In his Commentary to Shade’s poem Kinbote (who imagines that he is Charles the Beloved, the last self-exiled king of Zembla) mentions a seaside *situla* (“toy pail” in Zemblan):

His English tutor who, after a picnic in Mandevil Forest, was laid up with a sprained ankle, did not know where that circus might be; he advised looking for it in an old lumber room at the end of the West Gallery. Thither the Prince betook himself. That dusty black trunk? It looked grimly negative. The rain was more audible here owing to the proximity of a prolix gutter pipe. What about the closet? Its gilt key turned reluctantly. All three shelves and the space beneath were stuffed with disparate objects: a palette with the dregs of many sunsets; a cupful of counters; an ivory backscratcher, a thirty-twomo edition of *Timon of Athens* translated into Zemblan by his uncle Conmal, the Queen's brother; a seaside *situla* (toy pail); a sixty-five-carat blue diamond accidentally added in his childhood, from his late father's knickknackatory, to the pebbles and shells in that pail; a finger of chalk; and a square board with a design of interlaced figures for some long-forgotten game. He was about to look elsewhere in the closet when on trying to dislodge a piece of black velvet, one corner of which had unaccountably got caught behind the shelf, something gave, the shelf budged, proved removable, and revealed just under its farther edge, in the back of the closet, a keyhole to which the same gilt key was found to fit. (note to Line 130)

In his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1951) VN describes his childhood love for Colette (a playmate in Biarritz) and mentions Colette’s toy pail:

But when I met Colette, I knew at once that this was the real thing. Colette seemed to me so much stranger than all my other chance playmates at Biarritz! I somehow acquired the feeling that she was less happy than I, less loved. A bruise on her delicate, downy forearm gave rise to awful conjectures. “He pinches as bad as my mummy,” she said, speaking of a crab. I evolved various schemes to save her from her parents, who were “des bourgeois de Paris” as I heard somebody tell my mother with a slight shrug. I interpreted the disdain in my own fashion, as I knew that those people had come all the way from Paris in their blue-and-yellow limousine (a fashionable adventure in those days) but had drably sent Colette with her dog and governess by an ordinary coach-train. The dog was a female fox terrier with bells on her collar and a most waggly behind. From sheer exuberance, she would lap up salt water out of Colette’s toy pail. I remember the sail, the sunset and the lighthouse pictured on that pail, but I cannot recall the dog’s name, and this bothers me. (Chapter Seven, 3)

Describing his years in Cambridge, VN mentions English democrats in situ:

I soon became aware that if my views, the not unusual views of Russian democrats abroad, were received with pained surprise or polite sneers by English democrats in situ, another group, the English ultraconservatives, rallied eagerly to my side but did so from such crude reactionary motivation that I was only embarrassed by their despicable support. Indeed, I pride myself with having discerned even then the symptoms of what is so clear today, when a kind of family circle has gradually been formed, linking representatives of all nations, jolly empire-builders in their jungle clearings, French policemen, the unmentionable German product, the good old churchgoing Russian or Polish pogromshchik, the lean American lyncher, the man with the bad teeth who squirts antiminority stories in the bar or the lavatory, and, at another point of the same subhuman circle, those ruthless, paste-faced automatons in opulent John Held trousers and high-shouldered jackets, those Sitzriesen looming at all our conference tables, whom—or shall I say which?—the Soviet State began to export around 1945 after more than two decades of selective breeding and tailoring, during which men’s fashions abroad had had time to change, so that the symbol of infinitely available cloth could only provoke cruel derision (as occurred in postwar England when a famous Soviet team of professional soccer players happened to parade in mufti). (SM, Chapter Thirteen, 3)

At Cambridge VN was a goalkeeper of his college football team:

The literary set, Nesbit and his friends, while commending my nocturnal labors, frowned upon various other things I went in for, such as entomology, practical jokes, girls, and, especially, athletics. Of the games I played at Cambridge, soccer has remained a wind-swept clearing in the middle of a rather muddled period. I was crazy about goal keeping. In Russia and the Latin countries, that gallant art had been always surrounded with a halo of singular glamour. Aloof, solitary, impassive, the crack goalie is followed in the streets by entranced small boys. He vies with the matador and the flying ace as an object of thrilled adulation. His sweater, his peaked cap, his kneeguards, the gloves protruding from the hip pocket of his shorts, set him apart from the rest of the team. He is the lone eagle, the man of mystery, the last defender. Photographers, reverently bending one knee, snap him in the act of making a spectacular dive across the goal mouth to deflect with his fingertips a low, lightning-like shot, and the stadium roars in approval as he remains for a moment or two lying full length where he fell, his goal still intact. (Chapter Thirteen, 4)

In his Commentary Kinbote mentions a certain stupendous Dynamo goalkeeper whose mannerisms Niagarin (one of the two Soviet experts hired by the Zemblan government to find the crown jewels) could imitate to perfection:

However, not all Russians are gloomy, and the two young experts from Moscow whom our new government engaged to locate the Zemblan crown jewels turned out to be positively rollicking. The Extremists were right in believing that Baron Bland, the Keeper of the Treasure, had succeeded in hiding those jewels before he jumped or fell from the North Tower; but they did not know he had had a helper and were wrong in thinking the jewels must be looked for in the palace which the gentle white-haired Bland had never left except to die. I may add, with pardonable satisfaction, that they were, and still are, cached in a totally different - and quite unexpected - corner of Zembla.

In an earlier note (to line 130) the reader has already glimpsed those two treasure hunters at work. After the King's escape and the belated discovery of the secret passage, they continued their elaborate excavations until the palace was all honeycombed and partly demolished, an entire wall of one room collapsing one night, to yield, in a niche whose presence nobody had suspected, an ancient salt cellar of bronze and King Wigbert's drinking horn; but you will never find our crown, necklace and scepter.

All this is the rule of a supernal game, all this is the immutable fable of fate, and should not be construed as reflecting on the efficiency of the two Soviet experts - who, anyway, were to be marvelously successful on a later occasion with another job (see note to line 747). Their names (probably fictitious) were Andronnikov and Niagarin. One has seldom seen, at least among waxworks, a pair of more pleasant, presentable chaps. Everybody admired their clean-shaven jaws, elementary facial expressions, wavy hair, and perfect teeth. Tall handsome Andronnikov seldom smiled but the crinkly little rays of his orbital flesh bespoke infinite humor while the twin furrows descending from the sides of his shapely nostrils evoked glamorous associations with flying aces and sagebrush heroes. Niagarin, on the other hand, was of comparatively short stature, had somewhat more rounded, albeit quite manly features, and every now and then would flash a big boyish smile remindful of scoutmasters with something to hide, or those gentlemen who cheat in television quizzes. It was delightful to watch the two splendid Sovietchiks running about in the yard and kicking a chalk-dusty, thumping-tight soccer ball (looking so large and bald in such surroundings). Andronnikov could tap-play it on his toe up and down a dozen times before punting it rocket straight into the melancholy, surprised, bleached, harmless heavens: and Niagarin could imitate to perfection the mannerisms of a certain stupendous Dynamo goalkeeper. They used to hand out to the kitchen boys Russian caramels with plums or cherries depicted on the rich luscious six-cornered wrappers that enclosed a jacket of thinner paper with the mauve mummy inside; and lustful country girls were known to creep up along the drungen (bramble-choked footpaths) to the very foot of the bulwark when the two silhouetted against the now flushed sky sang beautiful sentimental military duets at eventide on the rampart. Niagarin had a soulful tenor voice, and Andronnikov a hearty baritone, and both wore elegant jackboots of soft black leather, and the sky turned away showing its ethereal vertebrae. (note to Line 681)

