

THE NABOKOVIAN

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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

In this issue we are featuring a story and two poems by Vladimir Nabokov. The story, "Wingstroke" (Udar kryla), was written by VN in October 1923 (Boyd I, 219) and published in *Russkoe Ekho* 21 (January 1924). This first translation of the story into English by Dmitri Nabokov also appears under the title "Wingbeat" in the spring 1992 edition of *The Yale Review* (volume 80, nos. 1 and 2). The title, "Wingstroke," here employed, corresponds to the working title which VN himself designated for the story (see Parker, *RLT* 24; the text of the story has been slightly revised by Dmitri Nabokov from the *Yale Review* version.). The two poems, "Whence have you flown?" (1924) and "Spring" (1925) appear here for the first time in English translation by Dmitri Nabokov.

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A number of our readers wrote to inform the editor of the death of Gilles Barbedette in Paris on March 30. His funeral took place in l'Eglise Saint Thomas d'Aquin, with burial at the Cimetiere du Père-Lachaise. Christine Raguet-Bouvard wrote the following:

Gilles Barbedette, the French author and Nabokov editor, died in Paris on Monday, March 30, 1922. He was a very talented writer, the author of several novels: *Le metromane*, *Les volumes ephemeres*, *Baltimore*, and a short and beautiful autobiographical narrative: *Une saison en enfance*. He was also the editor of an excellent French collection of foreign fiction which allowed French readers to discover many American writers. He devoted a large part of his

literary life to Vladimir Nabokov. Translator of *The Enchanter*, he was the general editor of *La Pleiade-Nabokov* (Gallimard), to appear in 1994; the editor of Nabokov's unpublished Russian stories, *La Venitienne*; the author of *Invitation au mensonge*, an essay on the novel, about Sterne, Flaubert, Wilde, Proust, and Nabokov. In her will, Vera Nabokov had made him the Literary Executor of Vladimir Nabokov in France. His death is a great loss for French Nabokovians.

In the words of Dmitri Nabokov, "Gilles Barbedette was one of the moving spirits behind the French resurgence that will culminate in the Pleiade editions. He assembled a team of specialists to carry on the VN work that, with remarkable dedication, he had continued into his very last weeks. He never met VN, but became a good friend of Vera and Dmitri Nabokov, with whom he worked closely on *L'Enchanteur* and other projects."

*

Dmitri Nabokov also sends word of the death of Heinrich Maria Ledig-Rowohlt: "Even though he had officially retired, he had remained the gray eminence of the firm and the dean of German publishing. He was wise, witty, and loved by all. He had been Nabokov's German publisher for many years, and gave the impetus to the Rowohlt VN *opera omnia* project now in progress. He had also been, for a long time, one of the Nabokovs' dearest personal friends."

*

Report on the 1991 MLA sessions by Marilyn Edelstein:

On Saturday, December 28, 3:30-4:45, in the San Francisco Hilton, the session on "Feminist Approaches to Nabokov" took place, chaired by Marilyn Edelstein. The session was well attended,

with more than 40 people in the audience, and a lively, even heated question-and-answer period and discussion followed the four papers and carried over into the Society's cocktail hour.

Marilyn Edelstein introduced the four speakers and noted the relative novelty and future possibilities of feminist approaches to Nabokov's work. She suggested that feminist work might help redirect Nabokov criticism, once an almost exclusively male domain in which game-playing and technique were far more common concerns than gender, toward the social and cultural dimensions of Nabokov's writings. The four papers, she noted, reveal that the sexual politics and gender implications of Nabokov's work are highly complex, especially if one tries to locate the author's own attitudes behind those of his narrators and characters.

The four papers were quite varied in their uses of feminist theory and their approaches to Nabokov. Charles Nicol presented the first paper, "Limited to the Male's Perceptions: Colette, Lolita, and the Wife of Chorb." He argued that the absent wife in "The Return of Chorb" might be the impossible adult version of Colette, obsessively recreated in "First Love," *Speak, Memory*, and *Lolita*--impossible because of Nabokov's own ambivalence toward adult (especially female) sexuality and his objectification of women.

