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SEVERAL EMENDATIONS TO ONE SENTENCE IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF “PASKHAL’NYI DOZHD’”

Vladimir Nabokov composed “Paskhal’nyi dozhd’” in 1924 and published it in 1925 in the Berlin émigré weekly *Russkoe Ekho*. The publication was long believed to be lost, until in 1996 a Swedish Slavist Svetlana Polsky discovered the story and reprinted it in the April 1999 issue of the St. Petersburg journal *Zvezda*. The story was translated into English as “Easter Rain” by Dmitri Nabokov and Peter Constantine and appeared in the thirty-eighth issue of *Conjunctions* in the Spring of 2002. Consequently, “Easter Rain” was not initially included in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* and has been added to the collection’s later editions.

In “Paskhal’nyi dozhd’,” there is a passage in which Joséphine visits the Platonovs, her Lausanne Russian émigré acquaintances. She hopes against hope that they will ask her to join them in attending the Easter Vigils at the Greek Orthodox church and will invite her afterward to break the fast. The Platonovs, however, show no kindness to her. Joséphine, then, ponders going to the church on her own, but eventually decides against it. The sentence under consideration in the original Russian reads: «Но так случилось, что в Петербурге она только бывала в красной кирке, в конце Морской улицы, и теперь в православный храм входить было совестно, не знала, когда креститься, как складывать пальцы,—могли сделать замечание» (*S.Soch.* 1: 79–80). The existent rendition of the sentence reads: “But in Petersburg the only church she had ever gone to was the red Catholic one at the end of Morskaya Street, and she felt ashamed now to go into an Orthodox church, where she did not know when to cross herself or how one held one’s fingers, and where somebody might make a comment” (*Stories* 647).

I propose several emendations to the English translation of the sentence. First, I suggest reinstating the introductory “But it so happened” clause that corresponds to the original “No tak sluchilos’.” Further, the word “kirka” (more commonly spelled “kirkha”) derives from the German “Kirche,” meaning “church,” and denotes a Protestant church in Russian (*Dal’*, 2:109). Nabokov is very precise here: “krasnaia kirka” refers to the neo-Gothic redbrick Reformed church, designed by Harald Julius von Bosse and built in 1865. In 1872, after having been damaged by fire, it was restored by Karl Rachau (see the image below). The church, whose official address was Bol’shaia Morskaia 58, stood at the intersection of Bol’shaia Morskaia Street, Pochtamtsky Lane, and the Moika Embankment, so that Nabokov could see its spire from the windows of the family mansion at Bol’shaia Morskaia 47. Nabokov makes reference to the church several years earlier in his nostalgic poem “Peterburg” (1921) (*S.Soch.* 1:580). At the time of

Nabokov's composing the story, the church was still functioning. In 1929, the Soviet authorities closed it down and converted into a dormitory. In the 1930s, the building was cardinally restructured and turned into the so-called House of Culture, later renamed Palace of Culture, for Communication Workers. (On the history of the church and its aftermath, see Andreeva, 239–42).

Although “sovestno” may be translated as “to be ashamed,” it seems “uneasiness” rather than “shame” is more appropriate here. In all likelihood, the Swiss-born Joséphine is a Calvinist, and therefore, is unfamiliar with the Eastern Orthodox service, and specifically with its distinctive sign of the cross. That is why she does not know “kak skladyvat' pal'tsy” (“how to fold fingers”). It is all the more so since the Reformed Church has espoused John Calvin's dictum, promulgated in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (4.17.28), that the sign of the cross is “a superstitious rite” (915).

All things considered, the modified translation of the sentence in question reads: “But it so happened that in Petersburg she had only gone to the red Protestant church at the end of Morskaia Street, and she felt ill at ease now to go into an Orthodox church; she did not know when to cross herself and how to fold fingers, somebody might make a comment.”

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