THE NABOKOVIAN

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THE NABOKOVIAN

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Our thanks to Ms. Paula Courtney for her now two-decades-plus irreplaceable assistance in the production of this publication.

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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

The results of the Nabokov Prose-Alike Contest reader poll are now in: surprisingly, no one succeeded in distinguishing the original passages from the imitations. For the record, #2 and #5 were the passages written by VN, taken from his incomplete and unpublished novel, *Original of Laura*. Passages #1, #3, #4 were submissions created by contest entrants.

The Grand Prize ($100) is awarded to Charles Nicol, the author of passage #3, the brilliantly composed, "unknown section" from *Pnin*. <u>Every</u> participant in the reader poll selected this passage as a passage written by VN. Congratulations to Charles! Three-year gift subscriptions to *The Nabokovian* are awarded to the two runners-up: Gene Barabtarlo, first runner-up, author of passage #1 and, Robert Aldwinckle, second runner-up, author of passage #4.

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Odds and Ends

— The first of three planned volumes of the Pleiade edition of VN's works has been published under the title, *Vladimir Nabokov: Oeuvre romanesques completes* (Paris: Gallimard). It is a major event in Nabokov studies, given the Pleiade's reputation as the finest scholarly editions of the works of only the most important, world-renowned authors. Maurice Couturier served as director of the lavish 1730 page edition which includes all of Nabokov's Russian novels, except *The Gift*, in French translation. The texts are translated, presented, and annotated by Genia and René Cannac, Maurice Couturier, Bernard Kreise, Georges Magnane, Jarl Priel, Christine Raguet-Bouvart, Marcelle Sibon, Marcel Stora, Laure and Wladimir Troubetzkoy. Couturier provides an introduction to the

volume, and Brian Boyd provides a Nabokov chronology. Notices, notes, and variants are given for each text by Maurice Couturier, Alexander Dolinin, Suzanne Fraysse, Bernard Kreise, Christine Raguet-Bouvart, Laure and Wladimir Troubetzkoy, all under the general co-editorship of Alexander Dolinin.

— Three film adaptations of VN novels are in the works: stage director-producer Gregory Mosher is directing *Laughter in the Dark*; Marleen Gorris is directing *The Luzhin Defense*, screenplay by Peter Berry with John Turturro in the lead role; and, Arthur Penn has been announced as the director of *Ada*, from a screenplay by Michael Alexander.

— Akiko Nakata writes to inform us that The Nabokov Society of Japan was formed in Tokyo on May 15 at a Nabokov conference celebrating the centennial. The first issue of their newsletter, *Krug*, (September 1999) includes the Presidential Address by Yoshiyuki Fujikawa, Greetings from Abroad from IVNS/Zembla, reports on the Foundation Meeting of the Nabokov Society of Japan, a book review, a section from *Conclusive Evidence*, an interview with Brian Boyd, an invitation to the Kyoto Reading Circle, and a Notice Board.

— The final word on Pia Pera's low-ball, low-grade *Lo's Diary* was given by Richard Corliss in his *Time* review (October 18): "Without question, *Lo's Diary* should be published. But it needn't be read."

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Recently Published Books:

Vladimir Alexandrov. *Nabokov i potustoronnost'* (Nabokov's Otherworld), tr. N.A. Anastaseva. St. Petersburg: Aleteaieia.

Sabine Baumann. *Vladimir Nabokov: Haus der Erinnerung*. Frankfurt/Main: Stroemfeld.

Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's PALE FIRE: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Olga Chervinskaia. *Pushkin, Nabokov, Akhmatova: metamorfizm russkogo liricheskogo romana*. Chernovetsy: Ruta.

Julian Connolly, ed. *Nabokov and His Fiction: New Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Neil Cornwell. *Vladimir Nabokov*. Plymouth, England: Northcote House.

Pekka Tammi, *Russian Subtexts in Nabokov's Fiction*. Tampere, Finland: Tampere University Press.

Thomas Urban. *Vladimir Nabokov: blaue Abende in Berlin*. Berlin: Propylaen.

Hyo-Yun Yun. *Vladimir Nabokov's English Novels: A Study of Their Structural Layers*. Seoul: Hanshin.

Lisa Zunshine, ed. *Nabokov at the Limits: Redrawing Critical Boundaries*. New York: Garland.

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A Word From the Editor

George Gibian, mentor and dear friend, died suddenly and unexpectedly in Ithaca, New York on October 24, and it is with gratitude and respect that I dedicate this issue in memory of him. The embodiment of intellectual vitality and joie de vivre, an inspiring teacher and preeminent Slavist, George was a steady supporter of Nabokov studies. It was he who created the Department of Russian Literature at Cornell in the immediate post-Nabokov years. Aware and respectful of the Nabokov/Cornell legacy, he organized the first, semester-long international Nabokov Festival at Cornell in 1983, having decided that it was high time for Cornell to honor its distinguished former faculty member. I subsequently had the singular pleasure and privilege of co-editing with him *The Achievements of Vladimir Nabokov* which derived from that festival. It is perhaps fitting that my last recollections of George are of a laughter-filled evening spent together this past spring in New York City on the occasion of the PEN/Nabokov celebration at Town Hall.

THE NABOKOV CENTENARY

by Stephen Jan Parker

To the spring issue list of centennial activities should be added the following:

October 23-25. "Nabokov and Germany." International conference, St. Petersburg, Russia.

November 4-5. "Centennial Conference: Vladimir Nabokov at 100". University of Freiburg, Germany.

November 25-27. "Vladimir Nabokov dans le miroir du XXe siecle." International conference, Institu d'études slaves, Université de Paris Sorbonne.

Throughout the year, notable events have been held in the USA, Russia, Switzerland, England, Germany, France, Estonia, China, and Japan. The editor has also received messages signaling more modest, local celebrations in community libraries and on various college and university campuses.

Perhaps fittingly, the centenary year concludes with the meetings of the International Vladimir Nabokov Society at the national conferences of the Modern Language Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Chicago, December 27-28.

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The Nabokov Centenary Festival in St. Petersburg, a report by Brian Boyd

In one of his best-known stories, Nabokov imagines a Russian emigre in the 1930s entering a small museum on the French Riviera and emerging, after a nightmare of

twists and turns, to find himself to his horror by a canal in Leningrad, in the bloody Soviet Russia of that era. In recent years D. Barton Johnson and I have attended splendid Nabokov conferences on the Riviera, and even investigated relics of Russian Nice, but when this April we emerged into the air of St. Petersburg we found it anything but nightmarish - found it, in fact, more like a wish-fulfilment dream - as day after day we visited the V.V. Nabokov Museum.

The Museum was the focal point of the city's highly successful International Nabokov Centenary Festival, from April 10 to 24, organized by the St. Petersburg V.V. Nabokov Museum (Director, Dmitry Milkov, Deputy Director, Olga Voronina, and Public Relations Director, Zakhar Fialkovsky), as well as the Nabokov Foundation (President, Vadim Stark) and the Rozhdestveno V. V. Nabokov Museum (Director, Alexander Syomochkin), with the support of many other St Petersburg cultural organizations.

The Festival opened, appropriately, on April 10, at the Nabokov Museum, the elegant house at 47 Bol'shaya Morskaya where Nabokov was born on the morning of April 10, Old Style, 1899. It had been hoped up to the last minute that Nabokov's son and translator, Dmitri, would be present to launch the Festival, but illness and injury confined him to Montreux. Nevertheless the Festival began festively in the former library of Nabokov's father, where V.D. Nabokov once had his morning fencing lessons, and where on the afternoon of April 10 Terry Myers of California presented the Museum with a valuable collection of Nabokov first editions, both books and emigre periodicals. Russian patrons also presented the Museum with Nabokov memorabilia, including household items from Vyra and Rozhdestveno and books mentioned in *Speak, Memory*.

That evening a concert dedicated to Nabokov was staged at the Alexandrinskiy Drama Theater, with leading St. Petersburg actors, poets and writers speaking about Nabokov and reading from his works. The Russian

media were present in force all day, as they were for many of the festival events. Indeed, the three major Russian television networks, ORT, RTR and NTV, covered the events of the day in their evening news programmes.

Other events on April 10, 12, 14 I can't really comment on (as I can't really say much about the opening session, at which I presume Vadim Stark and Dmitry Milkov both spoke).

As part of the festival the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences hosted an International Academic Pushkin and Nabokov Conference (April 15-18), to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of Pushkin's birth as well as the hundredth anniversary of Nabokov's.

Of course, there is more than an overlap of birth years connecting Pushkin and Nabokov. Among books launched or presented at the conference were: the bicentennial/centennial co-publication by the Nabokov Foundation and Iskusstvo St Petersburg of a 900-page translation into Russian of Nabokov's commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, complete with a facsimile reproduction of the 1837 edition; a Pushkin-Nabokov special issue of the journal *Vyshgorod*; and issue number 3 of *Nabokovskiy Vestnik*, a centenary special on the Nabokov homes in St Petersburg and Rozhdestveno-Vyra-Batovo.

