

## Frühere Englisch-Sprachklausuren

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### 13. Oktober 2000 – [Florian Cramer](#)

**Vladimir Nabokov:** *Poems and Problems*. (Auszug aus dem Vorwort). New York und Toronto (McGraw-Hill) 1970, S. 13ff.

#### INTRODUCTION

This volume consists of three sections: a batch of thirty-nine Russian poems, given in the original and in translation; fourteen poems which I wrote directly in English after 1940 (the year of my leaving Europe for the United States); and eighteen chess problems.

[...]

For the last ten years, I have been promoting, on every possible occasion, literality, i.e., rigid fidelity, in the translation of Russian verse. Treating a text in that way is an honest and delightful procedure, when the text is a recognized masterpiece, whose every detail must be faithfully rendered in English. But what about faithfully englishing one's own verse, written half a century or a quarter of century ago? One has to fight a vague embarrassment; one cannot help squirming and wincing; one feels rather like a potentate swearing allegiance to his own self or a conscientious priest blessing his own bathwater. On the other hand, if one contemplates, for one wild moment, the possibility of paraphrasing and improving one's old verse, a horrid sense of falsification makes one scamper back and cling like a baby ape to rugged fidelity. There is only one little compromise I have accepted: whenever possible, I have welcomed rhyme, or its shadow; but I have never twisted the tail of a line for the sake of consonance; and the original measure has not been kept if readjustments of sense had to be made for its sake.

There is not much to say about the section of fourteen English poems, all written in America and all published in *The New Yorker*. Somehow, they are of a lighter texture than the Russian stuff, owing, no doubt, to their lacking that inner verbal association with old perplexities and constant worry of thought which marks poems written in one's mother tongue, with exile keeping up its parallel murmur and a never-resolved childhood plucking at one's rustiest chords.