Describing his dialogue over the dorophone (hydraulic telephone) with his secretary, Van Veen (the narrator and main character in VN’s novel *Ada*, 1969) mentions *la durée*:

At this point, as in a well-constructed play larded with comic relief, the brass campophone buzzed and not only did the radiators start to cluck but the uncapped soda water fizzed in sympathy.

Van (crossly): ‘I don’t understand the first word... What’s that? *L’adorée?* Wait a second’ (to Lucette). ‘Please, stay where you are.’ (Lucette whispers a French child-word with two ‘p’s.). ‘Okay’ (pointing toward the corridor). ‘Sorry, Polly. Well, is it *l’adorée?* No? Give me the context. Ah — *la durée. La durée* is not... sin on what? Synonymous with duration. Aha. Sorry again, I must stopper that orgiastic soda. Hold the line.’ (Yells down the ‘cory door,’ as they called the long second-floor passage at Ardis.) ‘Lucette, *let* it run over, who cares!’

He poured himself another glass of brandy and for a ridiculous moment could not remember what the hell he had been — yes, the polliphone.

It had died, but buzzed as soon as he recradled the receiver, and Lucette knocked discreetly at the same time.

*‘La durée...* For goodness sake, come in without knocking... No, Polly, knocking does not concern you — it’s my little cousin. All right. *La durée* is not synonymous with duration, being saturated — yes, as in Saturday — with that particular philosopher’s thought. What’s wrong now? You don’t know if it’s *dorée* or *durée?* D, U, R. I thought you knew French. Oh, I see. So long.

‘My typist, a trivial but always available blonde, could not make out *durée* in my quite legible hand because, she says, she knows French, but not scientific French.’

‘Actually,’ observed Lucette, wiping the long envelope which a drop of soda had stained, ‘Bergson is only for very young people or very unhappy people, such as this available *rousse.’*

‘Spotting Bergson,’ said the assistant lecher, ‘rates a B minus *dans ton petit cas,* hardly more. Or shall I reward you with a kiss on your *krestik —* whatever that is?’

Wincing and rearranging his legs, our young Vandemonian cursed under his breath the condition in which the image of the four embers of a vixen’s cross had now solidly put him. One of the synonyms of ‘condition’ is ‘state,’ and the adjective ‘human’ may be construed as ‘manly’ (since L’Humanité means ‘Mankind’!), and that’s how, my dears, Lowden recently translated the title of the *malheureux* Pompier’s cheap novel *La Condition Humaine,* wherein, incidentally, the term ‘Vandemonian’ is hilariously glossed as *‘Koulak tasmanien d’origine hollandaise.’* Kick her out before it is too late.

‘If you are serious,’ said Lucette, passing her tongue over her lips and slitting her darkening eyes, ‘then, my darling, you can do it now. But if you are making fun of me, then you’re an abominably cruel Vandemonian.’

‘Come, come, Lucette, it means "little cross" in Russian, that’s all, what else? Is it some amulet? You mentioned just now a little red stud or pawn. Is it something you wear, or used to wear, on a chainlet round your neck? a small acorn of coral, the *glandulella* of vestals in ancient Rome? What’s the matter, my dear?’ (2.5)

In *Opravdanie svobody* (“Justification of Freedom,” 1924), a review of Berdyaev’s book *Filosofiya neravenstva* (“The Philosophy of Inequality,” 1924), Zinaida Hippius mentions Bergson’s *la durée* and renders it as *dlenye*:

Революция не имеет *дленья* (la durée, по Бергсону), и когда мы говорим о «революции» – мы говорим, в сущности, о временах, окружающих этот миг; о времени «послереволюционном», о революционных «эпохах»… Отсюда и споры, когда именно, какая революция кончилась. Споры неразрешимые, ибо революция есть реальное, но неуследимое мгновенье.

According to Hippius, Revolution has no *dlenye*. Describing the difference between Terra and Antiterra (aka Demonia, Earth’s twin planet on which *Ada* is set), Van mentions Revolution:

Revelation can be more perilous than Revolution. Sick minds identified the notion of a Terra planet with that of another world and this ‘Other World’ got confused not only with the ‘Next World’ but with the Real World in us and beyond us. *Our* enchanters, *our* demons, are noble iridescent creatures with translucent talons and mightily beating wings; but in the eighteen-sixties the New Believers urged one to imagine a sphere where our splendid friends had been utterly degraded, had become nothing but vicious monsters, disgusting devils, with the black scrota of carnivora and the fangs of serpents, revilers and tormentors of female souls; while on the opposite side of the cosmic lane a rainbow mist of angelic spirits, inhabitants of sweet Terra, restored all the stalest but still potent myths of old creeds, with rearrangement for melodeon of all the cacophonies of all the divinities and divines ever spawned in the marshes of this our sufficient world.

Sufficient for your purpose, Van, *entendons-nous.* (Note in the margin.) (1.3)

The phenomenon of Terra appeared on Demonia after the L disaster in the middle of the 19th century:

The details of the L disaster (and I do not mean Elevated) in the *beau milieu* of last century, which had the singular effect of both causing and cursing the notion of ‘Terra,’ are too well-known historically, and too obscene spiritually, to be treated at length in a book addressed to young laymen and lemans — and not to grave men or gravemen.

Of course, today, after great anti-L years of reactionary delusion have gone by (more or less!) and our sleek little machines, Faragod bless them, hum again after a fashion, as they did in the first half of the nineteenth century, the mere geographic aspect of the affair possesses its redeeming comic side, like those patterns of brass marquetry, and bric-à-Braques, and the ormolu horrors that meant ‘art’ to our humorless forefathers. (ibid.)

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): Faragod: apparently, the god of electricity.