Less focused on Nabokov than on his narrative strategies, Sally Robinson presented the next paper, "Producing Woman as Text: Narrative Seduction in *Lolita*." She analyzed the ways in which Humbert's narrative manipulates or seduces the male reader, and sets in motion a masculine rivalry or exchange between addresser and addressee, narrator and reader, over possession of woman as token, object, and finally, text. She argued that women readers must resist such narrative seductions and identifications against themselves.

The third paper, presented by Jean Walton, examined "Kinbote's Transparent Closet in *Pale Fire*." [an abstract of her paper appears in this issue, ED]. Susan Elizabeth Sweeney gave the last paper, "Re-Inventing Nabokov: A Critique of the Feminist Critique in Roberta Smoodin's *Inventing Ivanov* [an abstract of her paper appears in this issue, ED].

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The VN session at the 1991 AATSEEL Convention took place on Monday December 30. The topic was "The Fine Arts in Nabokov," chaired by Christine Rydel (Grand Valley State); Secretary, Charles Nicol (Indiana State). Papers read were: "Nabokov's *Pnin* and Superrealism," Alexander Dunkel (Arizona); "Anamorphoses and Anagrams, Landscape and Lexicon: Seeing What Nabokov is Saying," Ralph Ciancio (Skidmore); "Pictorial Fictions in Nabokov's Works," Robert Bowie (Miami); "Nabokov and Music Reconsidered," Charles Nicol.

*

The program for the VN Society Meetings at the MLA in December 1992 in New York City have been set. One session, "Vladimir Nabokov's Discovery of America," will be chaired by Zoran Kuzmanovich (Davidson), with papers by John Burt Foster, Jr. (George Mason), Ellen Pifer (Delaware), Joel Brattin (Worcester Polytechnic), and Shoshana Milgram Knapp (Virginia Polytechnic). The other session, "Vladimir Nabokov: General Session," will be chaired by John Burt Foster, Jr. (George Mason), with papers by Gavriel Shapiro (Cornell), Tom Goldpaugh (Marist), Virginia L. Blum (Kentucky), and Leona Toker (Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

*

Mrs. Jacqueline Callier and Dmitri Nabokov have provided the following list of VN works received November 1991 - March 1992.

- November - *Uitnodiging voor en onthoofding* [Invitation to a Beheading], tr. Anneke Brassinga. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
- *De Gave* [The Gift], tr. Anneke Brassinga. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
- December - *King, Queen, Knave*. London: Oxford University Press, reprint.
- January - *Sogliadatai, Volshebnik* [The Eye, The Enchanter]. Volume III of *Sobranie Sochinenii*. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- *Lolita*, tr. Mehka Kheba. Sofia (Bulgaria): Narodna Kultura.
- February - *Rire dans la nuit* [Laughter in the Dark], tr. Christine Bouvart. Paris: Grasset.
- *Le Don* [The Gift]. Paris: Gallimard, Folio reprint.
- "Frühling in Fialta." In *Russische Erzaehler des 19 & 20 Jahrhunderts*. Munich: Wilhelm Heyne.
- "Sprich, Erinnerung, Sprich" (Speak, Memory) excerpt. In *Petersburger Traume*. Munich: R. Piper.
- "Pilgram" [story]. In *Berlin Erzaelt*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch.
- *Lettres choisies 1940-1977* [Selected Letters], tr. Christine Bouvart. Paris: Gallimard, Du Monde Entier.

- *Pnine*, tr. Michel Chrestine. Paris: Gallimard, Folio.
- March - *Ada*, tr. Rene Kupershoek. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
- *Hetwerkelijkeven Van Sebastian Knight* [The Real Life of Sebastian Knight], tr. Sjaak Commandeur. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
- *The Gift*. London: Penguin reprint.
- *Le Guetteur* [The Eye], tr. Georges Magnane. Paris: Gallimard, Folio reprint.
- *Lolita* excerpt. In *Das Lesebuch der Lust*. Munich: Wilhelm Heyne.
- "Stadtführer Berlin". In *Russen in Berlin*. Leipzig: Reclam.