Among those participating in the conference, held for the most part in an imposing state room on the Vasilievsky Island on the embankment of the Malaya Neva, were overseas scholars such as Mitsuyoshi Numano (Japan), Svetlana Polskaya (Sweden), D. Barton Johnson (USA) and myself (New Zealand), established Russian scholars such as Boris Averin and Vadim Stark, and talented younger scholars such as Maria Malikova, Olga Skonechnaya and Andrey Babikov. On April 17 one session of the conference was held in the town of Siverskiy (Siverskaya), with Vadim Stark playing the role of tour guide for conference participants as he led them around the nearby Nabokov estates. The conference proceedings will be published in August.

On the evening of April 17 the Lensoviet theater (the theater director noted the irony of the locale) staged a performance of A. Getman's adaptation of *King, Queen, Knave* in a lively and polished production directed by V. Pazi. The mannequins in the novel provided the pretext for numerous stylish dance interludes, with top hats (as I think I recall) and toplessness (which I know I remember).

On April 18, after the final session of the Pushkin and Nabokov conference, the St. Petersburg Center for Books and Graphics (Russia has a lively tradition of graphic work illustrating serious adult writing) opened an exhibition of entries for a competition of graphic artists who had submitted work on Nabokovian themes.

The next day a Nabokov centenary exhibit was opened at the Russian National Library at midday. In the early evening, I gave an open lecture at the Nabokov Museum, outlining my new interpretation of *Pale Fire*; with translations, the session lasted four hours.

The next day was a rest day in St Petersburg, although some participants in the St Petersburg Pushkin and Nabokov conference also attended the last days of another Nabokov Conference at the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow, April 18-20.

Over tea and brunch in the library at the Nabokov Museum, at noon on April 21, director Dmitri Milkov introduced the Museum and invited guests introduced themselves: members of the extended Nabokov family (from France, Ivan Nabokov, son of Nabokov's cousin, the composer Nicholas, and his wife Claudia; from the USA, Marina Ledkovsky, daughter of Nabokov's cousin Sonya; from Germany, her brother Nicholas Fasolt and his daughter Natasha; from Luxembourg, Nabokov's cousin Baron Falz-Fein; and from Russia, more distant cousins); St Petersburg city officials; consuls from five countries, the US, Germany, Britain, France and Switzerland; representatives of international cultural organizations (the British Council, the French Institute in St. Petersburg, the Open Society Institute); Alexander Kononov of Sym-

posium Publishing House, and his Nabokov translator, Sergey Il'in; Serena Vitale (Italy); D. Barton Johnson, as representative of the International Vladimir Nabokov Society, and myself. The guests discussed the future of the Nabokov Museum and commented on the Museum's development plan as outlined by Dmitri Milkov. The St. Petersburg City Administration, represented by the first Vice-President of the Cultural Committee, Pavel Koshelev, promised the museum its support, an unusual coup in view of the Museum's private status.

In the early afternoon the guests of the Museum were taken on a tour through the building (the first and second floor, in American parlance), by the Museum's subtle and enthusiastic tour guide, Lyubov Klimenko, and then later in the afternoon on a bus tour of Nabokovian sites in the city, with Vadim Stark again providing an encyclopedic commentary. In the early evening, at its editorial office, the long-established journal *Zvezda* launched a special Nabokov centenary issue, with a host of Nabokov materials unpublished in Russian or unavailable since their first publication, including the story "Easter Rain," rediscovered by Svetlana Polskaya.

Most Russians regard April 22 as Nabokov's "actual" birthday, since in 1899 this was the New Style equivalent of the Old Style April 10, and this day was therefore the climax of the Festival.

In the large entrance room of the Museum Olga Voronina opened an exhibition of hundreds of children's butterfly paintings, a successful way of involving the wider St. Petersburg community without straining the Museum's limited budget. Among the new publications and exhibitions launched before a crowd of hundreds were: the Nabokov Museum's superb brochure, whose photography, design and text reflect the imagination, flair and energy of the young Museum directors; a ten-volume centenary edition of Nabokov's works being published by Symposium in St Petersburg (not only all the fiction, many of the English works being newly translated by Sergey Il'in, but also all Nabokov's poetry

from his collections of 1918 and later, reviews, essays, interviews, and even his translations of *Alice in Wonderland* and Rolland's *Colas Breugnon*); and an exhibition of photographs of the Nabokov Museum by some of St. Petersburg's best photographers. The lights dimmed for two birthday cakes whose hundred candles were blown out by the members of the Nabokov family in attendance. Again, TV, radio and print media were present and reported extensively on the proceedings.

That evening at the Dom Uchonykh (House of Scholars) on the Nevsky Embankment, the former palace of Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, a packed auditorium attended a "Speak, Memory" session compered by Vadim Stark, involving reminiscences from the Nabokov family members, and additional comments from Serena Vitale, D. Barton Johnson and myself.

Since the discrepancy between Old and New Styles increased a day each century, the twentieth-century New Style equivalent of Old Style April 10, 1899 was April 23, the date on which Nabokov therefore naturally celebrated his birthday after his family left Russia in 1919. This too was a major day for the Festival.

While the St. Petersburg Nabokov Museum held an open day, the Museum's guests took a trip out to the Nabokov estates. There they briefly joined a large commemorative concert, also televised, in the Rozhdestveno manor that Nabokov inherited at sixteen. Gutted by fire in 1995, the manor is now being restored under the direction of Alexander Syomochkin, the director of the Nabokov Museum at Rozhdestveno, who spoke eloquently on Nabokov as the last heir of Pushkin. The guests of the St. Petersburg Nabokov Museum and the Nabokov Foundation then toured the Nabokovian sites in the area (the Rozhdestveno church, Vyra, Batovo), with Vadim Stark again serving as tour guide, before banqueting at the village of Vyra (some distance from the Nabokov manor of the same name), when many a toast was raised to Nabokov and those who had organized and participated in the Festival.

In the evening a one-man show of *Lolita* was performed at the St. Petersburg Nabokov Museum by Leonid Mozgovoy (who starred in the Alexander Sokurov film MOLOKH, recent winner of the Best Screenplay award at Cannes), while in the House of Journalists on Nevskiy Prospekt an informal evening organized by Evgeny Belodubrovsky featured D. Barton Johnson and myself in a panel discussion on the theme "Why Nabokov?"

The final event in the Festival, on the hundredth anniversary of Nabokov's second day of life, was an open lecture at the Pushkin House by Serena Vitale, incorporating a hitherto unpublished Russian lecture Nabokov wrote on Pushkin.

Literature still plays a part more central in Russia's than in any other nation's culture, Pushkin a role more central in Russia's and Nabokov's sense of their heritage than anyone else, and St. Petersburg, especially 47 Bol'shaya Morskaya, and the Nabokov estates, occupy a place more central in Nabokov's memory than any other. St. Petersburg now may not have the wealth Nabokov was born into a hundred years ago, but how fitting that it should be here that the longest and most elaborate commemoration of Nabokov's hundredth anniversary took place, in the Pushkinskiy Dom, at the Rozhdestveno Nabokov Museum, and especially at the rosy-stone house on the Morskaya where Nabokov was born and the St. Petersburg Nabokov Museum now stands.

It should be pointed out that the Centenary Festival is only part of the St Petersburg V.V. Nabokov Museum's plans for the year. It has already staged a series of "Nabokov and England" events, is planning a "Nabokov and Carroll" follow-up, and intends a "Nabokov and Germany" focus for later in the year. The "Nabokov and Germany" program is being curated by Marina Koreneva, co-author of the prize-winning screenplay for *Molokh.*

In 1967 Nabokov's *Zashchita Luzhina* and Dzhems Dzhoys's *Dublintsy* were parachuted into the Soviet Union in CIA-sponsored editions. On June 16, 1999, Bloomsday will be publicly celebrated for the first time in

Russia with a reading by Russian actors at the Nabokov Museum, in tribute to Nabokov's admiration for *Ulysses.* Although Nabokov in the early 1930s approached Joyce asking if he could translate the novel into Russian, the translation to be used, alas, will not be his.

The Museum also plans to open this year a Nabokov reading room, as a focus for those carrying out research on Nabokov in Russia, where it is still extremely difficult to gain access to Nabokov material other than recent Russian reprints. The Museum would welcome copies of their work from Western scholars, both in book and article form; anybody who does wish to donate material is advised to use the regular postal system, and not UPS or FedEx, which involves customs charges prohibitively expensive for the Museum, and to mark parcels "Cultural Purposes" or "Not for sale" or "Charity" or the like.

The Museum staff are a dedicated and talented team, working hard for little financial reward to maximize Nabokov's presence in Russia's cultural consciousness, and they and the many Russian scholars now wishing to work on Nabokov should be given every possible support.

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Nabokov's Signature

By the fifth issue of the *Vladimir Nabokov Research Newletter* (1980) it struck me as requisite to alter its design by adding a VN-to-Vera butterfly to the cover plate, where it has remained to this day in its metamorphosed *Nabokovian* form. Nabokov and butterflies were, and continue to be, inseparable, a fact most emphatically made in this centenary year. As I sit in my office I am surrounded by some of the exquisite graphics that accompany our year-long celebration: the white on black poster announcing Symposium publisher's five-volume edition of VN's English novels in Russian translation with butterflies interwoven into Nabokov's face which peers bemusedly at the viewer; the exquisite multi-colored

butterfly on a black background above VN's golden signature, that served as the signature graphic of the Cornell Centenary Festival; and, the striking longitudinal poster with four flitting butterflies announcing the VN centenary and the fourteen Nabokov titles published by Anagrama (Barcelona).