After the L disaster electricity (“the unmentionable magnetic power”) was banned on Antiterra. *Elektrichestvo* (“Electricity,” 1901) is a poem (quoted by Merezhkovski in “Tolstoy and Dostoevski,” 1902) by Zinaida Hippius:

Две нити вместе свиты,

Концы обнажены.

То «да» и «нет», — не слиты,

Не слиты — сплетены.

Их тёмное сплетенье

И тесно, и мертво.

Но ждет их воскресенье,

И ждут они его.

Концов концы коснутся —

Другие «да» и «нет»,

И «да» и «нет» проснутся,

Сплетённые сольются,

И смерть их будет — Свет.

Two wires are wrapped together,

The loose ends naked, exposed

A yes and no, not united,

Not united, but juxtaposed.

A dark, dark juxtaposition --

So close together, dead.

But resurrection awaits them;

And they await what waits ahead.

End will meet end in touching

Yes -- no, left and right,

The yes and no awakening,

Inseparably uniting

And their death will be - Light.

The Antiterran L disaster seems to correspond to the mock execution of Dostoevski and the Petrashevskians on Jan. 3, 1850 (NS), in our world. In her poem *Otdykh* (“Rest,” 1914) Zinaida Hippius compares words to *pena* (foam) and twice repeats the word *dlenye* (duration):

Слова — как пена,
Невозвратимы и ничтожны.
Слова — измена,
Когда молитвы невозможны.

Пусть длится дленье.
Не я безмолвие нарушу.
Но исцеленье
Сойдёт ли в замкнутую душу?

Я знаю, надо
Сейчас молчанью покориться.
Но в том отрада,
Что дление не вечно длится.

Words are like foam,

irrevocable and insignificant.

Words are a treason,

When prayers are impossible.

Let the duration last.

Not I will break the silence.

But will the healing come

unto the locked soul?

I know I should now

submit to silence.

But there is a comfort in the fact

that the duration won’t last forever.

*Pen pan* (“Master of Foams,” 1912) is a poem by Velimir Khlebnikov. In VN’s novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) Sebastian’s half-brother V. (the narrator and main character) mentions the futurist poet Alexis Pan and his wife Larissa (whom young Sebastian accompanied in their tour to the East). In Manhattan (aka Man, the Antiterran name of New York) Van lives in Cordula’s former apartment on Alexis Avenue. According to Van, he was about to move to Manhattan when he received an unexpected dorophone call from his half-sister Lucette:

Van Veen [as also, in his small way, the editor of *Ada*] liked to change his abode at the end of a section or chapter or even paragraph, and he had almost finished a difficult bit dealing with the divorce between time and the contents of time (such as action on matter, in space, and the nature of space itself) and was contemplating moving to Manhattan (that kind of switch being a reflection of mental rubrication rather than a concession to some farcical ‘influence of environment’ endorsed by Marx *père,* the popular author of ‘historical’ plays), when he received an unexpected dorophone call which for a moment affected violently his entire pulmonary and systemic circulation.

Nobody, not even his father, knew that Van had recently bought Cordula’s penthouse apartment between Manhattan’s Library and Park. Besides its being the perfect place to work in, with that terrace of scholarly seclusion suspended in a celestial void, and that noisy but convenient city lapping below at the base of his mind’s invulnerable rock, it was, in fashionable parlance, a ‘bachelor’s folly’ where he could secretly entertain any girl or girls he pleased. (One of them dubbed it ‘your wing *à terre’).* But he was still in his rather dingy Chose-like rooms at Kingston when he consented to Lucette’s visiting him on that bright November afternoon. (2.5)

At the beginning of Leo Tolstoy’s story *Posle bala* (“After the Ball,” 1903) the narrator mentions *sreda* (environment) and says that its influence is not as important as that of *sluchay* (chance):

— Вот вы говорите, что человек не может сам по себе понять, что хорошо, что дурно, что всё дело в среде, что среда заедает. А я думаю, что всё дело в случае. Я вот про себя скажу.

“And you say that a man cannot, of himself, understand what is good and evil; that it is all environment, that the environment swamps the man. But I believe it is all chance. Take my own case . . . ”

In his MS poem *O skol’ko nam otkrytiy chudnykh…* (“O how many wondrous discoveries…”  1829) Pushkin mentions *Opyt, syn oshibok trudnykh* (Experience, the son of difficult errors), *Geniy, Paradoksov drug* (Genius, a friend of Paradox) and *Sluchay, bog* *izobretatel’* (Chance, the inventor god):

О сколько нам открытий чудных
Готовят просвещенья дух
И Опыт, [сын] ошибок трудных,
И Гений, [Парадоксов] друг,
[И Случай, бог изобретатель]

O how many wondrous discoveries

the spirit of Enlightenment prepares for us

and Experience, [the son] of difficult errors,

and Genius, a friend of [Paradox],

[and Chance, the inventor god]

Berdyaev is the author of *Opyt paradoksal’noy etiki* (“An Attempt of Paradoxical Ethics,” 1931) and *Opyt eskhatologicheskoy metafiziki* (“An Attempt of Eschatological Metaphysics,” 1947). In the epilogue of *Ada* Van mentions the crowning paradox of our boxed brain’s eschatologies:

I had a schoolmate called Vanda. And *I* knew a girl called Adora, little thing in my last floramor. What makes me see that bit as the purest *sanglot* in the book? What is the worst part of dying?