The characters in Dostoevski’s novel *Podrostok* (“The Adolescent,” 1875) include Andronikov, Versilov’s lawyer. In his speech on Dostoevski (delivered on the hundredth anniversary of the writer’s birth) Lunacharski takes the example of water, in order to explain Dostoevski’s treatment of man’s psyche. According to Lunacharski, to understand the dynamics of water, one must imagine a fantastic Niagara Falls, a hundred times more grandiose than the real one:

Чтобы понять, что делает Достоевский с психикой - возьмём хотя бы такой пример - вода. Для того, чтобы дать человеку полное представление о воде, заставить его объять все её свойства, надо ему показать воду, пар, лёд, разделить воду на составные части, показать, что такое тихое озеро, величаво катящая свои волны река, водопад, фонтан и проч. Словом - ему нужно показать все свойства, всю внутреннюю динамику воды. И, однако, этого всё-таки будет мало. Может быть, для того, чтобы понять динамику воды, нужно превысить данные возможности и фантастически представить человеку Ниагару, в сотню раз грандиознейшую, чем подлинная. Вот Достоевский и стремится превозмочь реальность и показать дух человеческий со всеми его неизмеримыми высотами и необъяснимыми глубинами со всех сторон. Как Микель Анджело скручивает человеческие тела в конвульсиях, в агонии, так Достоевский дух человеческий то раздувает до гиперболы, то сжимает до полного уничтожения, смешивает с грязью, низвергает его в глубины ада, то потом вдруг взмывает в самые высокие эмпиреи неба. Этими полётами человеческого духа Достоевский не только приковывает наше внимание, захватывает нас, открывает нам новые неизведанные красоты, но даёт очень много и нашему познанию, показывая нам неподозреваемые нами глубины души.

In the Russian version of his autobiography, *Drugie berega* (“Other Shores,” 1954), VN mentions Lunacharski (the minister of public education in Lenin’s government who made his mistress, a former circus horsewoman, the head of Soviet circuses):

Особенно меня раздражало отношение Бомстона к самому Ильичу, который, как известно всякому образованному русскому, был совершенный мещанин в своем отношении к искусству, знал Пушкина по Чайковскому и Белинскому и "не одобрял модернистов", причём под "модернистами" понимал Луначарского и каких-то шумных итальянцев; но для Бомстона и его друзей, столь тонко судивших о Донне и Хопкинсе, столь хорошо понимавших разные прелестные подробности в только что появившейся главе об искусе Леопольда Блума, наш убогий Ленин был чувствительнейшим, проницательнейшим знатоком и поборником новейших течений в литературе, и Бомстон только снисходительно улыбался, когда я, продолжая кричать, доказывал ему, что связь между передовым в политике и передовым в поэтике, связь чисто словесная (чем, конечно, радостно пользовалась советская пропаганда), и что на самом деле, чем радикальнее русский человек в своих политических взглядах, тем обыкновенно консервативнее он в художественных.

But the thing that irritated me perhaps most was Nesbit’s attitude toward Lenin himself. All cultured and discriminating Russians knew that this astute politician had about as much taste and interest in aesthetic matters as an ordinary Russian bourgeois of the Flaubertian épicier sort (the type that admired Pushkin on the strength of Chaykovski’s vile librettos, wept at the Italian opera, and was allured by any painting that told a story); but Nesbit and his highbrow friends saw in him a kind of sensitive, poetic-minded patron and promoter of the newest trends in art and would smile a superior smile when I tried to explain that the connection between advanced politics and advanced art was a purely verbal one (gleefully exploited by Soviet propaganda), and that the more radical a Russian was in politics, the more conservative he was on the artistic side. (Chapter Thirteen, 3)

“Nesbit” enters into a voluptuous palindromic association with “Ibsen:”