*

From Christine Rydel comes the following information:

There were two panels devoted to VN at the 20th Century Literature Conference held at the University of Louisville, February 27-29, 1992. Professor Mania Ritter of Western Kentucky University chaired the panel called "Nabokov's *Lolita*." The participants and their papers included: Kristi Larkin Havens, University of Tennessee, "'Lo-Lee-ta' and Humbert Humbert's Discourse of Desire: Reinscribing the Body of *Lolita* in Nabokov's *Lolita*"; Helene Versamidou, University of Illinois, "'I am your father, and I am speaking English, and I love you.' Fragments of a Lover's Discourse in *Lolita*"; Brenda S. Scherer, Ball State University, "In the Light of Death: *Lolita*

Exposed to Foucault's Concept of the Gaze." I chaired the other panel, "Nabokov in Context." The panelists and papers included the following: Jean Petrolle, Southern Illinois University, "The Anti-Hero and Morality: Observations About Moralism in Dostoevsky and Nabokov"; Louis P. Simon, Jr., Southern Illinois University, "Nabokov's Radical Subjectivity and the Problem of Solipsism"; Robert Alpert, Harvard University, "Nabokov and Pynchon: Modern and Postmodern Engagements with Popular Culture."

*

At the 1992 AAASS national convention in Phoenix, on Friday, November 20, the following session will be held: "Nabokov: 'Conclusive Evidence' About Some Not So 'Transparent Things'," chaired by D. Barton Johnson. Papers to be read include "Nabokov and Narrative Point of View," Julian Connolly (Virginia); "Pnin Revisited," Galya Diment (Washington); "Despair and the Criminal Imagination," Anthony Anemone, Jr. (Colby); discussant Vladimir Alexandrov (Yale).

*

ODDS AND ENDS

-- There has recently been a great deal of VN activity in France. French editions of *Selected Letters* and Boyd's *VN. The Russian Years* have appeared. *Rire dans la Nuit* [Laughter in the Dark], for the first time translated (by Christine Bouvart, Grasset) from the version of *Kamera/Laughter* that VN considered definitive, reached #8 on the French bestseller list. Dmitri Nabokov appeared on French TV and Radio ("Caracteres du mois," France Culture and France Info) to present the three works.

-- Rights for a film remake of *Laughter in the Dark* have been sold to Prophit films. Shooting will begin

this summer in Poland and on the Côte d'Azur, with Ben Kingsley tentatively set to play Albinus.

-- Serena Vitale's fine translation of *Dar* [The Gift] from Russian into Italian (Milan, Adelphi, 1991) was on the Italian bestseller list for a number of weeks. The next Adelphi volume, scheduled for early summer, will be *La Veneziana* [The Italian version of the thirteen previously unpublished and/or uncollected stories published in France as *La Venitienne* (Gallimard, 1991) and being prepared by Dmitri Nabokov for next year's full Knopf story anthology].

-- As briefly noted in the last issue, a VN butterfly and book exhibition called "Le Farfalle di Nabokov," under the auspices of the Museo de Storia Naturale de Milano together with Adelphi Edizione, was held 2 October 1991 to 29 March 1992. Three cases of butterflies from the Lausanne Museum's Nabokov collection (whose 3900 specimens have all finally been spread, mounted, and gathered in a Nabokov section) were exhibited together with Nabokov's books, scientific sketches, and dedication butterflies. Serena Vitale and Dmitri Nabokov spoke at the opening ceremony, and Dmitri Nabokov discussed the butterfly themes in VN's books on Italian TV.

-- An interesting new term was coined in an article appearing in the Swiss *Le Nouveau Quotidien* ("L'ombrageux Vladimir Nabokov, individualiste absolu," 19 March 1992): "*Nabokovisme*, ou la vision du monde qui se cache derriere ces livres d'apparence frivole" [*Nabokovism*, or the vision of the world which hides behind these books which appear frivolous].

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A word to our readers: Please inform us in a timely manner when you change your address. We cannot be responsible for undelivered editions, and will not provide free substitute copies.

WINGSTROKE

Vladimir Nabokov

When the curved tip of one ski crosses the other, you tumble forward. The scalding snow goes up your sleeves, and it is very hard to get back on your feet. Kern, who had not skied for a long time, rapidly worked up a sweat. Feeling slightly dizzy, he yanked off the woolen cap that had been tickling his ears, and brushed the moist sparks from his eyelashes.

