom became the most important actor in the region in less than one year, due to its editorial program and publishing rhythm. Shortly afterwards, it made its way among the major players on the Romanian book market—a fast evolution resulting from a development strategy oriented towards the accumulation of both financial and symbolic capital (Bourdieu *The Field; The Rules*). From the very beginning, Polirom has fused commercial spirit and innovative force, publishing both books with a wide audience and specialized works, in established fields of interest as well as emerging ones.

The various author series established within Polirom's foreign literature collection (known under the global title of "Biblioteca Polirom" ["The Polirom Library"]) and coordinated by Bogdan-Alexandru Stănescu from 2006 onwards) have followed the same multiple logic. Some of them (for instance, the Saragat series) came about as a consequence of the success of the respective authors among Romanian readers. Others have been the result of important editorial events. An example of the latter would be the Hemingway series, which marked the reentry of the American writer on the Romanian market after fifteen years during which the owners of the publishing rights had refused to engage in any negotiation with Romanian publishers because of the conditions under which the previous translations of the volumes had been published

5 For a detailed analysis of the various "obstacles to translation" in both dominant and peripheral cultures, see Sapiro *Rapports de force*, in particular 15–41. Of particular interest for a comparison with the Romanian case is the chapter authored by Marta Pragana Dantas and Arturo Perussi on the publishing industry in Brazil (144–177).

in the early 1990s. And, finally, there are the series dedicated to authors such as Nabokov or Borges that have represented cultural gestures with multiple motivations, equally related to the image of the publishing house and to that of the writer.

Polirom's mobility, its ability to foresee the tendencies of a continuously changing market, and its promotional strategies, often described as "aggressive," have led the press as well as part of the reading public to perceive this publishing house as following a "democratic" and "American" cultural model, as opposed to the "elitist" and "European" image of one of its main contenders, Humanitas.⁶ Accordingly, the Nabokov series can be regarded as a prestige investment meant to rectify or touch upon this perception. A hint in this sense is given by the editing options: before the establishing of the author series, all books from "The Polirom Library" came out in pocket-sized paperback formats (10.6×18 cm), with a common graphic image. By contrast, most author series have been designed from the beginning as hardcovers in a larger format (13×20 cm), each having its own graphic conception adapted to the specific character of every author.

The Nabokov project remains to this day one of the most ambitious, most expensive, and most complex of such endeavors on the Romanian book market. Twenty-two volumes have been published in a timespan of seven years (2008–2015). Ten of these are edited versions of earlier translations published between 1993 and 1997 and then between 2003 and 2006. The other twelve are new translations into Romanian of works previously unavailable to the general public. From a financial point of view, the Nabokov series represented one of the most important investments on the Romanian book market: the advance payment on royalties alone was, at the time, equivalent to the price of a small apartment in Bucharest or to the salary of a Senior Lecturer over a period of ten years.

In mounting this extraordinary series, Polirom has sought to present to the Romanian public a different image of the author than the one rendered familiar by previous translations: not merely a more complete Nabokov, but also a repositioned one. In shaping this image, the Polirom series integrated all the aspects underlined by previous editorial projects (strong political message, canonicity, literary complexity, thematic appeal), while at the same time using a variety of editorial and promotional strategies in order to implement an important change of perspective that could dwell on the problematic situation of the writer: the image advanced by the author series is that of a *transnational* and

6 For the differences between the two models, see (Sapiro "Globalization").

translational Nabokov. In her recent book *Born Translated*, Rebecca Walkowitz has analyzed contemporary novels written for a global audience, works that anticipate their life in translation and even incorporate it into the work itself. Polirom's effort highlights aspects of Nabokov's work that anticipate such contemporary developments; it could be said that they create a Nabokov for whom "translation functions as a thematic, structural, conceptual, and sometimes even typographical device" (Walkowitz 4).

Translation as a theme and issue had rarely been noted in the previous Romanian editions of Nabokov, or by Romanian scholars. It is only recently that Translation Studies has gained momentum in the local university programs; the same can be said about academic interest in editorial theories and practices. Insofar as press reviews are concerned, "expert" comments more often than not contribute to reinforcing the "illusion of transparency" (Venuti *Translator's*)⁷ by focusing on the *translated* book rather than on the book *in translation*. When the translators' contribution is mentioned at all, the discussion rarely moves beyond the quality of their work to the nature and signification of the mediation involved. By contrast, Polirom's Nabokov series emphasizes this issue through a variety of means, from editorial strategies to translation practices.