Nabokov's lepidoptera and Nabokov the lepidopterist have been ubiquitous this year. On the light side, for instance, in the 21 July issue of *Le Nouvel Observateur* (Paris), under the title, "A Panoply for a Legend," there is a photo of VN in lepping garb with instructions on how the reader can purchase similar items of clothing — windbreaker, shirt, sweater, bermudas, socks, shoes, cap (for $200) — and also butterfly net. On the more serious side, the year has seen a stream of publications which describe VN's accomplishments and growing reputation as the world's most renowned lepidopterist, and which reveal in greater detail the marriage of lepidoptera and his literary art.

This bulging bibliography was importantly prefaced by two earlier volumes. *Les Papillons de Nabokov* (Le Musee cantonal de Zoologie, Lausanne, Switzerland) appeared in 1993 on the occasion of the exposition of the museum's Nabokov butterfly collection. It contains Dieter Zimmer's "Nabokov's Lepidoptera," the essential, indispensable introduction and handbook to the subject. Zimmer provides, among other things, listings of (1) the families of moths and butterflies VN dealt with, (2) butterflies and moths bearing Nabokov's name, (3) a complete descriptive and annotated list of all butterflies and moths in Nabokov's published writings, (4) Nabokov's writings on butterflies, listed and summarized, (5) and Nabokov's uncollected interviews with mention of lepidoptera. Then, in 1995, *Neotropical "Blue" Butterflies* (Museum of Natural History, University of Wisconsin, Report No.'s 43-54) laid out in detail the voluminous work of Dr. Kurt Johnson and Dr. Zsolt Balint on the species of butterflies which interested VN.

During the centennial year there have been numerous articles regarding Nabokov the lepidopterist, such as Robert Dirig's beautifully illustrated "Nabokov's Rainbow" which appears in *American Butterflies* (vol. 7, no. 3), the official publication of the North American Butterfly Association. Two books have been published, and yet another is awaited with considerable anticipation. *Vera's Butterflies*, edited by Sarah Funke, (Glenn Horowitz publisher), attractively displays, with commentary, the now legendary butterfly drawings that adorn the first editions that VN presented to his wife. Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates have given us their handsome, inspired, and meticulously traced *Nabokov's Blues, The Scientific Odyssey of a Literary Genius* (Zoland Books). To quote the publisher's notes, "It is part biography of one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, and part scientific detective story. [It] explores the rich and varied place butterflies hold in Nabokov's fiction, as well as far-reaching questions of biogeography and evolution, and the worldwide crisis in ecology and biodiversity." Last, *Nabokov's Butterflies*, co-edited by Brian Boyd and Robert Michael Pyle (Beacon Press), is scheduled for publication in early 2000. Among other things, it will contain all of Nabokov's non-fictional writings on butterflies, as well as a translation into English, by Dmitri Nabokov, of a large, never before published lepidopterological section of *The Gift*.

(31 August, 1923)

Like pallid dawn, my poetry sounds gently;
my fleeting cadences soon die away,
and it's unlikely that a keen descendent
will recollect my avian sobriquet.

What can I do, my muse, my darling. We shall,
in footnotes, unpretentiously endure. . . .
I can't sing forth, I can't convey to others
how much they need to hold God's shadow dear,

how we can see God's shadow undulating
as through our motley curtains it transpires,
how day and night are precious beakers holding
life-giving water and sidereal wine.

I can't sing forth, I can't convey — and, shortly,
they will forget this pallid dawn of mine,
and she who first forgets will be the same one
on whom the gift of my last rays will shine.

And yet I am content, my muse — for silence
and tenderness you are; one can't be sad
with you; from each day's song the worldly turmoil,
like a superfluous syllable, you've banned.

Vladimir Nabokov
Translated by Dmitri Nabokov

Как бледная заря, мой стих негромок,
и кратко звуковое бытие,
и вряд ли мой разборчивый потомок
припомнит птичье прозвище мое.

Что ж делать, муза, жизнь моя. Мы будем
в подстрочном примечанье скромно жить. . .
Не прозвенеть, не высказать мне людям,
что надо Божьей тенью дорожить.

Что Божья тень волнистая сквозь наши
завесы разноцветные видна;
что день и ночь — две дорогие чаши
живой воды и звездного вина.

Не прозвенеть, не высказать — и скоро
мою забудут бледную зарю,
и первая забудет та, которой
последние лучи я подарю.

И все же, муза, счастлив я. . . Ты нежность,
ты — тишина; с тобой нельзя грустить;
ты в пенье дней житейскую мятежность,
как лишний слог, не можешь допустить.

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NOTES AND BRIEF COMMENTARIES

by Gennady Barabtarlo

[Submissions should be forwarded to Gennady Barabtarlo at 451 GCB University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, U.S.A., or by fax at (573) 884-8456, or by e-mail at **gragb@showme.missouri.edu** • Deadlines are April 1 and October 1 respectively for the Spring and Fall issues. • Most notes will be sent, anonymously, to at least one reader for review. • If accepted for publication, the piece may be subjected to slight technical corrections. Editorial interpolations are within brackets. • Authors who desire to read proof ought to state so at the time of submission. • Kindly refrain from footnotes; all citations and remarks should be put within the text. • References to Nabokov's English or Englished works should be made either to the first American (or British) edition or to the Vintage collected series. • All Russian quotations must be transliterated and translated.]

ON SOME ALLUSIONS IN V. NABOKOV'S WORKS

Let us turn to Adam Krug's hampered attempt to cross the bridge. The soldiers of the south side guard do not permit him to enter the city since his pass has not been signed whereas the north side soldiers can not read and write. "Doomed to walk back and forth on a bridge which has ceased to be one since neither bank is really attainable. Not a bridge but an hourglass which somebody keep reversing, with me, the fluent fine sand, inside" (V. Nabokov. *Bend Sinister*. London, 1974, p. 24. This edition is designated as BS in the subsequent references).

An hourglass is an image of measurable infinity (as well as a verse line, a unit of poetry, another metaphor for the bridge). It visually resembles the mathematical sign

of infinity and belongs to the leitmotival "signs and symbols associated with the point of contact between the novel's two worlds" (D. Barton Johnson. *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*, 1985, p. 197. The sign is also prominent in *Lolita* ("Our Glass Lake") and *Pale Fire* ("ampersand", "lemniscate") - see P. Tammi's article on *Pale Fire* in *The Garland Companion to V. Nabokov*). The leitmotive of "infinity" refers to the Pascalean subtext. There are at least two obvious references to Pascal in *Bend Sinister*. One has been discussed already: "the swooning galaxies - those mirrors of infinite space *qui m'effrayent Blaise*, as they did you" (BS, p. 59. P. Tammi, "Nabokov's *Pale Fire, Bend Sinister*, "Terror," "Lance." - *The Explicator*, 1992, vol. 50, N 2, p. 109-111). The other appears in the lyrical digression of chapter 9: "Where was I at the time? An eighteen-year-old student sitting with a book (*Les Pense'es*, I imagine) on a station bench miles away, not knowing you, not known to you" (BS, 118). But the field of allusions to "Thoughts" is evidently much wider.

"Thoughts" were obviously important for young Russian emigrants of Nabokov's generation as a possible parallel to their own experience. (G. Adamovich. *Odinochestvo i Svoboda*. New York, 1955, p. 35; V. Varshavskii. *Nezamechennoe Pokolenie*. New York, 1956, p. 186). Pascal's utterance serves as the epigraph to the part 4 of V. Yanovskii's novel *Portable Immortality* (New York, 1953, p. 166; first published in 1938).