Kern's skis creaked as he made his way up the slope. Noticing his broad shoulders, his equine profile, and the robust gloss on his cheekbones, the English girl he had met yesterday, the third day since his arrival, had taken him for a compatriot. Isabel, Airborne Isabel, as she was dubbed by a crowd of sleek and swarthy young men of the Argentine type, who scurried everywhere in her wake: to the hotel ballroom, up the padded stairs, along the snowy slopes in a play of sparkling dust. Her mien was airy and impetuous, her mouth so red it seemed the Creator had scooped up some torrid carmine and slapped a handful on the nether part of her face. Laughter flitted in her down-flecked eyes. A Spanish comb stood erect like a wing in the steep wave of her satin-sheeny hair. This was how Kern had seen her yesterday, when the slightly hollow din of the gong summoned her to dinner from Room 35. And the fact that they were neighbors, and that the number of her room was that of his years, and that she was seated across from him at the long table d'hôte, tall, vivacious, in a low-cut black dress, with a band of black silk on her bare neck -- all this seemed so significant to Kern that it made a rift in the dull melancholy that had already oppressed him for half a year.

It was Isabel who spoke first, and that did not surprise him. In this huge hotel that blazed, isolated,

in a cleft between the mountains, life pulsed tipsy and light-hearted after the dead War years. Besides, to her, to Isabel, nothing was forbidden -- not the sidelong flutter of eyelashes, not the melody of laughter in her voice as she said, handing Kern the ashtray,

"I think you and I are the only English here," and added, inclining tableward a translucent shoulder restrained by a black ribbonlike strap, "Not counting, of course, a half-dozen little old ladies, and that character over there with the turned-around collar."

Kern replied, "You're mistaken. I have no homeland. It's true I spent many years in London. Besides--"

The next morning, after a half-year of indifference grown habitual, he suddenly felt the pleasure of entering the deafening cone of an ice-cold shower. At nine, after a substantial and sensible breakfast, he crunched off on his skis across the reddish sand scattered on the naked glare of the path before the hotel veranda. When he had mounted the snowy slope, herringbone-style as befits a skier, there, amid checkered knickers and flushed faces, was Isabel.

She greeted him English fashion -- with but the flourish of a smile. Her skis were iridescent with olive-gold. Snow clung to the intricate straps that held her feet. There was an unfeminine strength about her feet and legs, shapely in their sturdy boots and tightly wound puttees. A purple shadow glided behind her along the crusty surface as, hands nonchalantly thrust into the pockets of her leather jacket and her left ski slightly advanced, she sped off down the slope, even faster, scarf flying, amid sprays of powdered snow. Then, at full speed, she made a sharp turn with one knee deeply flexed, straightened again, and sped on, past the firs, past the turquoise skating rink. A pair of youths in colorful sweaters and a famous Swedish sportsman with a terracotta face and colorless, combed-back hair rushed past behind her.

A little later Kern ran into her again near a bluish track along which people flashed with a faint clatter, belly-down on their flat sleds like woolly frogs. With a glint of her skis Isabel disappeared behind the bend of

a snowbank, and when Kern, ashamed of his awkward movements, overtook her in a soft hollow amid silver-frosted boughs, she wiggled her fingers in the air, stamped her skis, and was off again. Kern stood for a time among the violet shadows, and suddenly felt a whiff of the familiar terror of silence. The lacework of the branches in the enamel-like air had the chill of a terrifying fairy tale. The trees, the intricate shadows, his own skis all looked strangely toylike. He realized that he was tired, that he had a blistered heel, and, snagging some protruding branches, he turned back. Skaters glided mechanically across the smooth turquoise. On the snow slope beyond, the terracotta Swede was helping up a lanky chap with snow-covered horn-rimmed glasses, who was floundering in the sparkling powder like some awkward bird. Like a detached wing, a ski that had come off his foot was sliding down the hill.

Back in his room, Kern changed and, at the sound of the gong's hollow clanging, rang and ordered cold roast beef, some grapes, and a flask of Chianti.

He had a nagging ache in his shoulders and thighs.

