THE NABOKOVIAN

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The Nabokovian serves to report and stimulate Nabokov scholarship and to create a link between Nabokov scholars, both in the USA and abroad.

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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

ANNUAL MEETINGS

The 1985 MLA Nabokov Society meetings are scheduled as follows: A session under the title, "Lolita at Thirty," to be chaired by Charles Nicol (Indiana State), will be held 7:00 - 8:15 pm in the Du Sable room of the Hyatt Regency Hotel (151 E. Wacker Drive), Chicago on Friday, December 27. Papers will be presented by Ruth Knafo-Setton (Lafayette), Dana Brand (Rutgers), Marilyn Edelstein (UCLA) and Alina Clej (Berkeley), with Samuel Schuman (Guilford) as respondent. Copies of the papers may be obtained for $2.00 (write to Charles Nicol, Department of English, Indiana State University, Terra Haute, IN 47809). The business meeting of the Society, Phyllis Roth (Skidmore) presiding, will follow at 9:00 -10:15 pm.

The AATSEEL Nabokov Society meeting will take place on Saturday, December 28, at 3:15 - 5:15 pm in Parlor B of The Palmer House, Chicago (17 East Monroe St.). The session, entitled "Nabokov: Poet, Playwright, Critic, Translator," will be chaired by Duffield White (Wesleyan). Papers will be presented by Dale Peterson (Amherst), Martha Hickey (Harvard), Julian Connolly (Virginia), Priscilla Meyer (Wesleyan), and Robert Bowie (Miami, Ohio). Also note that Vladimir Alexandrov (Harvard) will present a paper, "Nabokov's Metaphysics of Authorship," at a session entitled "Theory and Practice in Russian Literature: The

Writer and His Craft," in Parlor H on Friday, December 27, 3:15 - 5:15 pm.

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Mrs. Vera Nabokov has supplied the following list of VN works received by her March - September 1985:

March -- Brisure à senestre (Bend Sinister), tr. Gérard-Henri Durand. Paris: Julliard, "Presses Pocket" edition.
April -- Pnin, tr. Bruno Oddera. Milano: Longanesi & Co.
-- Litterature II (Lectures on Russian Literature), tr. Marie-Odile Fortier-Masek. Paris: Fayard.
-- Vladimir Nabokov: Perepiska s sestroi (Correspondence with His Sister). Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis.
May -- The Man From the USSR and Other Plays, tr. Dmitri Nabokov. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
-- Pnin, one chapter, and "A Discovery" in Anthology of American Literature. New York: W. W. Norton, second edition.
Aug. -- Stadführer durch Berlin (A Guide to Berlin) [five stories]. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun.
Sept. -- Der Späher (The Eye). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowholt Rororo.

*

D. Barton Johnson (Dept. of Germanic and Slavic Languages & Literatures, University of California, Santa Barbara CA 93106) notes that

a very good essay on Speak Memory can be found in John Pilling, Autobiography and Imagination: Studies in Self-Scrutiny (London: Routledge, 1981), pages 103-115. He also notes that V.S. Janovskij, a novelist, member of the Paris émigré circle, and target of a VN review in Rul', mentions VN frequently in his memoirs, Poliia eliseiskie (New York: Silver Age, 1983).

*

Peter Evans (Tokyo-to, Setagaya-ku, Higashi Tamagawa 1-3-4, Japan 158) writes to say that he has completed a 36-page list (in English) of the Japanese editions of VN's works and of articles in Japanese about these. Any interested reader is welcome to write to him for details.

*

Susan E. Sweeney (English Department, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912) notes that her essay, "Io's Metamorphosis: A Classical Subtext for Lolita," based on the paper she read at last year's Nabokov AATSEEL panel will appear in a forthcoming issue of Classical and Modern Literature. Another of her essays, "Nabokov's Amphiphorical Gestures," which examines sustained, "seventh-type" ambiguity in Nabokov's metaphors, is forthcoming in Twentieth-Century Studies in Literature.

Ms. Sweeney also writes that she is presently researching and writing an essay on

Nabokov's relationship with his brother Sergey and its effects upon his fiction. She would greatly appreciate hearing from anyone with access to relevant biographical material.

*

Some recently published books of interest:

- Brian Boyd. Nabokov's ADA: The Place of Consciousness. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Annapaola Cancogni. The Mirage in the Mirror: Nabokov's ADA and Its French Pre-Texts. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Debra Castillo. The Translated World. Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State University Press. [much material on VN]
- Joann Karges. Nabokov's Lepidoptera: Genres and Genera. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- D. Barton Johnson. Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Asher Z. Milbauer. Transcending Exile: Conrad, Nabokov, I.B. Singer. Miami: Florida International University Press.
- Stanley Ross. Vladimir Nabokov: Life, Work and Criticism. Fredericton, Canada: York Press Ltd.

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The photograph on page 8 is provided courtesy of Mrs. Vera Nabokov. It was taken in Montreux, 1972, by Lord Snowdon.

*

Coming issues of The Nabokovian will feature a series of interviews of VN either originally produced for other media (radio, tv, film), published in languages other than English, or simply never before published.

The editor asks that readers continue to keep him informed of Nabokov-related news and please continue to submit abstracts of papers, articles, and books.

*

Thanks to the support of our readers, some new institutional and individual subscribers were enrolled this past year and no increases in the subscription/membership rates are necessary. However, in light of the regularly rising postal costs, would you please assist us by renewing your subscriptions for 1986 in a timely manner so that we do not have to mail out a series of individual reminders. Your support of this publication is essential and greatly appreciated.

