At the end of his Commentary Kinbote (Shade’s commentator who imagines that he is Charles the Beloved, the last self-exiled king of Zembla) quotes a Zemblan saying that he heard from his nurse:

Many years ago--how many I would not care to say--I remember my Zemblan nurse telling me, a little man of six in the throes of adult insomnia: "Minnamin, Gut mag alkan, Pern dirstan" (my darling, God makes hungry, the Devil thirsty). Well, folks, I guess many in this fine hall are as hungry and thirsty as me, and I'd better stop, folks, right here. (note to Line 1000)

The author of *Stikhi, sochinyonnye noch’yu vo vremya bessonitsy* (“Lines Written at Night During Insomnia,” 1830), in his poem *Zimniy vecher* (“Winter Evening,” 1825) Pushkin offers a drink to his dear old nurse Arina Rodionovna:

Выпьем, добрая подружка

Бедной юности моей,

Выпьем с горя: где же кружка?

Сердцу будет веселей.

Let us drink, good friend  
Of my wretched youth,  
Let us drink from grief; where is the mug?  
The heart will be gayer.

Like Gradus (Shade’s murderer), Kinbote was born in 1915 and was six in 1921. In February of 1921 Alexander Blok and Vladislav Hodasevich participated in the Pushkin Evening (in honor of the 84th anniversary of Pushkin’s death) in Petrograd. The title of Hodasevich’s speech, *Koleblemyi trenozhnik* (“The Shaken Tripod”), alludes to the last line of Pushkin’s sonnet *Poetu* (“To a Poet,” 1830): *i v detskoy rezvosti koleblet tvoy trenozhnik* (and in childish playfulness shakes your tripod). In his essay *Bal’mont liricheskiy* *poet* (“Balmont the Lyric Poet”) included in *Kniga otrazheniy* (“The Book of Reflections,” 1906) Nik. T-o (I. Annenski’s penname) mentions *podvig* (heroic deed), *ogon’* (fire) and *altar’* (altar), the three “emblems” that occur in Pushkin’s sonnet “To a Poet:”

На словах поэзия будет для нас, пожалуй, и служение, и подвиг, и огонь, и алтарь, и какая там ещё не потревожена эмблема, а на деле мы все ещё ценим в ней сладкий лимонад, не лишённый, впрочем, и полезности, которая даже строгим и огорчённым русским читателем очень ценится. Разве можно думать над стихами? Что же тогда останется для алгебры? (II)

In words poetry will be for us devotion, and heroic deed, and fire, and altar, and whatever other emblem is affected, but actually we still love in it sweet lemonade not devoid of usefulness very much appreciated by the austere and afflicted Russian reader. How can one brood over verses? What will then remain for algebra?

In Pushkin’s little tragedy “Mozart and Salieri” (1830) Salieri says that he measured harmony by algebra and Mozart mentions his insomnia and uses the phrase *nikto b* (none would). Botkin (a Russian Professor mentioned by Kinbote in his Commentary) is *nikto b* in revese.

*Podvig* (“Glory,” 1932) is a novel by VN. In his poem *Ya vezhliv s zhizn’yu sovremennoyu…* (“I am polite with modern life…” 1913) Gumilyov mentions *pobeda* (victory), *slava* (glory), *podvig* (heroic deed) – pale words that are now lost:

Победа, слава, подвиг — бледные

Слова, затерянные ныне,

Гремят в душе, как громы медные,

Как голос Господа в пустыне.

Heroic deeds and glory, victory -  
Pale words that are now lost  
Are thundering in my soul,  
Like God’s voice of in the desert.

In his poem *Pamyat’* (“Memory,” 1920) Gumilyov says that he knew *muki goloda i zhazhdy* (the torments of hunger and thirst) and mentions *svyatoy Georgiy* (the Cross of St. George, a decoration):

Знал он муки голода и жажды,  
Сон тревожный, бесконечный путь,  
Но святой Георгий тронул дважды  
Пулею нетронутую грудь.

He knew the torments of hunger and thirst,

Sleep disturbed, the endless road,

But St. George twice touched

His breast untouched by a bullet.

Zemblan for “my darling,” *minnamin* brings to mind Gumilyov’s poem *Persidskaya miniatyura* (“Persian Miniature,” 1919) that begins as follows:

Когда я кончу наконец  
Игру в cache-cache со смертью хмурой,  
То сделает меня Творец  
Персидскою миниатюрой.

When I’ve given up  
playing at hide-and-seek with sour-faced  
Death, the Creator will turn me  
into a Persian miniature.