For you realize there are three facets to it (roughly corresponding to the popular tripartition of Time). There is, first, the wrench of relinquishing forever all one’s memories — that’s a commonplace, but what courage man must have had to go through that commonplace again and again and not give up the rigmarole of accumulating again and again the riches of consciousness that will be snatched away! Then we have the second facet — the hideous physical pain — for obvious reasons let us not dwell upon that. And finally, there is the featureless pseudo-future, blank and black, an everlasting nonlastingness, the crowning paradox of our boxed brain’s eschatologies! (5.6)

Van arrives at the site of his duel with Captain Tapper in Paradox, his second’s cheap ‘semi-racer:’

He shaved, disposed of two blood-stained safety blades by leaving them in a massive bronze ashtray, had a structurally perfect stool, took a quick bath, briskly dressed, left his bag with the concierge, paid his bill and at six punctually squeezed himself next to blue-chinned and malodorous Johnny into the latter’s Paradox, a cheap “semi-racer.” For two or three miles they skirted the dismal bank of the lake—coal piles, shacks, boat-houses, a long strip of black pebbly mud and, in the distance, over the curving bank of autumnally misted water, the tawny fumes of tremendous factories.

“Where are we now, Johnny dear?” asked Van as they swung out of the lake’s orbit and sped along a suburban avenue with clapboard cottages among laundry-linked pines.

“Dorofey Road,” cried the driver above the din of the motor. “It abuts at the forest.”

It abutted. Van felt a faint twinge in his knee where he had hit it against a stone when attacked from behind a week ago, in another wood. At the moment his foot touched the pine-needle strewn earth of the forest road, a transparent white butterfly floated past, and with utter certainty Van knew that he had only a few minutes to live. (1.42)

In the Kalugano hospital (where he recovers after his duel with Tapper) Van meets Tatiana, a remarkably pretty and proud young nurse, and Dorofey, a beefy-handed male nurse. At the beginning of his fable *Vorchun Dorofey* (“The Grumbler Dorofey,” 1860) Kurochkin mentions *kapital* (the capital):

Наживая грехом
Капитал,
Иногда я тайком
Размышлял:
«Всё бы ладно: житьё!
Гладкий путь...
Только совесть... её
Как надуть?»

Making sinfully

Capital,

Sometimes secretly

I mused:

“All is well: my life

is a smooth way.

Only my conscience…

How can one dupe it?”

*Das Kapital* (“Capital,” 1867-83) is the main work of Karl Marx (cf. Marx *père*). In VN’s story *Soglyadatay* (“The Eye,” 1930) Smurov (the narrator and main character) says: “everything is vacillating, everything is due to chance, and vain have been the efforts of that ramshackle and grumbling bourgeois in Victorian check trousers, who wrote the obscure work called 'Capital' — a fruit of insomnia and megrim.”

In Kurochkin’s fable Dorofey is the name of the author’s conscience. At Chose (Van’s English University) Van wrestles with his conscience before accepting a cardsharp’s offer:

Van fumed and fretted the rest of the morning, and after a long soak in a hot bath (the best adviser, and prompter and inspirer in the world, except, of course, the W.C. seat) decided to pen — pen is the word — a note of apology to the cheated cheater. As he was dressing, a messenger brought him a note from Lord C. (he was a cousin of one of Van’s Riverlane schoolmates), in which generous Dick proposed to substitute for his debt an introduction to the Venus Villa Club to which his whole clan belonged. Such a bounty no boy of eighteen could hope to obtain. It was a ticket to paradise. Van tussled with his slightly overweight conscience (both grinning like old pals in their old gymnasium) — and accepted Dick’s offer. (1.28)

“Pen is the word” brings to mind Byron’s pun at the end of *Beppo* (1818), “my pen is at the bottom of a page.” *Sovest’* (conscience) rhymes with *povest’* (tale). In a letter of March 7 (?), 1826, to Pletnyov Pushkin calls his poem *Graf Nulin* (“Count Null,” 1825) *povest’ v* *rode* Beppo (“a tale in the genre of *Beppo*”):

Знаешь ли? уж если печатать что, так возьмемся за Цыганов. Надеюсь, что брат по крайней мере их перепишет — а ты пришли рукопись ко мне — я доставлю предисловие и м. б. примечания — и с рук долой. А то всякой раз, как я об них подумаю или прочту слово в журн., у меня кровь портится — в собрании же моих поэм для новинки поместим мы другую повесть в роде Верро, которая у меня в запасе.

According to Pushkin, he wrote “Count Nulin” in two mornings, on Dec. 13-14, 1825:

В конце 1825 года находился я в деревне. Перечитывая «Лукрецию», довольно слабую поэму Шекспира, я подумал: что если б Лукреции пришла в голову мысль дать пощечину Тарквинию? быть может, это охладило б его предприимчивость и он со стыдом принужден был отступить? Лукреция б не зарезалась. Публикола не взбесился бы, Брут не изгнал бы царей, и мир и история мира были бы не те.

Итак, республикою, консулами, диктаторами, Катонами, Кесарем мы обязаны соблазнительному происшествию, подобному тому, которое случилось недавно в моем соседстве, в Новоржевском уезде.

Мысль пародировать историю и Шекспира мне представилась. Я не мог воспротивиться двойному искушению и в два утра написал эту повесть.

Я имею привычку на моих бумагах выставлять год и число. «Граф Нулин» писан 13 и 14 декабря. Бывают странные сближения.

The Decembrist insurrection took place on Dec. 14, 1825. One of the five hanged Decembrists was Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin (1801-26). Zinaida Hippius’s cousin Vladimir (VN’s Russian literature teacher at the Tenishev school) wrote under the penname Bestuzhev. In the Russian version of his autobiography, *Drugie berega* (“Other Shores,” 1954), VN describes his romance with Tamara and mentions Vladimir Vasilievich Hippius who often rang up from school to learn the truth about his pupil’s failing health:

Мы пропускали школу: не помню, как устраивалась Тамара; я же подкупал нашего швейцара Устина, заведовавшего нижним телефоном (24--43), и Владимир Васильевич Гиппиус, часто звонивший из школы, чтобы справиться о моём пошатнувшемся здоровье, не видал меня в классе, скажем, с понедельника до пятницы, а во вторник я опять начинал болеть. (Chapter Eleven, 1)

According to VN, Vladimir Hippius, a first-rate though somewhat esoteric poet, surpassed in talent his much better-known cousin Zinaida Hippius, woman poet and critic. (*Speak, Memory*, Chapter Twelve, 2)

The name Kurochkin comes from *kurochka* (little hen, pullet) and brings to mind *poule*, as Demon Veen (Van’s and Ada’s father) calls Cordula de Prey:

Demon, flaunting his flair, desired to be told if Van or his *poule* had got into trouble with the police (nodding toward Jim or John who having some other delivery to make sat glancing through Crime Copulate Bessarmenia).