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Our thanks to Mrs. Paula Malone for her continuing, invaluable assistance in the publication of The Nabokovian. Thanks also to Mr. Chol-Kun Kwon for his indispensable help with this issue.

*

1973 NATIONAL MEDAL FOR LITERATURE

On the night of April 16, 1974 Vladimir Nabokov was awarded the National Medal for Literature at ceremonies conducted at the New York Public Library. Roger L. Stevens, Chairman of the National Book Committee presided. Richard Couper, President of the New York Public Library gave the welcoming remarks and Harrison E. Salisbury was a guest speaker. Accepting the award for his father was Dmitri Nabokov.

The National Medal for Literature is presented annually by the National Book Committee to a living American writer for the excellence of his or her total contribution to the world of letters. Prior medalists at that time were Lewis Mumford, E.B. White, Robert Penn Warren, Conrad Aiken, Marianne Moore, W.H. Auden, Edmund Wilson, and Thornton Wilder.

The text is taken from a hand-corrected typescript signed by Vladimir Nabokov and dated, Montreux, March 15, 1974.

***

A statement by Vladimir Nabokov

to be read by his son Dmitri Nabokov on April 16, 1974 at the New York Public Library for the Presentation of the 1973 National Medal for Literature.

My son, who represents me here, knows how hard it was for me to decide not to come to New York, not to leave my writing desk in Montreux, not to enjoy in person an honor I so highly appreciate. By some quirk of space-time, the date of the National Medal Dinner happened to clash with the final, most demanding and dramatic lap of work on the new novel which I have been writing since the beginning of last year. The festive break might have proved a formidable interruption. The lone lamp had to be preferred to the blaze of the feast.

I am never sure how many hours, five or six, are deductable or addable when one tries to clock a coincidence of two events separated by a sprawling body of salt water. I wish you to know, however, that at the very moment you are hearing the voice of my son I am either at my desk or in bed, writing the last paragraphs of my book with a stubby but stubborn pencil.

NABOKOV AND M. AGEYEV'S NOVEL WITH COCAINE

by D. Barton Johnson

In the tenth and last issue of its existence (1930-1934), the Parisian Russian émigré journal Chisla (Numbers) published a work entitled Novel with Cocaine (Roman s kokainom) by an author who signed himself M. Ageyev. Published in book form in 1936 (1938?), the novel, one of considerable merit, was forgotten until recently when it was rediscovered and reissued in French and English editions, as well as in the original Russian. The English translation and "Introduction" by Michael Henry Heim was published by Dutton in 1984 and is appearing in a Harper & Row paperback.

The reappearance of Novel with Cocaine has reawakened interest in the identity of its (presumably pseudonymous) author, M. Ageyev. Various hypotheses have been offered. The original manuscript is rumored to have been sent from Constantinople and, apart from a 1934 short story about anti-Semitism, Parshivyi narod ("A Lousy People"), the author is not known to have published other work--at least under the name Ageyev. Michael Heim has called my attention to a recent article that argues with great vigor and substantial detail that "Ageyev" was a pen name of Sirin/Nabokov. Written by editor Nikita Struve, the article, "K ragadke odnoi literaturnoi tainy: Roman s kokainom M. Ageeva" ("Toward the Solution of a Literary Mystery: M. Ageyev's Novel with Cocaine"), appears in the distinguished Parisian

Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia (The Herald of the Russian Christian Movement; No. 144 [1985], pp. 165-79).

The novel is a first person account of the life and death of a young man, a Muscovite born with the century, between sixteen and twenty years of age. The protagonist, Vadim Maslennikov, son of a widowed and impoverished mother whom he treats with contempt, is a clever, cynical, self-absorbed student in a classical gymnasium. In the opening section, "School," he tells of his casual dalliance with a young woman although he has infectious syphilis, and of his schoolmates--especially Burkewitz, who jeopardizes his graduation by a verbal onslaught against the theology teacher, a priest whom he taunts for his support of the war. Vadim next has a serious affair with a married woman, Sonya Mintz, who eventually drops him as she perceives his true character. Crushed, the narrator turns to cocaine and provides a graphic account, first of its pleasures, and then of his growing addiction. The final section of Vadim's narrative, "Reflections," is a statement of his Weltanschaaung as he descends into hallucination, if not madness. The "Epilogue" is narrated by a hospital official who tells of Vadim's brief hospital stay in January 1919, the refusal of Vadim's former friend Burkewitz, now a powerful Party official, to help his erstwhile friend, and Vadim's death by overdose.

The novel is tightly constructed, with vivid language and imagery. It is not without reason that Struve proposes Nabokov as the author. Situations and names evoke counter-

parts from Nabokov novels--especially Podvig (Glory), written in 1931. Similarities of theme are adduced. Most suggestive are references to Gogol and poshlost'. On another level, strong similarities in the use of technical devices and in stylistic traits are illustrated, as are examples of Nabokovian "multilevel thinking." Perhaps most impressive are Struve's examples of parallel paragraphs in which it is indeed very difficult to guess which is Nabokov's and which Ageyev's. Although some of Struve's parallels are relatively weak, the overall similarities, especially of form, are impressive. Any Nabokov reader will find still others.