Pascal collates two types of infinity, mathematical and intuitional: "Infinite movement, the point which fills everything, the moment of rest; infinite without quantity, indivisible and infinite" (Great Books of the Western World. 33. Pascal. Chicago-London-Toronto, 1952, fragment 232. The text of "Thoughts" translated by W. F. Trotter. The edition is based on Brunschwicg's numeration of the fragments. There exists also the most authoritative recent French edition of L. Lafuma: Pascal. *Oeuvres Completes*. Paris, 1963, fragment 682. We shall use both Brunschwicg's and Lafuma's numeration in the subse-

quent references). Years, days, hours, spaces, numbers recur constantly, but there is nothing infinite or eternal in their renewal - just multiplying of limited things (Pascal, 121, 663). The need for measurement comes from the inevitable limitedness of human perception and existence. Hence a recurrent Pascalean image of a man lost in infinite spaces and peering in horror into two abysses, one before his birth, another after his death: "When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant and which know me not, I am frightened and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then" (Pascal 205, 68; cf. the paraphrase in BS: "not known to you, not knowing you" - les espaces "que j'ignore et qui m'ignorent"). "Since he is infinitely removed from comprehending the extremes, the end of things and their beginning are hopeless hidden from him in an impenetrable secret; he is equally incapable of seeing the Nothing from which he was made, and the Infinite in which he is swallowed up" (Pascal, 72, 199; cf. also "the finite between two infinites" as a metaphor for human condition in this fragment). There are parallel motives of two abysses or eternities in *Speak, Memory, Bend Sinister* and *Ada,* for example: "Certain mind pictures had become so adulterated by the concept of "time" that we have come to believe in the actual existence of a permanently moving bright fissure (the point of perception) between our retrospective eternity which we cannot recall and the prospective one which we cannot know. We are not really able to measure time because no gold second is kept in a case in Paris but, quite frankly, do you not imagine a length of several hours more exactly than a length of several miles?" (BS, 147). The mediation on the prison of time in the beginning of "Speak, Memory" correlates polemically with the epigraph to A. Bely's *Kotik Letayev.*

Nabokov resorts to the Pascalean metaphor again and again: "infinity", "dark eternity", an "abyss" or a "pit" juxtaposed to human perceptual time. The "flashes" of consciousness usually have exact numerical characteristics in Nabokov's works: biology sets limits to consciousness and the latter seeks support either in reasoning and numbers or in spatial images. Compare in *Ada*: "...unconsciousness, far from awaiting us, with flyback and noose, somewhere ahead, envelopes both the Past and the Present from all conceivable sides, being a character not of Time itself but of c[illegible]e decline natural to all things whether conscious o[illegible]ne or not". "I also know, that you, and, probably, I, were born, but that does not prove we went through the chronal phase called the Past: my Present, my brief span of consciousness, tells me I did, not the silent thunder of the infinite unconsciousness proper to my birth fifty-two years and 195 days ago. My first recollection goes back to mid-July 1870, i.e. my seventh month of life /.../ I am today (mid-July, 1922) quite exactly fifty-two..." (V. Nabokov. *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle.* New York, 1970, p. 405).

Pascal describes the desperate middle position of man, his inability to perceive the extremes: neither too small nor too large things, neither too loud nor too weak sounds, neither too intense nor too faint light, neither beginning nor the end. The problem of perception and measurement of time outlined in *Bend Sinister* will be later developed with similar connotations in *Ada*: limitedness of perception prevents a man to catch pure Time inevitably assuming a from of extension, a gap between "two black beats". "Maybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the gray gap between two black beats: the Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like true Time lurks. How can I extract it from its soft hollow? The rhythm should be neither too slow nor too fast. One beat per minute is already far beyond my sense of succession

and five oscillations per second make a hopeless blur. The ample rhythm causes Time to dissolve, the rapid one crowds it out. Give me, say, three seconds, then I can do both: perceive the rhythm and probe the interval. A hollow, did I say? A dim pit? But that is only Space, the comedy villain, returning by the back door with the pendulum he peddles, while I grope for the meaning of Time" (*Ada*, p. 407).

Thus, Nabokov's reception of the Bergsonian "duration" is apparently mediated by Pascalean scepticism and by the Pascalean metaphors of non-being, of nothingness, which are so impressive that the Christian apology proves to be a document of existential bewilderment and doubt.

An hourglass is also an image of "reversed" or "inverted" time: it demonstrates visually that the future and the past consist of the same matter and that our idea of time is conditional. The past is incessantly bulking up at the expense of the future, the future diminishing at the expense of the past: the upper part (the future) is "a store" of the past, the lower one (the past) - "garbage", the "wasted" future. Being perceived as a visual image or icon, an hourglass represents the "reverse" time of human life; the diminishing future, the filling past (see the meditations of the reversible human time in the first chapter of *The Gift*). But if the movement of sand is identified with the arrow of historical time (an hourglass as a function of time, a clock), time runs to the future, the future is being filled and the past disappearing.

An emblem of an hourglass is hidden in the words of the Professor of Modern History describing the past "toppling over the brink of the present into the vacuum it eventually filled (BS, 46). Time is reversible neither in a mathematical nor in a physical sense, but in terms of human perception: "What we are now trying (unsuccessfully) to do is to fill the abyss we have safely crossed with terrors borrowed from the abyss in front, which abyss is borrowed itself from the infinite past. Thus we live in a stocking which is in the process of being turned inside

out, without ever knowing for sure to what phase of the process our moment of consciousness corresponds" (BS, 161).

The idea of quantitative infinity is embodied in infinite movement: a moving body imitates time infinitely shuttling to and fro between the past and the future. The image is supported by the palindromes pointed out by D. B. Johnson (D. B. Johnson, op. cit.): Krug - Gurk, tip - pit (an ant running up a grass stalk, the tip becoming the pit as it gets to the tip). We may add to this list the palindrome "Madam, I'm Adam", that includes Krug's name and nickname and later appears in *Ada*. The image of infinite (absolute) movement may originate from several sources, for example from Alice's exclamation: "I wonder if I shall fall right through the earth!": "...the object would fall with increasing speed and decreasing acceleration until it reached the center of the earth, at which spot its acceleration would be zero. Thereafter it would slow down in speed, with increasing deceleration, until it reached the opening at the other end. Then it would fall back again. By ignoring air resistance and the coriolis force resulting from the earth's rotation (unless the hole ran from pole to pole), the object would oscillate back and forth forever" (L. Carroll. *The Annotated Alice.* London, 1970, p. 27-28). L. Carroll's examples in "Alice" and "Sylvie and Bruno" anticipate A. Einstein's thought experiments with a falling elevator (A. Einstein, L. Infeld. *The Evolution of Physics*, 1938, part 3). There is a reference to the Einsteinian elevator in chapter 14 of *Bend Sinister* where the mental work of a "wary logician" is depicted as an exploration of an unknown and exotical land appearing to be just an excursion for "a carload of tourists" in the end: "pressing on, surmounting all difficulties and finally arriving in triumph at the very first tree he had marked!" (BS, 146). This is an example of scientific thinking always describing a circle and returning to its starting point.

What Krug explains to the soldiers on the bridge is the relativity theory: "They of the solar side saw

heliocentrically what you tellurians saw geocentrically, and unless these two aspects are somehow combined, I, the visualized object, must keep shuttling in the universal night" (BS, 25). Nabokov ironically "re-writes" Einsteinian metaphors: scientific abstractions like bureaucratic rules have not any relation to individual experience. The soldiers (the "outside observers" in Einsteinian terms) can not conceive the cause of Krug's appearances and disappearances and ask him: "Do you live on the bridge?" Later a former official appears who has moved to live in the elevator avoiding arrest. The inside and the outside coordinate systems are absolutely isolated and impenetrable: "It is impossible to settle the differences between the outside and the inside observers. Each of them could claim the right to refer all events to his c.s. Both descriptions of events could be made equally consistent." "These two descriptions, one by the outside, the other by the inside, observer, are quite consistent, and there is no possibility of deciding which of them is right" (A. Einstein, L. Infeld, op. cit., p. 229, 231). The Einsteinian observers are just the symbols of certain types of space-time. Einstein allows, however, exclamations or melancholy remarks to interrupt his scientific discourse: "Strange things happen in the lift!"; "Sooner or later the whole lift will collide with the earth destroying the observers and their experiments". He tries to imagine "a generation of physicists born and brought up in the lift" (A. Einstein, L. Infeld, op. cit., p. 227, 228). In *Bend Sinister* the lift is just drawn out of a shaft and carried away with "the observer" inside. Nabokov follows the Pascalean-Bergsonian line of thinking opposite to Einsteinian scientific inspiration: the idea of an "objective observer" is doubtful because the very point of observation, immutably and permanently moving, is absent.

The underground tunnel, through which Krug is running in his dream, is a kind of the "fourth dimension" formed by the space-time curvature: the hero is moving back in time, but the present and the past finally coincide

during the passage. The tunnel is simultaneously a railroad and a train: Krug is running in one coordinate system and moving by train in another. Passenger's movement within a train has been a favourite example in relativist works. The description reminds one of Alice's famous fall ("...she looked at the sides of the well, and noticed that they were filled with cupboards and bookshelves: here and there she saw maps and pictures hung upon pegs. She took down a jar from one of the shelves as she passed..." - *Annotated Alice*, p. 27. Compare "ledges" and "show windows" in BS). Krug is pursuing the ball, that, as it turns out, has rolled into the door under a table. The door appears to be a schooldoor: Krug finds himself in the schoolyard. The dream repeats in the end of the novel, in the shooting episode. It is Krug's last game, only the flabby fall is replaced by a cap.

The following Pascalean fragment specifies and clarifies the episode: "How does it happen that this man, so distressed at the death of his wife and his only son, or who has some great lawsuit which annoys him, is not at this moment sad, and that he seems so free from all painful and disquieting thoughts? We need not wonder, for a ball has been served for him, and he must return it to his companion. He is occupied in catching it in its fall from the roof, to win a game. How can he think of his own affairs, pray, when he has this other matter in hand? Here is a care worthy of occupying this great soul and taking away from him every other thought of the mind. / .../ And if he does not lower himself to this and wants always to be on the strain, he will be more foolish still, because he would raise himself above humanity; and after all, he is only a man, that is to say capable of little and of much, of all and of nothing; he is neither angel, nor brute, but man" (Pascal, 140, 522).