*‘Poule,’* replied Van with the evasive taciturnity of the Roman rabbi shielding Barabbas.

‘Why gray?’ asked Demon, alluding to Van’s overcoat. ‘Why that military cut? It’s too late to enlist.’

‘I couldn’t — my draft board would turn me down anyway.’

‘How’s the wound?’

*‘Komsi-komsa.* It now appears that the Kalugano surgeon messed up his job. The rip seam has grown red and raw, without any reason, and there’s a lump in my armpit. I’m in for another spell of surgery — this time in London, where butchers carve so much better. Where’s the *mestechko* here? Oh, I see it. Cute (a gentian painted on one door, a lady fern on the other: have to go to the herbarium).’ (2.1)

When Van visits Philip Rack (Lucette’s music teacher who was poisoned by his jealous wife) in Ward Five of the Kalugano hospital, Dorofey reads the Russian-language newspaper *Golos (Logos)*:

That day came soon enough. After a long journey down corridors where pretty little things tripped by, shaking thermometers, and first an ascent and then a descent in two different lifts, the second of which was very capacious with a metal-handled black lid propped against its wall and bits of holly or laurel here and there on the soap-smelling floor, Dorofey, like Onegin’s coachman, said *priehali* (‘we have arrived’) and gently propelled Van, past two screened beds, toward a third one near the window. There he left Van, while he seated himself at a small table in the door corner and leisurely unfolded the Russian-language newspaper *Golos (Logos)…*

…Van drew in his useless weapon. Controlling himself, he thumped it against the footboard of his wheelchair. Dorofey glanced up from his paper, then went back to the article that engrossed him — ‘A Clever Piggy (from the memoirs of an animal trainer),’ or else ‘The Crimean War: Tartar Guerillas Help Chinese Troops.’ A diminutive nurse simultaneously stepped out from behind the farther screen and disappeared again. (1.42)

In his essay *V zashchitu A. Bloka* (“In Defense of A. Blok,” 1931) Berdyaev points out that poetry’s greatest and most painful problem is that it is only in a very small degree connected with Logos:

Это есть самая большая и мучи­тельная проблема поэзии: она лишь в очень малой степени причастна Логосу, она причастна Космосу.

According to Berdyaev, poetry is connected with Cosmos. To Dick’s question “what on earth is an artist” Van replies “an underground observatory:”

‘I say, Dick, ever met a gambler in the States called Plunkett? Bald gray chap when I knew him.’

‘Plunkett? Plunkett? Must have been before my time. Was he the one who turned priest or something? Why?’

‘One of my father’s pals. Great artist.’

‘Artist?’

‘Yes, artist. I’m an artist. I suppose *you* think you’re an artist. Many people do.’

‘What on earth is an artist?’

‘An underground observatory,’ replied Van promptly.

‘That’s out of some modem novel,’ said Dick, discarding his cigarette after a few avid inhales.

‘That’s out of Van Veen,’ said Van Veen. (1.28)

When Andrey Vinelander (Ada’s husband) falls ill, his sister Dorothy reads to him old issues of *Golos Feniksa* (“The Phoenix Voice,” a Russian-language newspaper in Arizona, 3.8). *Golos iz khora* (“A Voice from Choir,” 1910-14) is a poem by Alexander Blok, the author of *Sirin i Alkonost, ptitsy radosti i pechali* (“Sirin and Alkonost, the Birds of Joy and Sorrow,” 1899). Sirin was VN’s Russian nom de plume. Like Sirin, *Feniks* (Russ., Phoenix) is a fairy-tale bird. In her essay *Nabokov i ego Lolita* (“Nabokov and his *Lolita*,” 1959) and Describing his dialogue over the dorophone (hydraulic telephone) with his secretary, Van Veen (the narrator and main character in VN’s novel *Ada*, 1969) mentions *la durée*:

At this point, as in a well-constructed play larded with comic relief, the brass campophone buzzed and not only did the radiators start to cluck but the uncapped soda water fizzed in sympathy.

Van (crossly): ‘I don’t understand the first word... What’s that? *L’adorée?* Wait a second’ (to Lucette). ‘Please, stay where you are.’ (Lucette whispers a French child-word with two ‘p’s.). ‘Okay’ (pointing toward the corridor). ‘Sorry, Polly. Well, is it *l’adorée?* No? Give me the context. Ah — *la durée. La durée* is not... sin on what? Synonymous with duration. Aha. Sorry again, I must stopper that orgiastic soda. Hold the line.’ (Yells down the ‘cory door,’ as they called the long second-floor passage at Ardis.) ‘Lucette, *let* it run over, who cares!’

He poured himself another glass of brandy and for a ridiculous moment could not remember what the hell he had been — yes, the polliphone.

It had died, but buzzed as soon as he recradled the receiver, and Lucette knocked discreetly at the same time.

*‘La durée...* For goodness sake, come in without knocking... No, Polly, knocking does not concern you — it’s my little cousin. All right. *La durée* is not synonymous with duration, being saturated — yes, as in Saturday — with that particular philosopher’s thought. What’s wrong now? You don’t know if it’s *dorée* or *durée?* D, U, R. I thought you knew French. Oh, I see. So long.