Rather curiously, Struve does not go into detail about the biographical background of his hypothesis--perhaps supposing it to be already well-known to his Russian émigré readers. It is common knowledge that Nabokov had a feud with the émigré journal Numbers, or rather with several of its chief collaborators --principally, Georgii Adamovich. From a distance of fifty years the feud seems somewhat implausible, for Numbers, unlike almost all other émigré journals and papers, was resolutely apolitical and strongly committed to modernism, both West European and Russian. Nonetheless, the journal and Adamovich were uniformly hostile to Nabokov.

Nabokov, despite his oft-proclaimed indifference to critical opinion, was not above baiting both Numbers and Adamovich. According to Field (1967), Nabokov's 1931 short story, "Lips to Lips," about a Russian businessman-Maecenas whose pathetic literary

efforts were published in serialized dribblets by an émigré literary magazine, was based on an incident at Numbers (173-175). When this became known, Poslednie novosti, which had unwittingly agreed to publish the Nabokov story, rejected it, and "Lips to Lips" finally appeared only in 1956. Adamovich's knee-jerk reaction to Nabokov was subsequently exposed when Nabokov deliberately published the poem "Poety" ("The Poets": see Poems and Problems, pp. 92-95) under the pseudonym Vasiliy Shishkov. Adamovich was taken in and hailed the advent of a great new talent (Field, pp. 52-53). Adamovich had, incidentally, also hailed M. Ageyev on his appearance in print. (Struve, p. 166). Struve is in effect proposing that Novel with Cocaine was Nabokov's coup de grâce against Adamovich and Numbers.

The undeniable Nabokovian features of Ageyev's Novel with Cocaine and the biographical background of the feud combine to lend credence to the Struve hypothesis. It has, however, two serious flaws. The purpose of a hoax is to make a fool of one's opponent. Unless it comes out, the effort is vain. True, Nabokov was a very private man given to very private games in his art, but he openly conceded both the "Lips to Lips" affair (A Russian Beauty, p. 46; see Field above) and the Shishkov hoax (Tyrants Destroyed, pp. 204-206). Why should he have concealed his most devastating coup against his foes? The second flaw is internal. Struve has indeed pointed out a great many parallels between Ageyev's writing and Nabokov's. He fails, however, to deal with the most obvious explanation: that Ageyev, whoever he was, was a gifted mimic of Nabokov's highly distinctive style.

The final irony is that Nabokov, though not the author of Novel with Cocaine, had the pleasure of seeing Adamovich hail, and Numbers publish, an imitation Nabokov novel. M. Ageyev's identity remains one of the mysteries of Russian literature.

[Various responses to Struve's conclusions as to the identity of the real author of Novel with Cocaine have appeared in the Times Literary Supplement of July 5, August 9, August 30, 1985. Ed.]

Dmitri Nabokov comments, in personal correspondence with the editor (11 September, 1985):

"Mother emphatically denies any connection whatsoever between Nabokov and Novel with Cocaine (perhaps, more accurately, Romance with Cocaine). VN never used "Agheyev" as a pen name. He never met the author in question. The statement made by N.A. Struve concerning a presumed stylistic affinity between Nabokov and Agheyev is idiotic, and the most superficial comparison suffices to demonstrate that idiocy.

Even when describing the nastiest of people and the most squalid of milieux, and even in his earliest and least mature stories, Father always wrote not only in proper Russian, with an educated choice of words, impeccable grammar, careful attention to clashing repetitions and to inconsistencies, but also with loving care for the overall rhythm of a

paragraph. In short, highly kul'turno. This cannot be said of "Agheyev," although he is a lot better than your average Soviet hack.

There may have been grubost' [coarseness, crudeness, Ed.] in what VN described, but none existed in his writings. And there were certainly no Freudian Egos, Superegos, fear/anger transferences, or the like. I could count countless examples, but the very idea that VN might be the author of N with C is so patently ludicrous that I shall not, at the moment, waste any more valuable time on the matter.

It should also be understood that all the above comments are in no way motivated by our feelings about drug addiction as subject matter. I am sure no one (except perhaps some proponent of the Agheyev Connection) could imagine Nabokov as a coke junkie, and yet, imaginative artist that he was, he did write a youthful but beautifully poetic short story on that theme. The style of VN's treatment speaks for itself when compared with Agheyev's."

ANNOTATIONS & QUERIES

by Charles Nicol

[Material for this section should be sent to Charles Nicol, English Department, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809. Deadlines for submission are March 1 for the Spring issue and September 1 for the Fall. Unless specifically stated otherwise, references to Nabokov's works will be to the most recent hardcover U.S. editions.]

Nymphet-Singing in Singleton

That "the reader should have a dictionary," Nabokov told his students at Cornell, constituted one of the four criteria for good reading (Lectures on Literature, p. 3). Accordingly, he rewards the reader of Lolita for consulting the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of "nymphet," as he himself demonstrably did when composing Humbert's famous description of "maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic" (Annotated Lolita, p. 18).