A game has both a metaphysical and aesthetical meaning: it presupposes a possibility to compete with the Observer, to act at random, to play by guess in the situation of Deus absconditus or "uncertainty of the sentence" (Pascal), to act as if one's own principles were

absolute knowing their relativity (the Pascalean theory of probability). Pascal writes of it in other fragments: "Let no one say that I have said nothing new; the arrangement of the subject is new. When we play tennis, we both play with the same ball, but one of us places it better..."; "...we ought to work for an uncertainty according to the doctrine of chance which was demonstrated above..." (PascaL, 22, 696; 234, 577). In the game episode Krug looses his permanent characteristics of heaviness and inertia and becomes, like King Lear, "only a man".

There is a leitmotive of an oak-tree connected with the problem of a literary observer (a narrator) in Nabokov's works. It appears in *Invitation to a Beheading*: Cincinnatus is reading a book *Quercus* in prison, a biography of an oak tree, a detailed enumeration of all events witnessed by it, accompanied with scientific, dendrological, ornithological and mythological commentaries as well as popular descriptions and popular humour.

In V. Woolf's *Orlando* the hero is writing a book *The Oak Tree*. Nabokov's quite contemptible comment on *Orlando* is known from his letter to Z. Shakhovskyoy: "He thought *Orlando* a "first-class example of poshlost" (B. Boyd. *V. Nabokov: The Russian Years*. Princeton, 1990, p. 402). The polemic is directed probably against the motionless and immutable observer: Orlando "ties his heart to the oak-tree" and centuries pass before his eyes not changing him. But, as we know from V. Woolf's dairies, *Orlando* has to be a playful and parodizing book: "My own lyric vein is to be satirised" (quoted in: J. Graham. "The Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in "Orlando", - Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, 30, July 1961, p. 349). The narrator in *Orlando* was developed into a parody of V. Woolf's own favourite device of "contemplative consciousness" or "the mind in solitude". A number of other literary devices and clichés are parodized. "The oak tree", to which Orlando ties his heart, evidently refers to an enormous amount of English pseudo-historical "oak books", that have appeared in the end of the 19th - the beginning of the 20th century (W. Harrison Ainsworth. *Boscobel, or the Royal Oak. A Tale of the Year 1651.* L., 1874; L. Lousk. *Sussex Oak. A Romance of the Forest Ridge of Sussex.* L., 1912; Ch. Mosley. *The Oak. Its Natural History, Antiquity and Folk-Lore.* L., 1910; Emily Taylor, of New Buckenham. *Chronicles of an Old English Oak, or Sketches of English Life and History.* L., 1860. There is a deception quite similar to *Quercus* in Isabella Burt's *Memorials of the Oak Tree, with Notices of the Classical and Historical Associations Connected with It.* London, 1860" (p. 69-70):

"Surely no object, by art or nature, is more suggestive of the reminiscences of by-gone ages than an aged tree.

In gazing on an old oak, how many visions of other days glide before the mental view. Fancy pictures the face of the country when that old tree was a sapling /.../ or imagination presents the haughty, unscrupulous baron, with his half-british retainers, rushing by in pursuit of the wild animals /.../

Ages roll on /.../ and new generations disport themselves around the old oak /.../

Long lines of pack-horses, with numberless well-mounted (and well-armed) pedestrians, and the nobles travelling, with their numerous well-appointed retinue, might have been seen").

Translations of Shakespearian texts are compared with a perfect mechanical imitation of a living oak tree (BS): like *Quercus* they are imitations of changing reality, systems without history, mechanical devices imitating complexity, individuality and duration.

Nevertheless, the knowledge resulting from logical matching, mathematization, implication structurizes human life because of insufficiency of human perception. What Nabokov calls "the retrospective machinery" is a reverse result of the implication. "Reality" is an effect of the "retrospective machinery" of dream, "life" - of death, a "text" - of translation. Rational cause-and-effect logic does not tolerate emptiness and absence. There are several meaningful and plot-generating absences in the novel (Shakespeare, Olga, David). They are to be filled

and "furnished" in the fictional space. The absence of Shakespeare is being filled with numerous translations, fake interpretations and falsifications. Krug and Ember are discussing the possibility of their having invented the works of Shakespeare and injected the spurious interpolations into actual works which they had re-edited. The absence of Olga is concealed by the invasion of numerous relatives on the morning after her death. The absence of David is camouflaged with his coat, toys, videotape - corpus delicti demonstrated to Krug in the clinic as well as the details of the supposed pompous funeral.

Death is "unthinkable": it resists both Bergsonian all-embracing consciousness and Woolf's contemplative consciousness and refers rather to the Pascalean "darkness". P. Tammi has pointed out another allusion embedded in the Pascalean "infinite spaces". It's Hamlet's complaint "O God, I could be bound in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, where it not that I have bad dreams" - "bad dreams" breaking also Krug's imprisonment within his own consciousness. Krug as well as Hamlet wishes to "wake up". But the similar passage revealed by P. Tammi in the short story. "Terror" describes not only the conflict of the "inner" and the "outer", but also the problem of the borders of consciousness: "Death, infinite space, galaxies, all this is frightening, exactly because it transcends the limits of our perception" (P. Tammi, op. cit.).

The Pascalean subtext with its unresolved dilemmas and scepticism towards the final definitions seems to be actual for Nabokov. Nabokov's "anthropomorphous deity" preserves ambiguity: either the Author or the Absent God. Author's personal absence as well as his existence is a necessary condition of a text. Nabokov's text develops from the "absence" as a metafictional and metaphysical principle. Nabokovian heroes try to live absolutely "normal", "usual" life in a deeply "abnormal" and unpredictable situation, try to preserve their mental integrity, consistency of speech and behaviour and not to notice different "absence" (death, departure, ignorance, forgery,

deprivation, cruelty, etc.). The situation is a part of the common "anomaly" (from the viewpoint of the *absent* Observer) of the human condition discovered and depicted by Pascal.

The novel is saturated by relativist examples functioning as pieces of the great relativist myth melted by Nabokov's individual style. The leitmotives of gravity and light are especially significant. Therefore just one more meaning together with the other possible explanations of the title might be offered: it is a bend (curvature) of light in the gravitational field. The curvature of light is relevant for both Einsteinian systems of observation and enables the existence of at least two opposite, but not contradictory descriptions of a physical phenomenon. In Nabokov's novel the relativist world picture is imposed on the relations of a man and a state, of an individual consciousness and shared physical "reality", etc. The "circle" (Krug) may be also understood as the gravitational field which curves space-time and closes it into a sphere. Only the Pascalean "eternities" lie beyond it, where consciousness is absent.

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TIARAS AND TRIADS IN *SPEAK, MEMORY*

In the Index of *Pale Fire*, the reader, looking for "crown jewels" is referred to "hiding place" and returns, passing two Russian equivalents for "hiding place" (*potaynik* and a *taynik*), from that entry to "crown jewels". In the Index of *Speak, Memory* the quest for jewels leads to the same end although the circuitous route doesn't go past "hiding places" but rather "stained glass". This seems to suggest that "hiding place" and "stained glass" might be equiva-

lents. This indeed proves to be the case. To Alfred Appel's question where *Pale Fire's* crown jewels are hidden, Nabokov answers, "In the ruins, sir, of some old barracks near Kobaltana (q.v.)" (*Strong Opinions*, 92). Around the middle of the 16th century, when the production process changed, stained glass was obtained by mixing glass with various metallic oxides, like cobalt which is used to colour glass blue. The "Index" qualifies Kobaltana as a mountain resort connected with forest castles, which link it with that "medieval place in the mountains" where "a precious glass stained a deep blue", called "tintarron", is made. The resort and its name couple "hiding place" with "stained glass" and, moreover, equate the detours in the indices of *Pale Fire* and *Speak, Memory*, mentioned above.

As Brian Boyd has specified, the jewels hiding in stained glass refer to "the intangible riches of consciousness– the coloured sensations of the past and his ability to re-create them in language– that were his real wealth in exile" (*A.Y.* 159). In the index of *Speak, Memory*, "stained glass" directs the reader to page 105 and, via "pavilion", to pages 215-216: the first instance describing Nabokov's introduction to French literature; the second, his initiation into verse-making. Both events are closely connected with the stirring of leaves and the dripping of foliage, the importance of which will be discussed below. Apart from literature, jewels also signify the delight and splendours of lepidopterology. The six references in the index under "jewels" show how a number of them, the tiaras, chokers and rings produced by his mother for his amusement, travel from Russia to Europe where they were used to cover the Nabokov's living expenses in England. It was there that Nabokov was educated for the literary half of his professional career. A journey bound for the same destination is made by the Swallowtail, Nabokov's first catch, which flew from Vyra to the USA, to perch on a dandelion near Boulder (120). At the moment Nabokov was heavily involved in lepidopterological research, the other half of his profes-

sional career in the USA (*A.Y.* 120).