‘My typist, a trivial but always available blonde, could not make out *durée* in my quite legible hand because, she says, she knows French, but not scientific French.’

‘Actually,’ observed Lucette, wiping the long envelope which a drop of soda had stained, ‘Bergson is only for very young people or very unhappy people, such as this available *rousse.’*

‘Spotting Bergson,’ said the assistant lecher, ‘rates a B minus *dans ton petit cas,* hardly more. Or shall I reward you with a kiss on your *krestik —* whatever that is?’

Wincing and rearranging his legs, our young Vandemonian cursed under his breath the condition in which the image of the four embers of a vixen’s cross had now solidly put him. One of the synonyms of ‘condition’ is ‘state,’ and the adjective ‘human’ may be construed as ‘manly’ (since L’Humanité means ‘Mankind’!), and that’s how, my dears, Lowden recently translated the title of the *malheureux* Pompier’s cheap novel *La Condition Humaine,* wherein, incidentally, the term ‘Vandemonian’ is hilariously glossed as *‘Koulak tasmanien d’origine hollandaise.’* Kick her out before it is too late.

‘If you are serious,’ said Lucette, passing her tongue over her lips and slitting her darkening eyes, ‘then, my darling, you can do it now. But if you are making fun of me, then you’re an abominably cruel Vandemonian.’

‘Come, come, Lucette, it means "little cross" in Russian, that’s all, what else? Is it some amulet? You mentioned just now a little red stud or pawn. Is it something you wear, or used to wear, on a chainlet round your neck? a small acorn of coral, the *glandulella* of vestals in ancient Rome? What’s the matter, my dear?’ (2.5)

In *Opravdanie svobody* (“Justification of Freedom,” 1924), a review of Berdyaev’s book *Filosofiya neravenstva* (“The Philosophy of Inequality,” 1924), Zinaida Hippius mentions Bergson’s *la durée* and renders it as *dlenye*:

Революция не имеет *дленья* (la durée, по Бергсону), и когда мы говорим о «революции» – мы говорим, в сущности, о временах, окружающих этот миг; о времени «послереволюционном», о революционных «эпохах»… Отсюда и споры, когда именно, какая революция кончилась. Споры неразрешимые, ибо революция есть реальное, но неуследимое мгновенье.

According to Hippius, Revolution has no *dlenye*. Describing the difference between Terra and Antiterra (aka Demonia, Earth’s twin planet on which *Ada* is set), Van mentions Revolution:

Revelation can be more perilous than Revolution. Sick minds identified the notion of a Terra planet with that of another world and this ‘Other World’ got confused not only with the ‘Next World’ but with the Real World in us and beyond us. *Our* enchanters, *our* demons, are noble iridescent creatures with translucent talons and mightily beating wings; but in the eighteen-sixties the New Believers urged one to imagine a sphere where our splendid friends had been utterly degraded, had become nothing but vicious monsters, disgusting devils, with the black scrota of carnivora and the fangs of serpents, revilers and tormentors of female souls; while on the opposite side of the cosmic lane a rainbow mist of angelic spirits, inhabitants of sweet Terra, restored all the stalest but still potent myths of old creeds, with rearrangement for melodeon of all the cacophonies of all the divinities and divines ever spawned in the marshes of this our sufficient world.

Sufficient for your purpose, Van, *entendons-nous.* (Note in the margin.) (1.3)

The phenomenon of Terra appeared on Demonia after the L disaster in the middle of the 19th century:

The details of the L disaster (and I do not mean Elevated) in the *beau milieu* of last century, which had the singular effect of both causing and cursing the notion of ‘Terra,’ are too well-known historically, and too obscene spiritually, to be treated at length in a book addressed to young laymen and lemans — and not to grave men or gravemen.

Of course, today, after great anti-L years of reactionary delusion have gone by (more or less!) and our sleek little machines, Faragod bless them, hum again after a fashion, as they did in the first half of the nineteenth century, the mere geographic aspect of the affair possesses its redeeming comic side, like those patterns of brass marquetry, and bric-à-Braques, and the ormolu horrors that meant ‘art’ to our humorless forefathers. (ibid.)

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): Faragod: apparently, the god of electricity.

After the L disaster electricity (“the unmentionable magnetic power”) was banned on Antiterra. *Elektrichestvo* (“Electricity,” 1901) is a poem (quoted by Merezhkovski in “Tolstoy and Dostoevski,” 1902) by Zinaida Hippius:

Две нити вместе свиты,

Концы обнажены.

То «да» и «нет», — не слиты,

Не слиты — сплетены.

Их тёмное сплетенье

И тесно, и мертво.

Но ждет их воскресенье,

И ждут они его.

Концов концы коснутся —

Другие «да» и «нет»,

И «да» и «нет» проснутся,

Сплетённые сольются,

И смерть их будет — Свет.

Two wires are wrapped together,

The loose ends naked, exposed

A yes and no, not united,

Not united, but juxtaposed.

A dark, dark juxtaposition --

So close together, dead.

But resurrection awaits them;

And they await what waits ahead.

End will meet end in touching

Yes -- no, left and right,

The yes and no awakening,

Inseparably uniting

And their death will be - Light.

The Antiterran L disaster seems to correspond to the mock execution of Dostoevski and the Petrashevskians on Jan. 3, 1850 (NS), in our world. In her poem *Otdykh* (“Rest,” 1914) Zinaida Hippius compares words to *pena* (foam) and twice repeats the word *dlenye* (duration):

Слова — как пена,
Невозвратимы и ничтожны.
Слова — измена,
Когда молитвы невозможны.

Пусть длится дленье.
Не я безмолвие нарушу.
Но исцеленье
Сойдёт ли в замкнутую душу?