The O.E.D. clarifies its predictable definition, "a young or little nymph," with several literary quotations, of which one is "1855, Singleton, Virgil, 1. 60 'Who could the nymphets sing?'" Nabokov neatly embeds this illustrative example in his own allusion to Virgil: "Here are some more pictures. Here is Virgil who could the nymphet sing in single

tone, but probably preferred a lad's perineum" (p. 21; Nabokov replaced his original, more comic and more poetically resonant "peritonium" with the more anatomically correct "perineum," fearing that the reader might assume that the "grotesque error" was his and not Humbert's--Appel's note, p. 342). Nabokov's joke is even more complicated than it seems, however, for Singleton was the Reverend Robert Corbet Singleton, whose 1855 two-volume translation of Virgil's works is described, by the National Cooper Union Catalogue, as "closely rendered into English rhythm and illustrated from British poets of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries." Thus "single tone" not only puns on the translator's name, it also ironically refers to his Victorian prettification of Virgil, which was the kind of translation Nabokov especially despised.

-- S.E. Sweeney, Brown University

Person's Regress

Transparent Things is constructed around the theme of pilgrimages into the past. On the narrational level the pilgrimage is the ghostly narrators' journey back through Hugh Person's life history, their "report" in which "a person and the shadows of related matter are being followed from youth to death" (p. 102). For Person himself the pilgrimage is his return to the town of Witt, where by revisiting the places associated with memories of his late wife he hopes to recover and thereby rid himself of the past. This pilgrimage, on the last of Person's four visits

to Switzerland, is prefigured by the second of his visits, when in another journey to the past he returns to the hotel in Trux where he had stayed with his father ten years previously on the day of the latter's death.

The theme is further developed through a series of textual allusions invoking pilgrims and pilgrimages. Thus, when Person strangles Armande in his sleep, dreaming she is a girl from his past whom he is helping to escape from a fire--a Guilia or Julie or Julia or Juliet Romeo (a combination of his first whore and R.'s stepdaughter, Julia Moore)--the narrator remarks that "the surname means 'pilgrim' in archaic Italian, but then we are all pilgrims, and all dreams are anagrams of duirnal reality" (p. 80). The anagram in this case is the transformation of "Moore" into "Romeo." On the following page Person himself is referred to as "Mr. Romeo," and in the penultimate chapter, when he is trying to remember the name of the hotel in Stresa where he stayed with Armande on their honeymoon, he tells the receptionist that "it sounded like 'Beau Romeo'" (p. 95). It was at this hotel in fact that Armande, fearful of fires, persuaded Hugh to rehearse an escape through the window of their room, an event that resurfaces, "anagrammatized," in Person's fateful "Romeo" dream. Dreams, fires and falls are everywhere in this book, and meet again in the final chapter.

The novel also contains a number of specific allusions to literary "pilgrims" (fittingly, considering the Francophone setting, all are French). "What had you expected

of your pilgrimage, Person?" the narrator asks. "A mere mirror rerun of hoary torments? Sympathy from an old stone? Enforced re-creation of irrecoverable trivia? A search for lost time in an utterly distinct sense from Goodgrief's dreamful 'Je me souviens, je me souviens de la maison où je suis né' or, indeed, Proust's quest?" (p. 94). The references here to Proust and Baudelaire (= Beau douleur = Goodgrief) require little explication, and make it clear that Person's quest is not to immortalise the past but rather to exorcise it. An earlier pilgrimage-reference is less transparent. "Person was prone to pilgrimages," we are told, "as had been a French ancestor of his, a Catholic poet and well-nigh a saint" (p. 86). This can only be an allusion to the French poet and Nobel Prizewinner Saint-John Perse (1877-1975) who--like the Nabokovs, in fact--left France in 1940 to settle in the U.S.A., where he lived for some twenty years. (Perse's "prone [ness]to pilgrimages" is presumably a reference to the many years he spent in the French diplomatic service, when he travelled widely, especially in the East). The cumulative effect of this series of allusions and repetitions is to grant further resonance to the novel's controlling theme, binding text and texture in a finely woven fabric.

--Bob Grossmith, University of Keele, England

Vladimir Nabokov and Dr. Sineokov

In Invitation to a Beheading, the name "Dr. Sineokov" is the only fictional Russian

surname mentioned. The name of kapitan Sonnyi cannot be considered a true surname; it is used only symbolically--an assumption supported by the novel's English translation where the name was rendered as "Captain Somnus." The name "Sineokov," on the other hand, which derives from "dark blue-eyed" in Russian, was left intact in this translation.

Although listed in Boris Unbegaun's Russian Surnames, Sineokov is not a common Russian name. Therefore, it is interesting to speculate on Nabokov's source. One possibility is that Nabokov came across the name in V. Victoroff-Toporoff's Rossica et Sovietica, Bibliographie des ouvrages parus en francais de 1917 à 1930 inclus relativs à la Russie et à l'U.S.S.R. (Saint-Cloud, 1931). In this book (p. 52), there appears a work by V. Sineokov, entitled Quelque faits historiques sur les relations russo-géorgiennes (Picart, 1925). A year later, in 1926, Vladimir Sineokov became a doctor of social sciences at the University of Lausanne. His dissertation was entitled La colonisation Russe en Asie. In 1929, this dissertation was published under the same title by Marcel Giard in Paris. In his book, Dr. Sineokov discusses the exploration and colonization of Central Asia and Siberia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is likely that Nabokov studied this monograph by Dr. Sineokov for his description in The Gift of Konstantin Godunov-Cherdyntsev's expeditions to these areas. As Nabokov himself indicated in the introduction to its English edition, the greater part of the novel was written in 1935-1937, but preliminary work for it may

have begun in 1934 or earlier (according to Gleb Struve, The Gift was written before Invitation to a Beheading. See his Russkaia literatura v izgnanii, 2nd ed., 1984, n. 54, p. 282). This may explain how the name of Dr. Sineokov came to be included in Invitation to a Beheading written in September of 1934 (see Zinaida Shakhovskaia, V poiskakh Nabokova, pp. 25 and 27).