There are, furthermore, three striking links between jewels and butterflies in *Speak, Memory*. First of all, the concatenation in the index connects "jewels" with "pavilion", which is, etymologically, related to "papilio", as Nabokov notes (216). Second, Florence is a meeting point. The jewels were carried from Russia in a valise bought for his mother's wedding trip to Florence (143), and Florence is also invoked when Nabokov remembers his first sight of the Swallowtail (120). Third, Ustin, the family's janitor, who caught the butterfly, is also the person who, during the Revolution, led the Soviets to the place where the "tiaras of coloured fire" were hidden and which form "an adequate recompense for the Swallowtail". These etymological, topographical and beneficiary points of contact show that not only literature but lepidopterology, too, is symbolised by jewels. (A beautiful direct link between the two is presented in *The Gift*, in which an Elwes' Swallowtail is mentioned "with tails in the shape of hooves" which connotes the Hippocrene, the hoof-shaped fountain on Mount Helicon, the source of poetic inspiration.)

Comparable to the journey that the jewels and the Swallowtail make, first from Russia to Europe and then finally, to America, are the ways along which Nabokov's thought run while discussing his engrossment in verse-making in Chapter Eleven. Three geographical names; Turkestan, Grenoble, and New York (218); three parks; Vyra, the part of Versailles and Sequoia National Forest (223) and also three men of letters: Tyutchev, Bouilhet, and Wheeler Wilcox (225)indicate in each case the same route: from Russia to the USA via France. Using this pattern Nabokov is not only reflecting his own life (the triadic series with which Chapter Fourteen opens), but he is also stressing that his literary art is not confined to international boundaries. "My medium," he writes, "happened to be Russian but could have been just as well Ukrainian, or Basic English, German, French and Latin). This aspiration can also be observed in the way the origin

of his first poem is described, which is strongly reminiscent of the work of some of the English romantic poets, among others.

In Chapter Eleven Nabokov recounts how his "numb fury of verse making" started. Having sought shelter from a thunderstorm in the pavilion of the park of Vyra he noticed how "crumpled leaves had been swept in by the wind." The storm passed. "Gifts of voluptuous blue were expanding between great clouds– heap upon heap of pure white and purplish grey, *lepota* (old Russian for "stately beauty"), moving myths, gouache and guano, among the curves of which one could distinguish a mammary allusion or the death mask of a poet." Then Nabokov furnishes the reader with details about the glamour of the rainbow which has emerged, and proceeds by explaining exactly how his first poem began: "the sheer weight of the raindrop, shining in parasitic luxury on the cordate leaf, caused its tip to dip, relief– the instant it all took to happen seemed to me not so much a fraction of time as a fissure in it, a missed heartbeat, which was refunded at once by a patter of rhymes: I say "patter" intentionally, for when a gust of wind did come, the trees would briskly start to drip all together in as crude an imitation of the recent downpour as the stanza I was already muttering resembled the shock of wonder I had experienced when for a moment heart and leaf had been one."

It is interesting to note how almost identical, seemingly fortuitous, circumstances inspired other poets as well. The "Ode to the West Wind", written at a time when Shelley was eager to prove his poetical power, is introduced by a note: "This poem was conceived . . . in a wood . . . near Florence . . . when the tempestuous wind . . . was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains." Like Nabokov, Shelley starts by witnessing dead leaves, driven there by the wind, and then addresses the clouds, rain and storm, and finally asks to be lifted by the wind like a leaf: "like withered leaves to quicken a new birth/ . . . by the incantation of this verse." The stirring of the leaves, as in Nabokov's case the simile of verse-

making, is caused by the wind, but in "The Cloud", written eight months later, the frisking of plants is effected by droplets again: "the dews that waken/ The sweet buds every one,/ When rocked to rest on their mother's breast" a state of repose much like Nabokov's "leaf unbent". His comparison of the pavilion with a "coagulated rainbow" is mirroring Shelley's portraying of a rainbow as a "pavilion of Heaven".

In *Marmion*, Scott's "fancy's wakening hour," too, is aroused by comparable circumstances ("Introduction to Canto III," 11.154-173) but even more striking is the incident depicted by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*. Wordsworth, who is also the author of the "Lines" written above a mediaeval abbey, whose name, Tintern, is a homonym of "tintarron," describes how his "first poetic faculty" was titillated by "quaint obliquities" such as a foxglove, having lost all its bells but one, which is "left at the tapering ladder's top, that seemed/ To bend as doth a slender blade of grass/ Tipped with a rain-drop" (VIII, 11.365, 392, 397-9). Another instance can be found in Browning's poetry, since "Pippa Passes" was inspired by a double rainbow which appeared after a storm in Dulwich Wood. This wood is reinstated in *Pale Fire* and lends its name to the road where Kinbote and Shade live (see my "Fanning the Poet's Fire," *RLT*, Vol. 24, 1991, p. 250-1 and note 48). Nabokov, who cites in passing Gay's "To a Lady on Her Passion for Old China", (278) doubtless knew the passages from Shelley, Scott, and Wordsworth ["You have to *saturate* yourself with English poetry in order to compose English prose," he told a student (*A.Y.*, 316) and, given his literary career, would have welcomed these analogies as much as he did in Browning's case.]

With the notion that "heart and leaf had been one" Nabokov finishes his recollection of the episode of the birth of his first poem. *Speak, Memory* has many more moments for a phyllophile to offer (69, 97, 152), the most striking being the dead leaves in Batovo among which, at the moment of Pushkin's visit in May 1820, violets showed (62). Violet is also the color of the mark stamped

in his books and papers when the Nabokovs left Europe for the USA (293), "the ultimate tint of the spectrum." Violet is the last color of the primary rainbow, which, as Don Barton Johnson discovered, represents "Nabokov's literary creation in his native Russian," and the first letter of the secondary rainbow, representing his English language writing (*Worlds in Regression*, 22). Violet therefore, corresponds with the third arc of the triad: "the period spent in my adopted country (1940-1960) forms a synthesis and a new thesis," as violet closes the primary rainbow and opens the secondary (293). Johnson, before disclosing the rainbow motif as "Nabokov's master metaphor for his creative consciousness" (21), remarks that *Speak, Memory* is "a very strange autobiography for a writer" as ostensibly, his literary career is nowhere reviewed. The entry "literary life" in the index refers to pages 280-288 where meetings with Bunin, Hodasevich, Tsvetaev, and Sirin are recalled, and to the "Foreword" where the reader is directed to Dieter Zimmer's bibliography. The last sentence of the "Foreword," "And sometimes a gentle wind *ex Ponto* blows," refers, as Johnson (44) has explained, to Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponton*. These poems, together with the *Tristia*, are singled out by Pushkin as Ovid's superior work. The *Epistulae*, written in Constanta on the Black Sea, where Ovid (and Pushkin) were banished, contain endless lamentations. Of course Nabokov escaped from the Black Sea and Ovid's fate, the chief source of whose woes was that "writing a poem you can read to no one/ is like dancing in the dark" (IV, 2, 11.32-4, translated by Peter Green in Ovid, *The Poems of Exile*, Penguin), and Nabokov seems to have selected the very few lines in which Ovid reports his (fugitive) contentment with his place of exile because "Even here, where the south wind's weary breath scarce reaches, . . . the place seems less odious than before:/ at last I can see the sky, my cloud of worries/ has blown away, I've fooled my fate" (II, 1, 11.1, 4-6). (That in Nabokov's case this conciliation is greatly helped by his memories is clear from the rose which climbs "through the window of that

index" (16), as this rose stems from Paestum (295), another reference to the Epistulae (II, 4, 1.28) in which the power of its scent is ranked below that of memory.)

Without discussing explicitly his mastery of the English language, *Speak, Memory* abounds in precursory themes– the trips of the jewels and butterfly he describes, the flights his thoughts take, the coincidences with English poetry, and the reference to Ovid– which anticipate Nabokov's triumphs as an American writer.

–Gerard de Vries, The Netherlands

HARLEQUIN IN *ADA*

Martin Green and John Swan, in their *Triumph of Pierrot* (Macmillan 1986), discuss the impact on "Modernist" authors—English, American (including, on pp 47-50, Edmund Wilson), Russian, etc.—of the *commedia dell'arte*: that improvised, often overtly sexual "low" comedy, with stock characters whose antics (*lazzi*) might remind the American audience of the Marx brothers at their zaniest. The section on Nabokov (233-40), on whom Green had earlier read a paper, "Nabokov's Columbines," at the 1983 MLA meeting (abstract in *Nabokovian* XII, 1984, 38-9), treats especially *Look at the Harlequins*, *Speak Memory*, and (237-8) *Lolita*, where Humbert is seen as both Pierrot and Harlequin. But they do not treat *Ada*—an important omission which I shall partially remedy here.

For most of us the name Harlequin evokes the motley-garbed character from the *commedia* (and his later incarnations), and perhaps costume party guises based on that figure. But the original for Harlequin lies at least as early as the eleventh century, when he appeared with a howling band of demons, or of damned souls (reminding one of Yeats' "Hosting of the Sidhe"). His further development as a comic stage devil has been enthusiastically

traced, with illustrations and copious documentation, in the often cited *Ursprung des Harlekin* by Otto Driesen (Berlin: Duncker, 1904. See also *Enciclopedia Italiana.* Rome and Milan: Treccani, 1939, vol 4, p 388 ff).