Я знаю, надо
Сейчас молчанью покориться.
Но в том отрада,
Что дление не вечно длится.

Words are like foam,

irrevocable and insignificant.

Words are a treason,

When prayers are impossible.

Let the duration last.

Not I will break the silence.

But will the healing come

unto the locked soul?

I know I should now

submit to silence.

But there is a comfort in the fact

that the duration won’t last forever.

*Pen pan* (“Master of Foams,” 1912) is a poem by Velimir Khlebnikov. In VN’s novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) Sebastian’s half-brother V. (the narrator and main character) mentions the futurist poet Alexis Pan and his wife Larissa (whom young Sebastian accompanied in their tour to the East). In Manhattan (aka Man, the Antiterran name of New York) Van lives in Cordula’s former apartment on Alexis Avenue. According to Van, he was about to move to Manhattan when he received an unexpected dorophone call from his half-sister Lucette:

Van Veen [as also, in his small way, the editor of *Ada*] liked to change his abode at the end of a section or chapter or even paragraph, and he had almost finished a difficult bit dealing with the divorce between time and the contents of time (such as action on matter, in space, and the nature of space itself) and was contemplating moving to Manhattan (that kind of switch being a reflection of mental rubrication rather than a concession to some farcical ‘influence of environment’ endorsed by Marx *père,* the popular author of ‘historical’ plays), when he received an unexpected dorophone call which for a moment affected violently his entire pulmonary and systemic circulation.

Nobody, not even his father, knew that Van had recently bought Cordula’s penthouse apartment between Manhattan’s Library and Park. Besides its being the perfect place to work in, with that terrace of scholarly seclusion suspended in a celestial void, and that noisy but convenient city lapping below at the base of his mind’s invulnerable rock, it was, in fashionable parlance, a ‘bachelor’s folly’ where he could secretly entertain any girl or girls he pleased. (One of them dubbed it ‘your wing *à terre’).* But he was still in his rather dingy Chose-like rooms at Kingston when he consented to Lucette’s visiting him on that bright November afternoon. (2.5)

At the beginning of Leo Tolstoy’s story *Posle bala* (“After the Ball,” 1903) the narrator mentions *sreda* (environment) and says that its influence is not as important as that of *sluchay* (chance):

— Вот вы говорите, что человек не может сам по себе понять, что хорошо, что дурно, что всё дело в среде, что среда заедает. А я думаю, что всё дело в случае. Я вот про себя скажу.

“And you say that a man cannot, of himself, understand what is good and evil; that it is all environment, that the environment swamps the man. But I believe it is all chance. Take my own case . . . ”

In his MS poem *O skol’ko nam otkrytiy chudnykh…* (“O how many wondrous discoveries…”  1829) Pushkin mentions *Opyt, syn oshibok trudnykh* (Experience, the son of difficult errors), *Geniy, Paradoksov drug* (Genius, a friend of Paradox) and *Sluchay, bog* *izobretatel’* (Chance, the inventor god):

О сколько нам открытий чудных
Готовят просвещенья дух
И Опыт, [сын] ошибок трудных,
И Гений, [Парадоксов] друг,
[И Случай, бог изобретатель]

O how many wondrous discoveries

the spirit of Enlightenment prepares for us

and Experience, [the son] of difficult errors,

and Genius, a friend of [Paradox],

[and Chance, the inventor god]

Berdyaev is the author of *Opyt paradoksal’noy etiki* (“An Attempt of Paradoxical Ethics,” 1931) and *Opyt eskhatologicheskoy metafiziki* (“An Attempt of Eschatological Metaphysics,” 1947). In the epilogue of *Ada* Van mentions the crowning paradox of our boxed brain’s eschatologies:

I had a schoolmate called Vanda. And *I* knew a girl called Adora, little thing in my last floramor. What makes me see that bit as the purest *sanglot* in the book? What is the worst part of dying?

For you realize there are three facets to it (roughly corresponding to the popular tripartition of Time). There is, first, the wrench of relinquishing forever all one’s memories — that’s a commonplace, but what courage man must have had to go through that commonplace again and again and not give up the rigmarole of accumulating again and again the riches of consciousness that will be snatched away! Then we have the second facet — the hideous physical pain — for obvious reasons let us not dwell upon that. And finally, there is the featureless pseudo-future, blank and black, an everlasting nonlastingness, the crowning paradox of our boxed brain’s eschatologies! (5.6)

Van arrives at the site of his duel with Captain Tapper in Paradox, his second’s cheap ‘semi-racer:’

He shaved, disposed of two blood-stained safety blades by leaving them in a massive bronze ashtray, had a structurally perfect stool, took a quick bath, briskly dressed, left his bag with the concierge, paid his bill and at six punctually squeezed himself next to blue-chinned and malodorous Johnny into the latter’s Paradox, a cheap “semi-racer.” For two or three miles they skirted the dismal bank of the lake—coal piles, shacks, boat-houses, a long strip of black pebbly mud and, in the distance, over the curving bank of autumnally misted water, the tawny fumes of tremendous factories.

“Where are we now, Johnny dear?” asked Van as they swung out of the lake’s orbit and sped along a suburban avenue with clapboard cottages among laundry-linked pines.

“Dorofey Road,” cried the driver above the din of the motor. “It abuts at the forest.”

It abutted. Van felt a faint twinge in his knee where he had hit it against a stone when attacked from behind a week ago, in another wood. At the moment his foot touched the pine-needle strewn earth of the forest road, a transparent white butterfly floated past, and with utter certainty Van knew that he had only a few minutes to live. (1.42)

In the Kalugano hospital (where he recovers after his duel with Tapper) Van meets Tatiana, a remarkably pretty and proud young nurse, and Dorofey, a beefy-handed male nurse. At the beginning of his fable *Vorchun Dorofey* (“The Grumbler Dorofey,” 1860) Kurochkin mentions *kapital* (the capital):

Наживая грехом
Капитал,
Иногда я тайком
Размышлял:
«Всё бы ладно: житьё!
Гладкий путь...
Только совесть... её
Как надуть?»