(transl. Burton Raffel)

According to Kinbote, his Scottish tutor, Walter Campbell, is now in Iran (Index to PF). In VN’s *Podvig* Martin Edelweiss (the novel’s main character, a student of Cambridge) once called Calderon “a Scottish poet” and confused Petrarch with Plutarch. Calderon’s plays were translated into Russian by Balmont. In his “Sonnet” (1830) Pushkin mentions Petrarch who in a sonnet poured out the ardor of love.

The two poets who could not stand each other, Blok and Gumilyov died almost simultaneously in August of 1921 (Gumilyov, who was executed, outlived Blok by less than three weeks). In his memoirs *Peterburgskie zimy* (“The St. Petersburg Winters,” 1931) Georgiy Ivanov (a poet who attacked VN in the Paris émigré review “Numbers,” 1930, #1) says that to his question “does a sonnet need a coda” Blok replied that he did not know what a coda is. It seems that, to be completed, Shade’s poem needs not only Line 1000 (identical to Line 1: “I was the shadow of the waxwing slain”), but also a coda (Line 1001: “By its own double in the windowpane”). The total number of lines in Shade’s poem is thus odd. Pushkin’s *Podrazhaniya koranu* (“Imitations of the Koran,” 1824) begin as follows:

Клянусь четой и нечетой

I swear by even and odd.

The cycle’s last poem (IX) begins as follows:

И путник усталый на бога роптал:  
Он жаждой томился и тени алкал.

And the tired traveler grumbled at God:

He was parched with thirst and craved for shade.

*Alkan* (“hungry” in Zemblan) seems to hint at *alkal* (impf. of *alkat’*, “to hunger, crave”), the verb used by Pushkin. Like “Ode to Khvostov,” “André Chénier” and “Eugene Onegin,” *Podrazhaniya koranu* have footnotes. The poem’s title brings to mind Pushkin’s poem *Podrazhanie arabskomu* (“Imitation of the Arabic,” 1835):

Отрок милый, отрок нежный,  
Не стыдись, навек ты мой;  
Тот же в нас огонь мятежный,  
Жизнью мы живем одной.

Не боюся я насмешек:  
Мы сдвоились меж собой,  
Мы точь в точь двойной орешек  
Под единой скорлупой.

Sweet lad, tender lad,  
Have no shame, you’re mine for good;  
We share a sole insurgent fire,  
We live in boundless brotherhood.

I do not fear the gibes of men;  
One being split in two we dwell,  
The kernel of a double nut  
Embedded in a single shell.

*Dvoynoy oreshek* (the double nut) mentioned by Pushkin brings to mind Hazel Shade (the poet’s daughter whose “real” name seems to be Nadezhda Botkin). After his daughter’s death, Professor Botkin is split in three: the poet Shade, his commentator Kinbote (who prefers lads to lasses) and his killer Gradus. Kinbote completes his work on Shade’s poem and commits suicide on October 19, 1959 (the anniversary of Pushkin’s Lyceum). There is a hope (*nadezhda*) that after Kinbote’s death Botkin, like Count Vorontsov (a target of Pushkin’s epigrams, “half-milord, half-merchant, etc.”), will be full again.

Trying to shed his identity, poor mad Botkin proceeds to live as three different persons. At the beginning (and at the end) of his poem “Memory” Gumilyov says that, unlike snakes, we change souls, not bodies:

Только змеи сбрасывают кожи,

Чтоб душа старела и росла.

Мы, увы, со змеями не схожи,

Мы меняем души, не тела.

Only snakes shed their skin,

So their souls can age and grow.

We, alas, do not resemble snakes,

We change souls, not bodies.

In his poem *Prorok* (“The Prophet,” 1926) Pushkin mentions *zhalo mudryya zmei* (the sting of a wise serpent):

И он к устам моим приник,

И вырвал грешный мой язык,

И празднословный, и лукавый,

И жало мудрыя змеи

В уста замершие мои

Вложил десницею кровавой.

And then he [the six-winged seraph] bent down towards my mouth,

My sinful tongue he ripped right out-

Its slander and its idle lies-

And with his bloody hand inserted

Between my still and lifeless lips

The sting of a wise serpent.

Pushkin’s poem ends in the lines:

Как труп в пустыне я лежал,

И Бога глас ко мне воззвал:

"Восстань, пророк, и виждь, и внемли,

Исполнись волею моей,

И, обходя моря и земли,

Глаголом жги сердца людей".

Corpse-like I lay upon the sand

And then God's voice called out to me:

"Arise, O Prophet, watch and hark,

Fulfill all my commands:

Go forth now over sea and land,

And with your word ignite men's hearts.

*Morya i zemli* (sea and land) in the penultimate line bring to mind Kinbote’s Zembla, a distant northern land.

Alexey Sklyarenko