To some of the several fellow émigrés I met in Cambridge the general trend of my feelings was so obvious and familiar a thing that it would have fallen flat and seemed almost improper if put into words. With the whiter of those White Russians I soon found out that patriotism and politics boiled down to a snarling resentment which was directed more against Kerenski than against Lenin and which proceeded solely from material discomforts and losses. Then, too, I ran into some quite unexpected difficulties with such of my English acquaintances as were considered to be cultured and subtle, and humane, but who, for all their decency and refinement, would lapse into the most astonishing drivel when Russia was being discussed. I want to single out here a young Socialist I knew, a lanky giant whose slow and multiple manipulations of a pipe were horribly aggravating when you did not agree with him and delightfully soothing when you did. With him, I had many political wrangles, the bitterness of which invariably dissolved when we turned to the poets we both cherished. Today he is not unknown among his peers, which is, I readily admit, a pretty meaningless phrase, but then, I am doing my best to obscure his identity; let me refer to him by the name of “Nesbit” as I dubbed him (or affirm now having dubbed him), not only because of his alleged resemblance to early portraits of Maxim Gorki, a regional mediocrity of that era, one of whose first stories (“My Fellow Traveler”—another apt note) had been translated by a certain R. Nesbit Bain, but also because “Nesbit” has the advantage of entering into a voluptuous palindromic association with “Ibsen,” a name I shall have to evoke presently. (ibid.)

The epigraph to Alexander Blok’s poem *Vozmezdie* (“Retribution,” 1910-21), in which Dostoevski appears as a character, *Yunost’ – eto vozmezdie* (“Youth is retribution”), is from Ibsen’s play “The Master Builder” (1892). In his Foreword to “Retribution” Blok (who became Lunacharski’s secretary after the October Revolution) mentions those infinitely high qualities that once shone like *luchshie almazy v chelovecheskoy korone* (the best diamonds in man’s crown), such as humanism, virtues, impeccable honesty, rectitude, etc.:

Тема заключается в том, как развиваются звенья единой цепи рода. Отдельные отпрыски всякого рода развиваются до положенного им предела и затем вновь поглощаются окружающей мировой средой; но в каждом отпрыске зреет и отлагается нечто новое и нечто более острое, ценою бесконечных потерь, личных трагедий, жизненных неудач, падений и т. д.; ценою, наконец, потери тех бесконечно высоких свойств, которые в своё время сияли, как лучшие алмазы в человеческой короне (как, например, свойства гуманные, добродетели, безупречная честность, высокая нравственность и проч.)

In his speech (see the quote above) Lunacharski compares Dostoevski to Michelangelo (a sculptor who twists human bodies in convulsions, in agony). At the end of Pushkin’s *Mozart and Salieri* (1830) Salieri mentions Buonarotti:

                                         Ты заснёшь  
Надолго, Моцарт! Но ужель он прав,  
И я не гений? Гений и злодейство  
Две вещи несовместные. Неправда:  
А Бонаротти? Или это сказка  
Тупой, бессмысленной толпы — и не был  
Убийцею создатель Ватикана?

                    You will sleep  
For long, Mozart! But what if he is right?  
I am no genius? "Genius and evildoing  
Are incompatibles." That is not true:  
And Buonarotti?.. Or is it a legend  
Of the dull-witted, senseless crowd -- while really  
The Vatican's creator was no murderer? (scene II)

In Pushkin’s little tragedy Mozart uses the phrase *nikto b* (none would):

Когда бы все так чувствовали силу  
Гармонии! Но нет: тогда б не мог  
И мир существовать; никто б не стал  
Заботиться о нуждах низкой жизни;  
Все предались бы вольному искусству.

If only all so quickly felt the power  
of harmony! But no, in that event  
the world could not exist; none would care  
about the needs of ordinary life,  
all would give themselves to free art. (ibid.)