A case in point is the insertion of forewords written by Nabokov for the English editions of his early novels into the Romanian translations made from Russian, as is the case for *Mary*. Like the decision to have some of his novels belonging to the "Russian period" (*The Eye*, *Despair*, *The Gift* and *King, Queen, Knave*) translated not from the original language, but from the English versions that had been made or supervised by the author, this option, which is a breach of current editorial practice, is meant to underline the central position that translation—in the multiple forms practiced by Nabokov himself—holds in the author's work and, implicitly, its importance in the act of reception.⁸ In

7 Venuti uses this phrase to describe the "illusory effect [that] occurs because of the general tendency to read translations mainly for meaning, to reduce the stylistic features of the translation to the foreign text or writer, and to question any language use that might interfere with the seemingly untroubled communication of the foreign writer's intention" (1). My own distinction between a *translated* book and a book *in translation* is meant to underline the difference between translation as a product and translation as a process.

8 As shown by Christine Raguette-Bouvard, the translation, supervision and re-writing extensively practiced by Nabokov contribute to the dissolution of boundaries between the original version and the derivative ones "to such an extent that the reader is never quite certain whether he is reading an original version by the author, a translation by the author, a translation revised by the author, or the work of a translator."

accordance with the central role assigned to the translation, the categorization of books within the series takes into consideration the language from which the book was translated (indicated on the title page, alongside the name of the translator), not the language of the original version. Thus *The Gift* is categorized on Polirom's website as "American literature," although it belongs to the Russian period of Nabokov's creation. In all cases, the second domain of categorization is "World literature"—a category that only appears once (with reference to *Lectures on Literature*) in the National Library or Central University Library catalog entries related to Nabokov. Moreover, these entries lack a unitary indexing criterion, so much so that two editions of the same book (for instance, *Invitation to a Beheading*) are sometimes assigned to two different domains in the same catalog ("Russian literature" for the 1997 edition and "American literature" for the 2003 edition), which suggests that Romanian libraries subscribe to a vision of world literature as the sum of national literatures, and consequently have difficulties in the categorization of transnational authors.

Another breach of editorial practice, meant to encourage a wider Romanian debate on the role of translation and of translators, is the use of "unaccustomed" translators. Veronica D. Niculescu, for instance, who did a third of the Romanian translations in the Nabokov series, made her translating debut with *Ochiul* [*The Eye*]. In my case, the situation was almost similar: *Nabokov's Dozen* and "Mademoiselle o," included in the Polirom edition of Nabokov's complete stories, were only my second attempt at translating fiction; *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* was the third. This was a most uncommon situation when considering the general tendency to use well-known translators in the case of established international authors (a practice I would call, for want of a better term, *mutually reinforcing canonicity*). The choice of translators thus signaled a break with Nabokov's image brought forward by the 2003–6 projects, by shifting the emphasis from the writer's *status* to his *situation*. At the same time, it allowed for the emergence of a new set of concerns closely related to the translators' own position. A writer herself, Niculescu brought to the public's attention an aspect that had been utterly ignored in previous discussions: the author's norms and their impact on Romanian translations, the reasons for which they were observed or, on the contrary, the situations in which they were partially disregarded in favor of alternative norms related to source-language or target-language specificities (Tourey 56–61). In my case, both the perspective on translation and the actual practice were largely shaped by my editorial experience and close involvement with the Nabokov series as a whole.

Another way of drawing attention to the superimposition of languages emphasized by the Polirom series was to offer an example of translation as collaborative practice. Thus, the Romanian edition of Nabokov's complete stories

appeared in a single volume translated by three people from two languages ... and a half,⁹ with the aim of highlighting the change in voice brought about by the shift between languages and translating choices. The cultural inflections produced, in the case of a writer like Nabokov, by the shift from one language to another, as well as the manner and extent to which this shift is captured in the target text has also been a central concern in my creating a Romanian version of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* able to convey the strangeness of the original by means of “the resurrection of an alien thing in a native body,” as Hilaire Belloc puts it (cited in Bassnett *Translation* 117).