The name itself has several spelling variants, with and without initial 'H' (in part depending on the language being used), with either 'e' or 'a', and with the 'k' sound represented by 'ch', 'qu' or indeed 'k'—plus other minor variations: thus also Arlechino, ellekin, Herlekin, etc. This last form, and its variant Hellekin, may evoke Goethe's "Erlkoenig", and remind us of Humbert's alluding to himself as a "heterosexual Erl King" in *Lolita.*" It is worth noticing that Harlequin early on was also a stealer of children and was wont "Kinder in Tragkoerben fort[zu]schleppen," (*Handwoerterbuch des Deutschen Aberglauben.* Berlin and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1933, vol 5, col 1775, as this reference, most helpful for Harlequin, puts it. David Esrig, among many striking illustrations, shows one of Harlequin carrying away children in a basket on his back, in *Commedia dell'arte.* Noerdlingen: Delphi, 1985, p. 237).

Nor is the patchwork clad costume ball Harlequin sufficient for us to form a good picture of this creature's appearance. Quite variable in attire, he typically wore an ugly black mask covering most or all of his face, usually with a false beard, often a cloak, and a (sometimes large) floppy hat—not unlike the one on Holbein's portrait of a young man. Further, he commonly performed surprising acrobatics on stage, dancing on his hands and leaping. (Note illustrations *passim* in Esrig.) In more than one reference Harlequin does a complete somersault holding a glass of wine in his hand without spilling (as in a version of the Don Juan theme cited by Cyril W. Beaumont, *The History of Harlequin.* New York: Arno Press, 1926, p 28, a book tat traces Harlequin in Europe especially in the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries). Harlequin's antics both shocked and delighted his audiences.

And it is clear that Nabokov was quite familiar with these traditions. Thus we see a stage where, 'something

swept out of the wings, enormous and black....masked..." shocking the audience. "A Karakul cap surmounted his top. A black mask covered the upper part of his heavily bearded face." The performer, actually Van, has been walking and dancing on his hands, and doing acrobatics—and receives frantic applause from the audience (*Ada* 183-4). ("Don Juan's Last Fling," in *Ada 488-90,* is quite different from the Don Juan performance cited in Beaumont, but the overt sexual humor, and the deceived or tricked elderly "Pantaleone" type are standard in the *commedia.*)

And we recall, too, Mason's and Boyd's emphasis on Van's having stolen the childhood of Lucette (and likewise of Ada), with too early an introduction to the world of sex, just as Humbert stole that of Lolita, which is reminiscent not only of the Erl King, but also of Harlequin the Kindlifortschlepper. Other references to Harlequin in Nabokov's novels and stories will surely occur to readers.

–John A. Rea, University of Kentucky

"MME LECERF, IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN?.."

The biographic method, as it has been described in Nabokov's lecture on Pushkin (*Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible,* Paris, 1937, translated by Dmitri Nabokov in *New York Review of Books,* 31 March 1988, pp. 38-42– this lecture has been considered instrumental for understanding the novel by V. Alexandrov in his *Nabokov's Otherworld,* p. 137) lies at the core of the entire novel and its central episode– V.'s investigation into the identity of the woman of Knights' last and fatal love affair. Many critics have followed V.'s investigation of Mme Lecerf's identity, noted the deliberate ambiguity of the narrative dealing with this issue, and stated that, although it is probably that Mme Lecerf or the person hiding under that name is in fact Sebastian's mysterious Russian lover, it can not be ascertained conclusively. Such indetermi-

nacy, since the novel is a first person narrative, casts shadows on V.'s overall trustworthiness as the narrator and leaves some readers, for example Michael Long, "puzzled and cross"– to employ his own quotation of the words of "an English businessman whom V. meets in a hotel foyer [and who] seems to sum it all up very cogently" (M. Long *Marvell, Nabokov*, p. 123). Brian Boyd believes that, because Mme Lecerf pretends that she is not Russian, to prove that she is indeed Russian is sufficient in order to prove that Nina Rechnoy and Mme Lecerf are one and the same. "The spider test" certainly proves the first point– she is Russian– but does not eliminate, however improbable, the possibility that she may be just another Russian woman, let us say, an acquaintance of Nina. Additional internal evidence is required in order to settle the matter of Nina/ Mme Lecerf's illusive identity, acquit the narrator V. of the charges of untrustworthiness, and bring to the fore the metaphysical dimension of the entire narrative. V.'s search for Sebastian's fatal Russian woman puts to a test his claims to be able to become "a serial soul", come in contact with deceased Sebastian's consciousness, and fill out the gaps of his biography.

I would argue that V. undoubtedly finds the fateful love of his half brother. However, true to Nabokov's principles of writing a biography, he does not reveal her plainly to the reader but makes the reader undergo the same experience as he did in his search for her, makes him divine her identity instead of taking it for granted. The absence of the picture perfect image of Sebastian's last lover, akin to the absence of the photographic images of Pushkin, to which Nabokov referred in his lecture as "a stroke of luck for imagination!" (p. 41), allows the reader's imagination to be involved actively in the reconstruction process. It also diminishes the perceptual boundaries between the reader and V.'s narrative and between V. and Sebastian thus minimizing "the threefold" mitigation of the biography (*The Real Life* . . ., p. 50) and makes V.'s endeavor overall successful.

After his break up with Clare, Sebastian sets out to

write *Lost Property*– "a summing up, a counting of the things and souls lost on the way" (p. 109). On the basis of Knight's writing habit of endowing his characters with his own ideas and sentiments (p. 112) as well as his own feeling of being in tune with Sebastian's soul– "I am sustained by the secret knowledge that in some unobtrusive way Sebastian's shade is trying to be helpful (p. 99)"– V. connects a passage in the novel with Sebastian's thoughts about his new relationship and makes the inference of his unhappiness and her fateful traits. "The cross-generation" (V. Alexandrov's term) pattern of the *femme fatale* motif in his family supports V.'s supposition and he, after a meeting with Roy Carswell, embarks on the search of, what he terms as "the missing link in his [Knight's] evolution" (p. 118).

One detail in that scene foretells that V.'s enterprise will be successful: Roy Carswell says at the end of their interview, "I'll bet you this picture that you won't find her (p. 118)." The beginning of the passage, however, reveals that V., at the time of the writing, was in possession of the portrait since he states, "But as I look at the portrait Roy Carswell painted I seem to see . . . (p. 117)." The present tense of "as I look" proves that V. won the bet and did find "that woman" not only in his own view, but also to the satisfaction of Carswell. This piece of evidence is deliberately hidden since the prize of the bet– Carwell's portrait– appears a page and half before the bet proper is introduced. Therefore, since the fact of V.'s possession of the portrait may go unnoticed, the very condition of the bet may be understood as a figure of speech. It is only by matching the two together (and their proximity reveals the authorial intent to make it possible) one can conclude at the outset that the two personages in the novel believe that "the missing link" has been established. The story of the quest follows.

With otherworldly help offered by "the extraordinary little man" (p. 128), Mr. Silbermann, V. obtained the list of four potentially Russian women who could be Sebastian's last love. Eventually, the list was reduced to

Nina de Rechnoy and Helen von Graun who, by another fateful coincidence, turn out to be one person– Mme Lecerf. All pieces of evidence point in the direction that Mme Lecerf was Russian and was hiding it. It is not impossible to suppose that she was another Russian friend of Helen von Graun, but that would not be in keeping with her salient excitement at finding out the matter concerned Sebastian Knight despite her refusal to acknowledge that she remembered his name. When she finds out that Sebastian burned his love-correspondence, she replies "cheerfully" (p. 149) and wholeheartedly agrees with Knight's decision. She remarks, "By all means, burn love letters" (p. 149), and offers V. a cup of tea– a sign of interest. Her manner of speaking about her friend's private life evokes the hackneyed device of *romans d'amour* to talk about a friend, sister, etc. when meaning one's own self; it also explains why she finds it "easy" (p. 150) to talk about Helene.

Mme Lecerf appears to be overly interested in the topic for just a third party: "she stopped and seemed to enjoy my impatience" (p. 153); she remembers in great detail her friend's feelings towards the person whom she claims not to remember: "Or perhaps she did love him, but held special views about death which excluded hysterics?" (p. 154) Later in the conversation, V. explains to Lecerf how he found her and mentions all four names, including, of course, the name Rechnoy (p. 155): "I saw one," I said, and that was enough."– "Which?" she asked with a *spasm of uncontrollable mirth* (Italics added). Which? The Rechnoy woman?"– "No," I said. "Her husband has married again, and she has vanished."– "You are charming, charming," and Madame Lecerf, *wiping her tears and rippling with new laughter* (Italics added) . . . Did his wife throw you downstairs, or what?"– "Let us drop the matter," I said rather curtly" (p. 155.) This passage demonstrates her remarkable ability not only to pick the right name out of three (33% probability), but also to remember and repeat it without a mistake– not

always an easy task for a non-Russian speaker; her unreasonable excitement to the extent that V. had to interrupt her; and too familiar a sarcasm regarding such a remote relation– a new wife of the former husband of a friend. V.'s provisional explanation that "she had that French sense of humor in connubial matters" (p. 155) hardly puts her above the suspicion. She slips again, later, when she says, "I don't think he was a relation of yours, because *he was so unlike you* (Italics added)– of course, as far I can judge by what whe told me . . ." (p. 157).