*Nikto b* is Botkin (Shade’s, Kinbote’s and Gradus’ “real” name) in reverse. An American scholar of Russian descent, Professor Vsevolod Botkin went mad and became Shade, Kinbote and Gradus (Shade’s murderer) after the tragic death of his daughter Nadezhda (Hazel Shade of Kinbote’s Commentary). There is a hope that, when Kinbote completes his work on Shade’s poem and commits suicide (on Oct. 19, 1959, the anniversary of Pushkin’s Lyceum), Botkin, like Count Vorontsov (a target of Pushkin’s epigrams, “half-milord, half-merchant, etc.”), will be full again.

situla + Karamzin = in situ + rak/ark + almaz

situla + Faust = fistula + usta

Karamzin – author of the twelve-volume *Istoriya Gosudarstva Rossiyskogo* (“The History of the Russian State”)

rak – crawfish, crayfish; cancer (astrologically, Cancer is Shade’s, Kinbote’s and Gradus’ sign)

almaz – diamond

Faust – tragedy (1808) by Goethe; Pushkin is the author of “A Scene from Faust” (1825)

fistula – falsetto voice

usta – obs., lips; cf. *Usta k ustam* (“Lips to Lips,” 1931), a story by VN

Karamzin’s *Poslanie k zhenshchinam* (“Epistle to Women,” 1795) has for epigraph the last lines of Pope’s *Epistle II: To a Lady on the Characters of Women* (1743):

The gen'rous God, who wit and gold refines,

And ripens spirits as he ripens mines,

[Kept dross for duchesses, the world shall know it,]

To you gave sense, good humour and… a poet.

In his translation of the epigraph Karamzin blends “gold” with “mines” (misspelled “minds”), rendering them as *almaz*:

Всеблагий бог, пекущийся о нас,  
Шлифующий наш разум, как алмаз,  
Вам кротость дал, рассудок и... Поэта.

An American poet, John Shade is an authority on Pope (a poet who mentions Zembla in his *Essay on Man*). *Duchess* *of Payn*, of Great Payn and Mone, Queen Disa (the wife of Charles the Beloved seems to blend Leonardo’s Mona Lisa with Shakespeare’s Desdemona. In his “Epistle to Dmitriev” (1794) Karamzin mentions Othello and Desdemona:

Отелло в старости своей  
Пленил младую Дездемону  
И вкрался тихо в сердце к ней  
Любезных муз прелестным даром.

Он с нежным, трогательным жаром  
В картинах ей изображал,  
Как случай в жизни им играл;  
Как он за дальними морями,  
Необозримыми степями,  
Между ревущих, пенных рек,  
Среди лесов густых, дремучих,  
Песков горящих и сыпучих,  
Где люди не бывали ввек,  
Бесстрашно в юности скитался,  
Со львами, тиграми сражался,  
Терпел жестокий зной и хлад,  
Терпел усталость, жажду, глад.  
Она внимала, удивлялась;  
Брала участие во всём;  
В опасность вместе с ним вдавалась  
И в нежном пламени своём,  
С блестящею в очах слезою,  
Сказала: я люблю тебя!

Pushkin dedicated his tragedy “Boris Godunov” (1825) to the memory of Karamzin. A character in “Boris Godunov,” Pimen (the old monk and chronicler) says:

Ещё одно, последнее сказанье

И летопись окончена моя.

Only one more, one final narrative,

And then my chronicle is ended.

Kinbote believes that, to be completed, Shade’s almost finished poem needs only Line 1000 (identical to Line 1: “I was the shadow of the waxwing slain”). But it seems that, like some Italian sonnets (mentioned by Gogol in his fragment “Rome,” 1841), Shade’s poem also needs a coda (Line 1001: “By its own double in the windowpane”). *Dvoynik* (“The Double”) is a short novel (1846) by Dostoevski and a poem (1909) by Blok. According to G. Ivanov (one of the editors of “Numbers,” a Paris émigré review satirized by VN in his story “Lips to Lips”), to his question “does a sonnet need a coda” Blok replied that he did not know what a coda was. The author of *Ulichnyi podrostok* (“The Street Adolescent,” 1914), a sonnet with a coda, in his poem “Like Byron to Greece – o, without regret…” 1927), G. Ivanov mentions *blednyi ogon’* (pale fire).

Alexey Sklyarenko