"Had no business chasing after her," he thought. "A man sticks a pair of boards on his feet and proceeds to savor the law of gravity. Ridiculous."

Around four he went down to the spacious reading room, where the mouth of the fireplace exhaled orange heat and invisible people sat in deep leather armchairs with their legs extending from under open newspapers. On a long oaken table lay a disorderly pile of magazines full of advertisements for toilet supplies, dancing girls, and parliamentary top hats. Kern picked out a ragged copy of the *Tattler* from the previous June and, for a long time, examined the smile of the woman who had, for seven years, been his wife. He recalled her dead face, which had become so cold and hard, and some letters he had found in a small box.

He pushed aside the magazine, his fingernail squeaking on the glossy page.

Then, moving his shoulders laboriously and wheezing on his short pipe, he went out onto the

enormous enclosed veranda, where a chilled band was playing and people in bright scarves were drinking strong tea, ready to rush out again into the cold, onto the slopes that shone with a humming shimmer through the wide windowpanes. With searching eyes, he scanned the veranda. Somebody's curious gaze pricked him like a needle touching the nerve of a tooth. He turned back abruptly.

In the billiard room, which he had entered sidewise as the oak door yielded to his push, Monfiore, a pale, red-haired little fellow who recognized only the Bible and the carom, was bent over the emerald cloth, sliding his cue back and forth as he aimed at a ball. Kern had made his acquaintance recently, and the man had promptly showered him with citations from the Holy Scriptures. He said he was writing a major book in which he demonstrated that, if one construed the Book of Job in a certain way, then But Kern had stopped listening, for his attention had suddenly been caught by his interlocutor's ears -- pointed ears, packed with canary-colored dust, with reddish fluff on their tips.

The balls clicked and scattered. Raising his eyebrows, Monfiore proposed a game. He had melancholy, slightly bulbous, caprine eyes.

Kern had already accepted, and had even rubbed some chalk on the tip of his cue, but, suddenly sensing a wave of dreadful ennui that made the pit of his stomach ache and his ears ring, said he had a pain in his elbow, glanced out as he passed a window at the mountains' sugary sheen, and returned to the reading room.

There, with his legs intertwined and one patent-leather shoe twitching, he again examined the pearl-gray photograph, the childlike eyes and shaded lips of the London beauty who had been his wife. The first night after her self-inflicted death he followed a woman who smiled at him on a foggy street corner, taking revenge on God, love, and fate.

And now came this Isabel with that red smear for a mouth. If one could only

He clenched his teeth and the muscles of his strong jaws rippled. His entire past life seemed a shaky row of varicolored screens with which he shielded himself from cosmic drafts. Isabel was but the latest bright scrap. How many there had already been of these silk rags, and how he had tried to hang them across the gaping black gap! Voyages, books in delicate bindings, and seven years of ecstatic love. They billowed, these scraps, with the wind outside, tore, fell one by one. The gap cannot be hidden, the abyss breathes and sucks everything in. This he understood when the detective in suede gloves

Kern sensed that he was rocking back and forth, and that some pale girl with pink eyebrows was looking at him from behind a magazine. He took a *Times* from the table and opened the giant sheets. Paper bedspread across the chasm. People invent crimes, museums, games, only to escape from the unknown, from the vertiginous sky. And now this Isabel

He tossed the paper aside, rubbed his forehead with an enormous fist, and again felt someone's wondering gaze on him. Then he slowly walked out of the room, past the reading feet, past the fireplace's orange jaw. He lost his way in the resounding corridors, found himself in some hallway, while the white legs of bowed chairs were reflected by the parquet and a broad painting hung on the wall of William Tell piercing the apple on his son's head; then he examined at length his clean-shaven, heavy face, the blood streaks on the whites of his eyes, his checked bow tie in the glistening mirror of a bright bathroom where water gurgled musically and a golden cigarette butt discarded by someone floated in the porcelain depths.

Beyond the windows the snows were dimming and turning blue. Delicate hues illumined the sky. The flaps of the revolving door at the entrance to the din-filled vestibule slowly glinted as they admitted clouds of vapor and snorting, florid-faced people tired after their snowy games. The stairs breathed with footfalls, exclamations, laughter. Then the hotel grew still; everyone was dressing for dinner.