Her brief account of "what she was told" about Sebastian corresponds well to the reader's idea of him and, therefore, makes it very unlikely that she is just another Russian woman in Paris. She describes him as "very intellectual", "did not turn into a sentimental pup", talked "of his dreams, and the dreams in his dreams, and the dreams in the dreams of his dreams", after their break up he "did not even send her any more of his usual entreating letters"– indeed, the letter that at first *prednaznachalos* "had been destined to quite a different person" (p. 184), was finished and directed to V. (other examples are in V. Alexandrov's *Nabokov's Otherworld*, p. 152).

In the country, Lecerf becomes openly flirtatious with V.: ". . . her hair brushed my cheek. 'You clumsy young man,' she said "(p. 164). V. calls her "decidedly a pretty woman" (p. 166) and, for a moment, feels attracted to her. He remarks on that occasion, that it [their possible affair] might have "amused Sebastian's ghost" (p. 166)– this statement would make sense only under the assumption that Knight knew Mme. Lecerf.

Her confession that, "once upon a time" she "kissed a man just because he could write his name upside down" (p. 169) connects her with Nina's former husband Pavel Rechnoy, but also reminds one of the last sentence in the chapter that deals with him, "Once upon a time," Uncle Black was saying . . ." (p. 146.) "The silent blond [stereotypically Russian] person" tuns out to be indeed

Russian when V.– "a clumsy young man"– "clumsily jolted his elbow" and "the blond person" responded in colloquial Russian, "*Boga radi,*" . . . (Don't mention it)" (p. 170). He had not been introduced to V. and had clearly been instructed to remain silent in order to conceal his accent ("she ignored his presence at the table" (p.165)). Earlier, during Mme Lecerf's and V.'s second meeting, Mme Lecerf stated, "I'm afraid I don't know any Russians, except Helene, of course" (p. 153). It proves now to be a lie. Later, after the "spider test", V. says to Lecerf that "fate pushed her elbow," and she "spilled her curds and whey" (p. 171). The last phrase recalls the Mother Goose rhyme about Little Miss Muffet– ". . .along came a spider . . ."– and, besides fitting the spider paradigm together with the spider in Carswell's portrait, recalls, by generic similarity, the working title of Knight's novel *Prismatic Bezel* "Cock Robin Hits Back," which was taken from another nursery rhyme "Who Killed Cock Robin?" The latter describes the death and the funeral of Cock Robin and echoes V.'s concerns regarding Mme Lecerf's role in Sebastian's life.

The most obvious argument that Mme Lecerf is not Nina Rechnoy is her fluency in French, in contrast to V.'s comical encounter with Lydia Bohemsky, another potential person in question, who "replied with terrific Russian accent (p. 151)." V., whose French is not native, could have easily overestimated her fluency whereas a native French person would have detected its foreignness. V.'s remark about her "crystal clear French" (p. 166) is potentially reversible for, on the one hand, it shows, understandably, V.'s misperception, and on the other, it draws attention to the linguistic aspect of the query: natives' fluency or accent are rarely commented on unless there is something unordinary with them; the very mentioning of Mme Lecerf's fluency in French raises the question whether she is really French.

Out of all of the amassed evidence, three conclusions appear to be reasonably certain: both V. and Carswell believe that V. found Sebastian's last love; Mme Lecerf is

Russian, she personally knew Sebastian Knight but chose to hide it from V. at the time; she must have also known Pavel Rechnoy. The final task of putting all these pieces together into the image of Nina Rechnoy is up to the reader.

–Constantine F. Muravnik, Yale University

P.S. There is a literary aside to this story. Has anyone noticed that, since Mme Lecerf translates into [Mlle] Olenin (le cerf being *olen'*, stag, in Russian), there may be a Pushkin theme lurking here? He was madly in love with Anna Olenina, the daughter of a senator and State Librarian, in the late 1820s and proposed to her but was turned down (and later inserted some rather petty lines about her in *Eugene Onegin*). To that elusive girl Nabokov assigns *seven* pages in the 3rd volume of his EO commentaries, pointing out especially that some of Pushkin's MSS are covered with her profiles, monograms and even anagrams (a palindrome of her nom du monde, *ettenna eninelo*, for instance, –see p. 206) and that she eventually married a man of French origin, Andrault (p. 196).

One will remember, of course, that Pushkin's bells ring especially often in Nabokov's works between 1936 (the anniversary commotion) and 1943 ("That in Aleppo Once"), and it would be odd if *RLSK* were an exception.

To a word gamester, her surname, Olenina, conveniently packs the sounds of three female names with currency in *RLSK*: Ol'ga (. . . Olegovna Orlova, see opening page. This triple- o/triple- a encirclement of each component is echoed in Anna Alekseevna Olenina), Helen (von Graun; the Rus. *olen'* = Church Slavonic elen'), and Nina. And speaking of the latter, I am surprised that nobody seems to have picked up Miss Emery's purposeful suggestion (in *The Nabokovian*- XX) that Nina de Rechnoy's name is modeled after Nina Zarechnaia, the high-strung and fickle heroine of Chekhov's *Seagull* (both surnames hint at a river nymph). I for one think that the affinity is striking. GB

Fortune-telling*

(1924)

On Christmas Eve, towards midnight,
outside the window stood,
reborn, a chopped-down fir copse,
my argentated wood.

Amidst the misty moonlight
I found the proper room.
That candle, my Svetlana,
between mirrors illume.

Across the basin's water
the magic flame will float;
accoasts in rapid order
the little nutshell boat.

And in the dusk, where, under
a lustre, melts parquet,
let's hear what fortunes utters
our little neighbor gray.

Upon the faded azure
the cards you can prepare. . . .
One moment grand-dad's scowling,
the next he lifts his brow,

Гаданье

К полуночи, в Сочельник,
под окнами воскрес
повырубленный ельник,
серебрянный мой лес.

Средь лунного тумана
я залу отыскал.
Зажги, моя Светлана,
свечу между зеркал.

Заплавает по тазу
волшебный огонек;
причаливает сразу
ореховый челнок.

И в сумерках, где тает
под люстрою паркет,
пускай нам погадает
наш седенький сосед.

На выцветшей лазури
ты карты приготовь. . .
И дедушка то хмурит,
то вскидывает бровь.

as he picks up and places
funereal-colored spades
upon the diamonds' faces,
of lacquered, orange shade.

That's how it is, Svetlana —
morose grows your regard.
For us, no sham nirvana
is augured by these cards.

I'm not much of a wizard,
the grand-dad's in his grave,
so there is no one, is there,
to question hoary fate.

Immerged in darkening glimmer,
now everything recedes,
the lustre's crystal pendants,
the white piano's sheen.

The flame's out in the nutshell. . . .
And you are gone for good,
my legendary fir copse,
my argentated wood.

Vladimir Nabokov
Translated by Dmitri Nabokov

И траурные пики
накладывает он
на лаковые лики
оранжевых бубен.

Ну что ж, моя Светлана,
туманится твой взгляд.
Прелестного обмана
нам карты не сулят.

Сам худо я колдую,
а деушка в гробу,
и нечего седую
допрашивать судьбу.

В смеркающемся блеске
все уплывает вдаль,
хрустальные подвески
и белая рояль.

Огонь в скорлупке малой
потух. . . И ты исчез,
мой ельник небывалый,
серебрянный мой лес.

1924 г.

Notes:

* The dreamy description of a Russian fortune-telling ritual, one of whose features was the course taken in a water-filled basin by half a walnut shell containing a miniature candle. The Svetlana of this poem is generic, a name whose music suits the atmosphere. It probably echoes Zhukovski's romantic heroine more than it does a fianceé with whom Nabokov's relationship had ended the previous year.

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ANNOTATIONS TO *ADA*

14: Part I Chapter 14

Brian Boyd

Forenote:

When Ada has to sit on Van's lap on their return from the picnic at the end of the previous chapter, the two children enjoy a sustained physical contact that, for Van at least, marks a major advance toward Ada. After that deliciously protracted intimacy, we see them next in this chapter, having once again to function amidst other people. Like Van, we want to know now whether the experience of the picnic ride has made any difference to Ada's feelings for him, but at this early stage he dare not ask her openly. He, and we, can only deduce her feelings from what she reveals in the company of others.

Part I Chapter 14, a day or two after the picnic, answers his question and ours when Greg Erminin arrives to return the cigarette lighter his aunt had inadvertently taken from the picnic. What follows is a rarity in Nabokov, a chapter that is one sustained scene and that consists almost entirely of conversation, and a six- or seven- or eight-way one at that (Dan contributes only with a silent shake of the head and withdrawal into the background, Dack stays in the foreground and barks his one line). After the mounting intimacy of the picnic, this second scene of refreshments on the grass seems light, colorful, relaxed, inconsequential, quietly comic.

The conversation is stylized, but not in the way of an Oscar Wilde or a Henry James, where all speak with the voice of the author. True, the conversation has the rococo exuberance and unexpectedness endemic in *Ada*, but it is also diverse and finely observed, ranging all the way from the wordless, the intended but unsaid, the curt, and the direct, through to the voluble and ornate. Van's wit shifts from relaxed to tense to strained, Ada is quietly cutting, Marina vague, fussily maternal when she re-