-- Gavriel Shapiro, Northern Illinois University

Shade's Peer in Ada

The theme of two sisters being madly in love with one man is not a local one in Ada. Lucette's titanic death in Part Three does not terminate that line; rather, its solid course becomes dotted as the poor mermaid surfaces every now and then in the last hundred pages of the Family Chronicle, haunting both principal lovers.

Among other things Van ponders as he faces eternity is the perplexing possibility of finding himself in the hereafter inveigled once again in this difficult triangle. Aged Van and Ada translate into Russian John Shade's Pale Fire, and the only sample of that joint venture included in the memoir (p. 585) is the not-so-flippant passage dealing with this disturbing situation:

> We give advice
> To widower. He has been married twice;
> He meets his wives; both loved, both loving, both
> Jealous of one another.
> (11. 569-72)

This idea recurs, in various disguises, in many of VN's books (notably, in Pnin and LATH). In his short story "A Slice of Life" (1935), an inside-out motif of the theme sounds when the cuckholded husband says to a "God-fearing widower,"

> Yes, here's a nice point...a nice, interesting point: how will it be in the hereafter--will she cohabitate there with me or that swine?
> (Details of a Sunset, p. 142)

The variation involving two sisters has a well-known precedent in King Lear. In the last act, Edmund first weighs his options in a quite earthly fashion (I added emphasis to the phrase which is almost identical to line 572 of Shade's poem):

> To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
> Each jealous of the other, as the stung
> Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
> Both? One? Or neither?
> (5.2.55-58)

But when he hears of Goneril's and Regan's synchronous death, the Bastard comes up with a subtler remark:

I was contracted to them both; all three
Now marry in an instant.

(5.3.227-28)

Could King Lear be really a source of this interesting paradox, especially in the form it takes in Ada? One wonders. After all, Shakespeare is invariably added to the cast in each of VN's first six English novels, and Lear barks his famous "tilted" line, Nabokov's favorite quintuple "never" (which Ada so deftly transfigures into Jamais--N'est vert, p. 92), almost as soon as the wretched Edmund is borne off the stage to cope with the two jealous adders in Hades.

-- Gene Barabtarlo, University of Missouri-Columbia

* * *

QUERY:

D. Barton Johnson (Dept of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106) seeks information regarding the fate of Conrad Brenner, the author of the fine "Introduction" to the 1959 New Directions reissue of The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.

NEWS OF NABOKOV IN POLAND AND THE USSR

by Leszek Engelking

In 1982, Historia literatury Stanow Zjednoczonych w zarysie. Wiek XX [A concise History of 20th Century American Literature], by Andrzej Kopcewicz and Marta Sienicka (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe) appeared. Nabokov is mentioned on p. 160 and p. 380. Only three sentences are devoted to his oeuvre. In two reviews, one by M. Adamczyk and one by myself, the authors of the book were reproached for their unsatisfactory treatment of Nabokov's works:

(1) Monika Adamcyzk. "Potrzeby informacyjne i portrzeby estetyczne." Literatura na Swiecie, Warsaw, 14, no. 8, 1984, pp. 270-275.

(2) Leszek Engleking, "Polska historia dwudziestowiecznej literatury amerykanskiej." Literatura na Swiecie, 14, no. 8, 1984, pp. 252-253.

In my review of the Soviet Kratkaya literaturnaya entsiklopediya (Concise Literary Encyclopedia) I discussed, among other things, an entry devoted to Nabokov:

(3) Leszek Engelking, "Duza male encyklopedia." Literatura na Swiecie, 14, no. 11, November 1984, pp. 358-367.

Between February 5-18, 1985 large excerpts from Pnin were broadcast on Polish radio:

(4) Pnin, tr. Anna Kolyszko. Read by Henryk Rozen. Polish Radio, program III; 21 10-minute installments; each installment broadcast twice.

Five more citations:

(5) Marcin Bajerowicz. "Nabokov po raz pierwszy." Nurt (Poznan) no. 11 (November 1983) 13. A review of the Polish translation of Transparent Things.

(6) M. Bronski. "Nabokova lekcja literatury." Kultura (Paris) 38, no. 10 (October 1984) 83-96. Text devoted to Nabokov's Lectures on Literature and Lectures on Russian Literature.

(7) Waclaw Sadkowski. "Kro jest ten dziwny nieznajomy?" Nowe Ksiazki (Warsaw) no. 11 (November 1983) 15-17. A review of the Polish translation of Transparent Things.

(8) Wlodzimierz Pazniewski. "Poszlost'." Tworczosc (Warsaw) 41, no. 1 (January 1985) 135-138.

(9) "Sceny z zycia podwojnego monstrum" ["Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster"], tr. from English by Teresa Truszkowska. In Przekroj (Cracow) No. 2090 (June 30, 1985), pp. 15-17.

Two of Nabokov's stories in my translation will appear in the next issue of Literatura na Swiecie and I am preparing a special Nabokov issue of this monthly for late 1987.