Kern, who had fallen into a vague torpor in his armchair in his twilight room, was awakened by the gong's vibrations. Reveling in his newfound energy, he turned on the lights, inserted cufflinks into a fresh, starched shirt, extracted a flattened pair of black pants from under the squeaking press. Five minutes later, aware of a cool lightness, the firmness of the hair on the top of his head, and every detail of his well-creased clothes, he went down to the dining room.

Isabel was not there. Soup was served, then fish, but she did not appear.

Kern examined with revulsion the dull-bronzed youths, the brick-hued face of an old woman with a beauty spot dissimulating a pimple, a man with goatish eyes, and fixed his gloomy gaze on a curly little pyramid of hyacinths in a green pot.

She appeared only when, in the hall where William Tell hung, the instruments of a Negro band had started pounding and moaning.

She smelled of chill air and perfume. Her hair looked moist. Something about her face stunned Kern.

She smiled a brilliant smile, and adjusted the black ribbon on her translucent shoulder.

"You know, I just got back. Barely had time to change and wolf down a sandwich."

Kern asked: "Don't tell me you've been skiing all this time? Why, it's completely dark out."

She gave him an intense look, and Kern realized what had astonished him: her eyes, which sparkled as if they were dusted with frost.

Isabel began gliding softly along the dovelike vowels of English speech:

"Of course. It was extraordinary. I hurtled down the slopes in the dark, I flew off the bumps. Right up into the stars."

"You might have killed yourself," said Kern.

She repeated, narrowing her downy eyes,

"Right up into the stars," and added, with a glint of her bare clavicle, "and now I want to dance."

The Negro band rattled and wailed in the hall, Japanese lanterns floated colorfully. Moving on tiptoe, alternating quick steps with suspended ones,

his palm pressed to hers, Kern advanced, at close quarters, on Isabel. One step, and her slender leg would press into him; another, and she would resiliently yield. The fragrant freshness of her hair tickled his temple, and he could feel, under the edge of his right hand, the supple undulations of her bared back. With bated breath he would enter breaks in the music, then glide on from measure to measure Around him floated past the intense faces of angular couples with perversely absent eyes. And the opaque song of the strings was punctuated by the patter of primitive little hammers.

The music accelerated, swelled, and ended with a clatter. Everything stopped. Then came applause, demanding more of the same. But the musicians had decided to have a rest.

Pulling a handkerchief out of his cuff and mopping his brown, Kern set off after Isabel, who, with a flutter of her black fan, was heading for the door. They sat down side by side on some wide stairs.

Not looking at him, she said, "Sorry -- I had the feeling I was still amid the snow and stars. I had no idea who you were, and whether you danced well or not."

Kern glanced at her as if not hearing, and she was indeed immersed in her own radiant thoughts, thoughts unknown to him.

One step lower sat a youth in a very narrow jacket and a skinny girl with a birthmark on her shoulderblade. When the music started again, the youth invited Isabel to dance a Boston. Kern had to dance with the skinny girl. She smelled of slightly sour lavender. Colored paper streamers swirled out through the hall, tangling themselves about the dancers. One of the musicians stuck on a white moustache, and for some reason Kern felt ashamed for him. When the dance was over he abandoned his partner and rushed off in search of Isabel. She was nowhere to be seen -- not at the buffet nor on the staircase.

"That's it -- bedtime," was Kern's terse thought.

Back in his room he held the drape aside before lying down, and, without thinking, looked into the night. Reflections of windows lay on the dark snow in front of the hotel. In the distance, the metallic summits floated in a funereal radiance.

He had the sensation he had glanced into death. He pulled the folds together tightly so that not a ray of night could leak into the room. But when he switched off the light and lay down, he noticed a glint coming from the edge of a glass shelf. He got up and fiddled a long time around the window, cursing the splashes of moonlight. The floor was cold as marble.

When Kern loosened the cord of his pyjamas and closed his eyes, slippery slopes started to rush beneath him. A hollow pounding began in his heart, as if it had kept silent all day and was now taking advantage of the quiet. He began feeling frightened as he listened to this pounding. He recalled how once, on a very windy day, he was passing a butcher's shop with his wife, and a carcass rocked on its hook with a dull thudding against the wall. That was how his heart felt now. His wife, meanwhile, had her eyes narrowed against the wind and was holding her hat as she said that the wind and the sea were driving her crazy, that they must leave, they must leave

Kern rolled over onto his other side -- gingerly, so his chest would not burst from the convex blows.