The innovations introduced by Polirom's Nabokov series—from the collaboration in the case of the *Stories* to the relativization of the notion of “original version” and the highlighting of competing, sometimes even conflicting, norms that shape the translation as both a process and a product—have been intended as invitations to rethink Nabokov in relation to local and global cultural changes. At the same time, they seek to respond to the ever more intricately layered challenges of the public: the readers' reactions to the new titles published within the series clearly indicate an increased awareness of translation as cultural mediation. This is the case both with common readers, who read *in* translation, and with expert readers, who read *for* the translation and oftentimes confront it with the original editions that have become more widely accessible in recent years. The horizon of expectation is not identical in the two cases (the former lay more emphasis on fluency, the latter on accuracy), but in both instances the reception is not strictly limited to the textual frame: the translator, who suddenly becomes more visible but also more vulnerable, is evaluated not only according to the quality of the linguistic rendition, but also according to his or her ability to position the translated book within a broader system that includes the conditions under which it was produced, the literary tradition it lays claim to or which it contests and the values it promotes. An excellent translation, in other words, is expected to be “an expansive transformation of the original, a concrete manifestation of cultural exchange and a new stage in a work's life as it moves from its first home out into the world” (Damrosch 66).

9 Nabokov's 1921–1940 stories written in Russian and published in book form were translated from Russian by Adriana Liciu; stories written in Russian between 1923 and 1925, which were unpublished at the time or only appeared in periodicals, were translated from English by Veronica D. Niculescu, while the stories written in English between 1923 and 1959 and “Mademoiselle O,” originally written in French (1936), were translated by myself (from English, with the additional support of the original French version of “Mademoiselle O”).

Under these circumstances, translation has to be viewed as an ongoing process. In the case of a project such as the Nabokov series, this would imply the retranslation of the volumes published as part of prior editorial projects in the light of the new context given by the series as a whole. Although revised (some of them even multiple times), these early versions did not undergo substantial changes; since the conditions under which they were made, as well as the overall vision of the project they were initially part of, were radically different from those of the Polirom series, their retranslation would substantially contribute to the series' cohesion. However, considering the fair amount of resources (time, people and money) required by such developments, it is very unlikely that this will occur in the near future. Even without this additional investment, the mere maintaining of the Nabokov series on the Romanian market for as long as possible (in 2015 Polirom renewed the publication contracts for all twenty-two volumes for a period of five years) is an effort that the publishing house can only face by modifying the presentation of the series, which will be released in paperback format in the future. And it is not difficult to foresee that, in the absence of systematic and substantial support on the part of the other actors involved (the state, the press, distribution networks, academic institutions and foreign financing bodies), this project, undoubtedly one of the most remarkable performances in the Romanian editorial market in the last few decades, may not go beyond the stage of the dress rehearsal.

Conclusions

This case study shows that cultural and commercial factors alike presided over the construction of Nabokov's image in the Romanian literary market, and that the shaping of this image at various moments in time reflects a shifting perspective on world literature's meaning and function for the receiving culture. It also points out that the rhythm of such changes is not always the same for all the agents involved: in Nabokov's case, the Romanian commentators were still focusing on his political relevance long after the publishers had started to emphasize his literary value, and are still praising the latter almost a decade after Polirom's series has started to argue for the value of attending to the translational status of world authors. While a full discussion of how this asynchrony might have impacted the local readers' response to Nabokov's work falls outside the scope of the present paper, this observation might serve as an argument for the close cooperation of the various actors involved in the translation and circulation of literary texts.

Polirom's Nabokov series proves that the complexity and quality of such a project largely depends on the commitment of those involved, on their willingness to make a change, and on their ability to promote it. As such, the series substantiates Venuti's claim that "the decision to publish a translation should be viewed as strategic, changing over time, never definitive, because it is, in fact, an interpretation, a changing assessment of what sort of context might be created in the receiving situation to help readers appreciate translated literatures more deeply" (*Translation* 163). Nevertheless, in an editorial context like the Romanian one, projects of such magnitude cannot survive and be developed exclusively as a private initiative. Therefore, the kind of collaboration they imply is not limited to the one between translator and publisher or translators with different areas of expertise, nor is it confined to the classic production-distribution-promotion circuit. In order to completely fulfill its role and produce enduring effects, a project like the Nabokov series depends, on the one hand, on the creation of strategic partnerships between multiple publishing houses or between a publishing house and various public or private financial structures and, on the other hand, on the opening of boundaries between activities (translation and research), domains (the publishing of foreign books and the teaching of foreign literature) and institutions (publishing houses and universities) which oftentimes make use of the same texts, yet are too seldom brought together in the same play.

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