Concerning Nabokov-related matters in the Soviet Union:

In M. B. Khrapchenko's book, Nikolai Gogol. Literaturnyi put'. Velichie pisatel'ia (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1984), Nabokov is mentioned on pp. 621, 623-625, 627. Khrapchenko argues Nabokov's points, quoting from VN's Gogol. The Moscow journal, Voprosy literatury (No. 3, March 1984) published an article entitled, "'Obeskurazhivaiiushchaia figura.' N.V. Gogol' v zerkale zapadnoi slavistiki" by R. Galtseva, I. Rodnianskaia, and V. Bibikhin, pp. 126-161. [later reprinted in Gogol': Istoriya i sovremennost'. K 175-letiyu so dyna rozhdeniya. Moscow, "Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1985, pp. 390-433]. VN is one of the Western slavists discussed, with quotations from his Gogol. In a publication from the University of Tartu, Estonia entitled Semeotika goroda i gorodskoi kultury. Peterburg (Trudy po znakovym sistemam 18, Tartu: 1984, uchonie zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, vypusk 664) there is an article by R.D. Timenchik entitlted "Poetika Sankt-Peterburga epokha simvolizma/postsimvolizma (pp. 117-124). On page 120 the author quotes from V. Sirin's poem, "Peterburg":

> Moya sienyushchaya ten'
> Struitsya ryadom, uglovato
> Peregibayas'.

Timenchik quotes from a book entitled Peterburg v stikhotvoreniakh russkikh poetov (Berlin 1923), but does not reveal whose pen-name "V. Sirin" was.

A final note. In La Quinzaine Littéraire (Paris) no. 425, October 1-15, 1984, p. 14 there appeared an interview with a contemporary Polish writer, Kazimierz Brandys. Jean-Pierre Salgas was the interviewer. This is a Nabokov-related fragment of the interview:

"J.-P.S. -- En lisant cette page des Carnets [Carnets de Varsovie 1978-1981, in French by Gallimard in Brandys' Miesiatse], je pensais à Nabokov...

K.B. -- Je me sens très proche de lui, meme si j'ai du mal à analyser cette proximité. En tous cas, quand je le lis, je me rends. Prenez Pnine: ce n'est pas un livre très gai, et pourtant il n'écrase pas le lecteur. Je suis très attiré par son comique et sa bonté, sa compassion pour l'homme."

VLADIMIR NABOKOV and SASHA SOKOLOV

by D. Barton Johnson

Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian writer of the first post-Revolutionary emigration, is a living presence for writers of the "Third Wave" emigration of the Seventies. As the only Russian émigré writer of his generation to gain international acclaim, Nabokov stands as a beacon light for those of the new émigré writers whose interests are belletristic rather than socio-political.

Many of the émigré writers invoke Nabokov's name, but only one, Sasha Sokolov, displays any marked affinity with the work of the acknowledged master. Sasha Sokolov's first novel, A School for Fools, was hailed by Nabokov as "an enchanting, touching and tragic book." Since his 1976 debut Sokolov has published two further novels: Mezhdu sobakoi i volkom (1980) [Between Dog and Wolf] and Palisandriia (1985) [The Epic of Palisander]. In part because of Nabokov's accolade and in part because of actual similarities, critics have not been slow to remark similarities betwen Sokolov's writings and Nabokov's. Our remarks survey the sometimes surprising and indirect ways in which Nabokov's presence has been and is being assimilated and redefined in the work of a leading figure in the new Russian literature. They also illustrate the hazards of influence hunting.

Sokolov's earliest contact with Nabokov's work was in 1960-1961 when a schoolmate sur-

reptitiously brought a Nabokov novel to class. It was the Age of Lolita and Nabokov's name had been unfavorably discussed in the Soviet press--although his books were virtually unattainable. Sokolov succeeded in looking at only the opening pages before returning the volume to its owner. This, he says, was his only exposure to Nabokov until his arrival in the West fifteen years later. He is no longer certain but thinks the Russian book may have been an émigré edition of Invitation to a Beheading.

After a checkered career as a journalist, Sokolov found a job as a gamekeeper on the remote upper Volga where he wrote A School for Fools. Knowing that such an avant-garde and negativistic book could not be published in the Soviet Union, the author made arrangements for the manuscript to be sent abroad where it found its way to Carl and Ellendea Proffers' Ardis Press in Michigan. Carl Proffer, the author of one of the first critical monographs on Nabokov--as well as the American publisher of his Russian-language books--sent proofs of Sokolov's novella to Nabokov in Switzerland. Nabokov's uncharacteristically warm response was to appear on the cover of both the Russian and English editions of the book as well as of the subsequent Italian, German, Dutch, Swedish and Polish translations. Sokolov had by now followed his manuscript into emigration. When Carl Proffer phoned him in Vienna with Nabokov's comments, the young author was elated. It was subsequently suggested that a visit to Nabokov be arranged, but Sokolov declined. What was there to talk about? "To say to him that I just wanted to look at you?--that's silly. To get pointers on how to write?"

After arriving in Vienna in October 1975, Sokolov read (in Russian) Lolita and The Gift and was surprised to note similarities between the avant-garde prose style of School for Fools and Nabokov's prose techniques: "... Nabokov had already achieved what I was only dreaming of." Dismayed, Sokolov determined to develop a new distinctive voice, one not under the shadow of the older writer. This search led to the exotic language of his 1980 Between Dog and Wolf, one of the most linguistically complex, daring, and difficult novels ever written in Russian. The novel, which has claim to being the Finnegans Wake of Russian literature, was a quantum jump in Sokolov's literary development that left many of his readers far behind. The stylistic density and narrative complexity of Sokolov's Between Dog and Wolf is far greater than that of any Nabokov work--not excepting Invitation to a Beheading, his most surreal and artifice-saturated novel. The point here is that Sokolov's language-obsessed novel arose in part as a conscious reaction against Nabokov's style--not in the sense of a rejection (for Sokolov greatly admires Nabokov) but in a successful attempt to sound a voice utterly distinct from that of the older writer.