Can't go on like this, he mumbled into the pillow, forlornly folding up his legs. He lay for a while on his back peering at the ceiling, at the wan gleams that had penetrated, as piercing as his ribs.

When his eyes closed again, silent sparks started to glide in front of him, then infinitely unwinding transparent spirals, Isabel's snowy eyes and fiery mouth flashed past, then came sparks and spirals again. For an instant his heart retracted into a lacerating lump. Then it expanded, swelled.

Can't go on like this, I'll go crazy. No future, just a black wall. There's nothing left.

He had the impression that the paper streamers were slithering down his face, rustling and ripping into narrow shreds. And the Japanese lanterns flowed

with colored undulations in the parquet. He was dancing, advancing.

If I could just unclench her, flip her open And then

And death seemed to him like a gliding dream, a fluffy fall. No thoughts, no palpitations, no aches.

The lunar ribs on the ceiling had imperceptibly moved. Footfalls passed quietly along the corridor, a lock clicked somewhere, a soft ringing flew past; then footfalls again, the mutter and murmur of footfalls.

That means the ball is over, thought Kern. He turned his stuffy pillow over.

Now, all around, there was an immense, gradually cooling silence. Only his heart oscillated, taut and heavy. Kern groped on the bedside table, located the pitcher, took a swallow from the spout. An icy streamlet scalded his neck and collarbone.

He started thinking of methods to induce sleep. He imagined waves rhythmically running up onto a shoreline. Then plump gray sheep slowly tumbling over a fence. One sheep, two, three

Isabel is asleep next door, thought Kern. Isabel is asleep, wearing yellow pajamas, probably. Yellow becomes her. Spanish color. If I scratched on the wall with my fingernail she'd hear me. Damned palpitations

He fell asleep at the very moment he had begun trying to decide whether there was any point in turning on the light and reading something for a while. There's a French novel lying on the armchair. The ivory knife glides, cutting the pages. One, two

He came to in the middle of the room, awakened by a sense of unbearable horror. The horror had knocked him off the bed. He had dreamt that the wall next to which stood his bed had begun slowly collapsing onto him -- so he had recoiled with a spasmodic exhalation.

Kern found the headboard by touch, and would have gone back to sleep immediately if it had not been for a noise he heard through the wall. He did not understand right away where this noise was coming from, and the act of straining his hearing made his consciousness, which was ready to glide down the

slope of sleep, abruptly grow lucid. The noise occurred again: a twang, followed by the rich sonority of guitar strings.

Kern remembered -- it was Isabel who was in the next room. Right away, as if in response to his thought, came a peal of her laughter. Twice, thrice, the guitar throbbed and dissolved. Then an odd, intermittent bark sounded and ceased.

Seated on his bed, Kern listened in wonder. He pictured a bizarre scene: Isabel with a guitar and a huge Great Dane looking up at her with blissful eyes. He put his ear to the chilly wall. The bark rang out again, the guitar twanged as from a fillip, and a strange rustle began undulating as if an ample wind were whirling there in the next room. The rustle stretched out into a low whistle, and once again the night filled with silence. Then a frame banged -- Isabel had shut the window.

Indefatigable girl, he thought -- the dog, the guitar, the icy drafts.

Now all was quiet. Having expelled all those noises from her room, Isabel had probably gone to bed and was now asleep.

"Damn it! I don't understand anything. I don't have anything. Damn it, damn it," moaned Kern, burying himself in the pillow. A leaden fatigue was compressing his temples. His legs ached and tingled unbearably. He groaned in the darkness for a long time, turning heavily from side to side. The rays on the ceiling were long since extinguished.

II

The next day Isabel did not appear until lunchtime.

Since morning the sky had been blindingly white and the sun had been moonlike. Then snow began falling, slowly and vertically. The dense flakes, like ornamental spots on a white veil, curtained the view of the mountains, the heavily laden firs, the dulled turquoise of the rink. The plump, soft particles of snow rustled against the windowpanes, falling, falling without end. If one watched them for long, one had the

impression the entire hotel was slowly drifting upward.