Making sinfully

Capital,

Sometimes secretly

I mused:

“Everything’s fine: my life

is a smooth way.

Only my conscience…

How can one dupe it?”

*Das Kapital* (“Capital,” 1867-83) is the main work of Karl Marx (cf. Marx *père*). In VN’s story *Soglyadatay* (“The Eye,” 1930) Smurov (the narrator and main character) says: “everything is vacillating, everything is due to chance, and vain have been the efforts of that ramshackle and grumbling bourgeois in Victorian check trousers, who wrote the obscure work called 'Capital' — a fruit of insomnia and megrim.”

In Kurochkin’s fable Dorofey is the name of the author’s conscience. At Chose (Van’s English University) Van wrestles with his conscience before accepting a cardsharp’s offer:

Van fumed and fretted the rest of the morning, and after a long soak in a hot bath (the best adviser, and prompter and inspirer in the world, except, of course, the W.C. seat) decided to pen — pen is the word — a note of apology to the cheated cheater. As he was dressing, a messenger brought him a note from Lord C. (he was a cousin of one of Van’s Riverlane schoolmates), in which generous Dick proposed to substitute for his debt an introduction to the Venus Villa Club to which his whole clan belonged. Such a bounty no boy of eighteen could hope to obtain. It was a ticket to paradise. Van tussled with his slightly overweight conscience (both grinning like old pals in their old gymnasium) — and accepted Dick’s offer. (1.28)

“Pen is the word” brings to mind Byron’s pun at the end of *Beppo* (1818), “my pen is at the bottom of a page.” *Sovest’* (conscience) rhymes with *povest’* (tale). In a letter of March 7 (?), 1826, to Pletnyov Pushkin calls his poem *Graf Nulin* (“Count Null,” 1825) *povest’ v* *rode* Beppo (“a tale in the genre of *Beppo*”):

Знаешь ли? уж если печатать что, так возьмемся за Цыганов. Надеюсь, что брат по крайней мере их перепишет — а ты пришли рукопись ко мне — я доставлю предисловие и м. б. примечания — и с рук долой. А то всякой раз, как я об них подумаю или прочту слово в журн., у меня кровь портится — в собрании же моих поэм для новинки поместим мы другую повесть в роде Верро, которая у меня в запасе.

According to Pushkin, he wrote “Count Nulin” in two mornings, on Dec. 13-14, 1825:

В конце 1825 года находился я в деревне. Перечитывая «Лукрецию», довольно слабую поэму Шекспира, я подумал: что если б Лукреции пришла в голову мысль дать пощечину Тарквинию? быть может, это охладило б его предприимчивость и он со стыдом принужден был отступить? Лукреция б не зарезалась. Публикола не взбесился бы, Брут не изгнал бы царей, и мир и история мира были бы не те.

Итак, республикою, консулами, диктаторами, Катонами, Кесарем мы обязаны соблазнительному происшествию, подобному тому, которое случилось недавно в моём соседстве, в Новоржевском уезде.

Мысль пародировать историю и Шекспира мне представилась. Я не мог воспротивиться двойному искушению и в два утра написал эту повесть.

Я имею привычку на моих бумагах выставлять год и число. «Граф Нулин» писан 13 и 14 декабря. Бывают странные сближения.

At the end of 1825 I was living in the country. Re-reading *Lucrece*, a rather weak poem of Shakespeare’s, I thought: what if it had occurred to Lucrece to slap Tarquin’s face? Maybe it would have cooled his boldness and he would have been obliged to withdraw, covered in confusion. Lucrece would not have stubbed herself, Publicola would not have been enraged, Brutus would not have driven out the kings, and the world and its history would have been different.

And so we owe the republic, the consuls, the dictators, the Catos, the Caesars to a seduction similar to one which took place recently in our neighborhood, in the Novorzhev district.

I was struck by the idea to parody both history and Shakespeare; I could not resist the double temptation and in two mornings had written this tale. I am accustomed to date my papers – *Count Nulin* was written on 13 and 14 December. History does repeat itself strangely.

The Decembrist insurrection took place on December 14, 1825. One of the five hanged Decembrists was Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin (1801-26). Zinaida Hippius’s cousin Vladimir (VN’s Russian literature teacher at the Tenishev school) wrote under the penname Bestuzhev. In the Russian version of his autobiography, *Drugie berega* (“Other Shores,” 1954), VN describes his romance with Tamara and mentions Vladimir Vasilievich Hippius who often rang up from school to learn the truth about his pupil’s failing health:

Мы пропускали школу: не помню, как устраивалась Тамара; я же подкупал нашего швейцара Устина, заведовавшего нижним телефоном (24--43), и Владимир Васильевич Гиппиус, часто звонивший из школы, чтобы справиться о моём пошатнувшемся здоровье, не видал меня в классе, скажем, с понедельника до пятницы, а во вторник я опять начинал болеть. (Chapter Eleven, 1)

We skipped school: I forget what Tamara’s procedure was; mine consisted of talking either of the two chauffeurs into dropping me at this or that corner on the way to school (both were good sports and actually refused to accept my gold—handy five-rouble pieces coming from the bank in appetizing, weighty sausages of ten or twenty shining pieces, in the aesthetic recollection of which I can freely indulge now that my proud émigré destitution is also a thing of the past). Nor had I any trouble with our wonderful, eminently bribable Ustin, who took the calls on our ground-floor telephone, the number of which was 24–43, *dvadtsat’ chetïre sorok tri;* he briskly replied I had a sore throat. I wonder, by the way, what would happen if I put in a long-distance call from my desk right now? No answer? No such number? No such country? Or the voice of Ustin saying “*moyo pochtenietse!”* (the ingratiating diminutive of “my respects”)? There exist, after all, well-publicized Slavs and Kurds who are well over one hundred and fifty. My father’s telephone in his study (584–51) was not listed, and my form master in his attempts to learn the truth about my failing health never got anywhere, though sometimes I missed three days in a row. (*Speak, Memory*, Chapter Twelve, 2)