Nabokov played a very different role in the writing of The Epic of Palisander. Although Lolita is mentioned in Sokolov's novel, the connection is much more pervasive. It has not escaped the attention of émigré writers that Nabokov's popular success came about through scandal. Sokolov was well aware of this when he began mulling over his third novel. Between Dog and Wolf, while a succès

d'estime, had been a commercial failure. The new novel must be less involute and have a theme of wide appeal--something perhaps both humorous and scabrous. Why not a radical inversion of the Lolita theme?: a very young male obsessed with very old women. While perhaps not highly erotic to most readers, the theme is exceedingly rich in parodic possibilities which Sokolov exploits to the hilt in one of the most outrageous, funniest works in modern Russian literature. The Epic of Palisander, like Dog and Wolf, is in part, a reaction to Nabokov but of a very different sort. If Dog and Wolf was a linguistic reaction into an arcanely brilliant stylistic tour de force, The Epic of Palisander is a topical reaction via inversion and parody--a parody of what, at least in the public eye, is the Nabokov theme.

The Epic of Palisander is far more than a parody inversion of the Lolita theme. It is parody on a grand scale--from Tolstoi and Dostoevskii through Svetlana Stalin's memoirs to Solzhenitsyn and beyond, to Beckett--all in the form of a comic picaresque epic, highly charged with grotesque eroticism. All of the traditional elements of the epic form are present: a hero of national importance, an extended journey, superhuman obstacles, and a ceremonial style. Cast in the form of a memoir addressed to a hypothetical twenty-eighth century biographer, the narrative traces the fantastical adventures of Palisander Dalberg, "Son of the Kremlin." Palisander, an orphan, is heir apparent to the leadership of the mysterious secret order of the Watchmen, a hereditary group that, in addition to regulating the Kremlin clocks, has

ruled Russia for many generations. Palisander, the great-grandson of Rasputin and the grand-nephew of Lavrenty Beria, is a difficult lad of enormous sexual capacities (and diverse proclivities) whose welfare is overseen by a Guardian Council consisting of Stalin, Beria, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Andropov. All are characters in the novel. The leadership, strangely enough, is rumored to be subject to the authority of certain forces abroad, possibly the Masons. In his memoir, Palisander recounts his many bizarre, often comic adventures and misadventures, including (extremely) youthful sexual escapades with elderly kin, as well as Kremlin wives and widows, a childish prank that results in Stalin's death, internal exile as steward of the Government Massage Parlor (located in Novodevichii Convent), an attempt on the life of Brezhnev, imprisonment, a pseudo-espionage mission to Western Europe to free Russia from supposed secret Masonic control, and exile abroad by forces that fear his accession to power in Russia. In the West, Palisander, who proves to be an enthusiastic hermaphrodite (and eventual winner of Nobel Prizes for leadership of the hermaphrodite civil rights movement as well as for literature), becomes a wandering bisexual courtesan--intimate with the great and near-great, a wealthy writer of scabrous best-sellers, and the owner of the graves of all of the Russians who have died in emigration and exile. Upon his final triumphant return to Russia to assume his rightful position, he is accompanied (in a sealed train) by the coffins of the Russian dead.

The style and narrative of The Epic of Palisander seem relatively straightforward, although its writing is both intricate and elegant. The creative technique used here to subvert the norm is parody and linguistic play, a procedure reminiscent of Nabokov. Sokolov's The Epic of Palisander is far more accessible, and far more scandalous than its predecessors. This does not, however, imply any retreat from the aesthetic standards of the earlier books any more than Lolita marked a decline in Nabokov's aesthetic standard.

The inverted Lolita theme, the mention of Nabokov, and the parodic, allusion-riddled nature of The Epic of Palisander lead one to seek out other Nabokovian subtexts. "The Book of Vengeance," one of the four "books" that make up Palisander's memoir, is, for the most part, a parody of GUlag memoirs. Palisander, having failed in his attempt to assassinate Brezhnev, is "imprisoned" in the luxurious palace of the former Prince Yusupov, the XVIIIth century libertine (and ancestor of the Prince Yusupov who staged the epic murder of Rasputin.) Awaiting disposition of his case, Palisander whiles away the time pursuing the arts and keeping his prison journal-destined, like all of his voluminous writings, to become a classic of its genre. The "prison" commandant is one Lt. Striutskii, an alternately imperious and unctuous incarnation of Gogolian poshlost'. Striutskii, a sex-obsessed sadist, is both Palisander's "friend" and jailer. The prisoner has the lurking impression he has met Striutskii before. And so he has. While waiting for Brezhnev's arrival in the Kremlin so he can carry out his plan, Palisander falls

into a barrack-room conversation with a marine horse-guardsman who introduces himself as Orest Modestovish Striutskii. Palisander has forgotten this brief encounter until his meeting with a third O.M. Striutskii who proves to be the philosophical judicial investigator in charge of preparing the case against the would-be assassin. Only on this third occasion does Palisander realize the coincidence and begin to ponder this strange triple incarnation and infestation of Striutskiis into his life: the Kremlin horse-guardsman, the prison administrator, and the investigator. Are they the same or different? Do they perhaps form a trinity symbolizing three dimensions of his captivity? These musings are all the more curious because it is hinted that Striutskii is the dark double of Palisander himself who is a classically unreliable narrator. The Striutskii affair in its various manifestations weaves in and out of the narrative over perhaps a hundred pages.