According to VN, Vladimir Hippius surpassed in talent his much better-known cousin:

My Russian literature teacher at school, Vladimir Hippius, a first-rate though somewhat esoteric poet whom I greatly admired (he surpassed in talent, I think, his much better known cousin, Zinaïda Hippius, woman poet and critic) brought a copy [of VN’s first book of poetry] with him to class and provoked the delirious hilarity of the majority of my classmates by applying his fiery sarcasm (he was a fierce man with red hair) to my most romantic lines. His famous cousin at a session of the Literary Fund asked my father, its president, to tell me, please, that I would never, never be a writer. (ibid.)

The name Kurochkin comes from *kurochka* (little hen, pullet) and brings to mind *poule*, as Demon Veen (Van’s and Ada’s father) calls Cordula de Prey:

Demon, flaunting his flair, desired to be told if Van or his *poule* had got into trouble with the police (nodding toward Jim or John who having some other delivery to make sat glancing through Crime Copulate Bessarmenia).

*‘Poule,’* replied Van with the evasive taciturnity of the Roman rabbi shielding Barabbas.

‘Why gray?’ asked Demon, alluding to Van’s overcoat. ‘Why that military cut? It’s too late to enlist.’

‘I couldn’t — my draft board would turn me down anyway.’

‘How’s the wound?’

*‘Komsi-komsa.* It now appears that the Kalugano surgeon messed up his job. The rip seam has grown red and raw, without any reason, and there’s a lump in my armpit. I’m in for another spell of surgery — this time in London, where butchers carve so much better. Where’s the *mestechko* here? Oh, I see it. Cute (a gentian painted on one door, a lady fern on the other: have to go to the herbarium).’ (2.1)

When Van visits Philip Rack (Lucette’s music teacher who was poisoned by his jealous wife) in Ward Five of the Kalugano hospital, Dorofey reads the Russian-language newspaper *Golos (Logos)*:

That day came soon enough. After a long journey down corridors where pretty little things tripped by, shaking thermometers, and first an ascent and then a descent in two different lifts, the second of which was very capacious with a metal-handled black lid propped against its wall and bits of holly or laurel here and there on the soap-smelling floor, Dorofey, like Onegin’s coachman, said *priehali* (‘we have arrived’) and gently propelled Van, past two screened beds, toward a third one near the window. There he left Van, while he seated himself at a small table in the door corner and leisurely unfolded the Russian-language newspaper *Golos (Logos)…*

…Van drew in his useless weapon. Controlling himself, he thumped it against the footboard of his wheelchair. Dorofey glanced up from his paper, then went back to the article that engrossed him — ‘A Clever Piggy (from the memoirs of an animal trainer),’ or else ‘The Crimean War: Tartar Guerillas Help Chinese Troops.’ A diminutive nurse simultaneously stepped out from behind the farther screen and disappeared again. (1.42)

In his essay *V zashchitu A. Bloka* (“In Defense of A. Blok,” 1931) Berdyaev points out that poetry’s greatest and most painful problem is that it is only in a very small degree connected with Logos:

Это есть самая большая и мучи­тельная проблема поэзии: она лишь в очень малой степени причастна Логосу, она причастна Космосу.

According to Berdyaev, poetry is connected with Cosmos. To Dick’s question “what on earth is an artist” Van replies “an underground observatory:”

‘I say, Dick, ever met a gambler in the States called Plunkett? Bald gray chap when I knew him.’

‘Plunkett? Plunkett? Must have been before my time. Was he the one who turned priest or something? Why?’

‘One of my father’s pals. Great artist.’

‘Artist?’

‘Yes, artist. I’m an artist. I suppose *you* think you’re an artist. Many people do.’

‘What on earth is an artist?’

‘An underground observatory,’ replied Van promptly.

‘That’s out of some modem novel,’ said Dick, discarding his cigarette after a few avid inhales.

‘That’s out of Van Veen,’ said Van Veen. (1.28)

When Andrey Vinelander (Ada’s husband) falls ill, his sister Dorothy reads to him old issues of *Golos Feniksa* (“The Phoenix Voice,” a Russian-language newspaper in Arizona, 3.8). *Golos iz khora* (“A Voice from Choir,” 1910-14) is a poem by Alexander Blok, the author of *Sirin i Alkonost, ptitsy radosti i pechali* (“Sirin and Alkonost, the Birds of Joy and Sorrow,” 1899). Sirin was VN’s Russian nom de plume. Like Sirin, *Feniks* (Russ., Phoenix) is a fairy-tale bird. In her essay *Nabokov i ego Lolita* (“Nabokov and his *Lolita*,” 1959) Nina Berberova (the author of *Alexandre Blok et son* *temps*, 1947) compares VN to Phoenix and twice repeats the word “paradox:”

Робкая интуиция разъятого мира сквозит в первых попытках дать непрерывную текучесть сознания, одновременно с приоткрытыми неопытной, но сильной молодой рукой «шлюзами»; в то же время творческая основа уже начинает отсвечивать новой поэтикой в ритме, звуке, тоне произведения и ещё не совсем оперившийся Феникс пытается забить крылами. (1)

Все это происходит в мире, не имеющем никакого смысла, и вместе с тем — Набоков есть оправдание целого поколения. Быть может, это звучит как парадокс, но это не парадокс. (3)

Alexey Sklyarenko