The Nabokovian parallel seems obvious. In Invitation to a Beheading, another prison novel, the hero, Cincinnatus, is attended by three figures: Rodion, his jailer; Roman, his attorney; and Rodrig, the prison director. As all careful readers of Chapter Three know, Rodion, Roman, and Rodrig are all the same actor who surreptitiously keeps changing costumes and make-up. They too are Gogolian incarnations of poshlost'. In a less direct parallel, Striutskii, in his guise as prison administrator, also seems to possess many of the qualities of the odious and amorous Pierre who is both Cincinnatus' "friend" and executioner. Pierre is the dark mirror image of

Cincinnatus as Striutskii is of Palisander. There is even a theatrically staged execution scene (albeit with a stand-in) at the end of the "Book of Vengeance" which inevitably evokes the denouement of Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading. The parallels seem overwhelming and one is tempted to assume the clever use of a Nabokovian subtext. The assumption is wrong. Sokolov affirms that he has never gotten past those opening pages of Invitation to a Beheading that he thinks he skimmed in his school days and knows only that "a certain Cincinnatus is in prison, that he is to be executed for some reason, and that the work is often compared with Kafka's Der Prozess" which he also has not read. The mention of The Trial is instructive for Nabokov was unaware of the Kafka novel at the time he wrote Invitation to a Beheading just as Sokolov had not read Nabokov's novel when writing The Epic of Palisander.

Sokolov provides yet another example of the hazards of influence hunting. After the completion of The Epic of Palisander Sokolov happened to read Blednyia Ogon', the Russian translation of Nabokov's Pale Fire. Once again he was struck by similarities to his own new work. Although he does not state them, they include the theme of royalty in exile and first-person narration by a bizarre, arch, self-deluded hero. More generally, Sokolov remarks that he sees "the similarity of many of his images and themes to Nabokov's in various of their works" and concludes simply that "nature is excessively bountiful." He finds, however, that the differences (he probably has in view chiefly stylistic features) predominate over similarities, and feels that his stylistic reaction to Nabokov has been successful.

To the naive question "Has Nabokov influenced Sokolov?", we must answer "yes." Most significant, however, is the nature of that relationship. It is, in the view of the author himself, either negative (more precisely 'reactive') or parodistic--a technique much favored by Nabokov himself. The real parallels between the writings of Sokolov and Nabokov, whose words of praise welcomed the younger writer's first novel, are on a more abstract level. Pushkin is central for both writers. Just as there is no Nabokov work without its Pushkin subtext, all three of Sokolov's novels draw heavily on Pushkin. Perhaps even more significant is their great admiration of Gogol. Both Nabokov and Sokolov share a profound aestheticism. They are stylists, language-centered writers who are little concerned with social issues. Nor are they much interested in character, which along with social commitment, has been a cardinal feature of the main stream of Russian literature. Their aestheticism, their obsession with style and language play (in the most literal sense) link them to the Russian Symbolists of the early XXth century, particularly Andrei Bely. Literary allusion and literary parody play important roles in their work. Most importantly, Sokolov and Nabokov are joined by their preoccupation with certain key themes: Time, Memory, Sex (especially sexual obsession and incest), and Death. Sokolov's vision is, however, far more estranged than that of his predecessor.

The differences between Sokolov and Nabokov are ultimately far more important than their similarities. Nabokov differed from his fellow modernists in his use of strong and often intricate plots. Sokolov, with the marginal exception of The Epic of Palisander, deemphasizes plot. Nabokov was among the most calculated of writers. By his own account, his characters were galley slaves, and his books were firmly in mind before he set pen to paper. Sokolov writes in a much more intuitive, groping fashion with little idea where he is headed. His books finally emerge from a prolonged process of reduction and refinement. Nabokov, one senses, nearly always knew why he wrote as he did; the allusions are conscious and explicit. Sokolov, when asked about particular points, is often, but not always, vague: "I liked the sound of it" or "It has an exotic ring." If the questioner suggests an answer to his own query, Sokolov will in essence often reply--"Yes, I may have had that in mind; I really can't say." Contrast this with a typical Nabokov's response: "A pretty thought, but not mine."

Sokolov himself sums up the difference saying "I start from the sound, the word, and proceed to the idea; Nabokov did the opposite." Elsewhere Sokolov writes "Nabokov was a mathematician in literature. I write spontaneously." The critic would perhaps qualify this by noting that Sokolov's "spontaneous" drafts are reworked many, many times. The differences might be summarized less succinctly by contrasting Nabokov's acuity of perception and revisualization and his remarkable precision of verbal description with

Sokolov's sense of sound, his verbal density, and his lyricism. Nabokov's language speaks of the outer world, while Sokolov's relates more to its own sound, to itself.

Nabokov, rather strangely, has no real followers among the Third Wave writers, although he has many among Anglo-American authors. The example of Sokolov, who in aesthetic outlook and verbal dexterity is the most Nabokovian of the Third Wave literary community, is instructive. Nabokov is the standard against which the new generation reacts.

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