"I was so tired last night," Isabel was saying to her neighbor, a young man with a high olive forehead and piercing eyes, "so tired I decided to loll in bed."

"You look stunning today," drawled the young man with exotic courtesy.

She inflated her nostrils derisively.

Looking at her through the hyacinths, Kern said coldly,

"I didn't know, Miss Isabel, that you had a dog in your room, as well as a guitar."

Her downy eyes seemed to narrow even more, against a breeze of embarrassment. Then she beamed with a smile, all carmine and ivory.

"You overdid it on the dance floor last night, Mr. Kern," she replied. The olive youth and the little fellow who recognized only Bible and billiards laughed, the first with a hearty ha-ha, the second very softly, with raised eyebrows.

Kern said with a frown,

"I'd like to ask you not to play at night. I don't have an easy time falling asleep."

Isabel slashed his face with a rapid, radiant glance.

"You had better ask your dreams, not me, about that."

And she began talking to her neighbor about the next day's ski competition.

For some minutes already Kern had felt his lips stretching into a spasmodic, uncontrollable sneer. It twitched agonizingly in the corners of his mouth, and he suddenly felt like yanking the tablecloth off the table, hurling the pot with the hyacinths against the wall.

He rose, trying to conceal his unbearable tremor, and, seeing no one, went out of the room.

"What's happening to me," he questioned his anguish. "What's going on here?"

He kicked his suitcase open and started packing. He immediately felt dizzy. He stopped and again began pacing the room. Angrily he stuffed his short pipe. He sat down in the armchair by the window, beyond

which the snow was falling with nauseating regularity.

He had come to this hotel, to this wintry, stylish nook called Zermatt, in order to fuse the sensation of white silence with the pleasure of light-hearted, motley encounters, for total solitude was what he feared most. But now he understood that human faces were also intolerable to him, that the snow made his head ring, and that he lacked the inspired vitality and tender perseverance without which passion is powerless. While for Isabel, probably, life consisted of a splendid ski run, of impetuous laughter, of perfume and frosty air.

Who is she? A heliotype diva, broken free? Or the runaway daughter of a swaggering, bilious lord? Or just one of those women from Paris And where does her money come from? Slightly vulgar thought . . .

She does have the dog, though, and it's pointless for her to deny it. Some sleek-haired Great Dane. With a cold nose and warm ears. Still snowing, too, Kern thought haphazardly. And, in my suitcase -- a spring seemed to pop open, with a clink, in his brain -- I have a Parabellum.

Until evening he again ambled about the hotel, or made dry rustling noises with the newspapers in the reading room. From the vestibule window he saw Isabel, the Swede, and several young men with jackets pulled on over fringed sweaters getting into a swanlike curved sleigh. The roan horses made their merry harnesses ring. The snow was falling silent and dense. Isabel, all spangled with small white stars, was shouting and laughing amid her companions. And when the sled started with a jerk and sped off, she rocked backwards, clapping her fur-mittened hands in the air.

Kern turned away from the window.

Go ahead, enjoy your ride It makes no difference. . . .

Then, during dinner, he tried not to look at her. She was filled with a merry, festive gaiety, and paid no attention to him. At nine the Negro music began

moaning and clattering again. Kern, in a state of feverish languor, was standing by the doorjamb, gazing at the clinched couples and at Isabel's curly fan.

A soft voice said next to his ear,

"Would you care to go to the bar?"

He turned and saw the melancholy caprine eyes, the ears with their reddish fuzz.

Amid the crimson penumbra of the bar the glass tables reflected the flounces of the lampshades.

On high stools at the metal counter sat three men, all three wearing white gaiters, their legs retracted, sucking through straws on bright-colored drinks. On the other side of the bar, where varicolored bottles sparkled on the shelves like a collection of convex beetles, a fleshy, black-mustachioed man in a cherry-colored dinner jacket was mixing cocktails with extraordinary dexterity. Kern and Monfiori selected a table in the bar's velvet depths. A waiter opened a long list of beverages, gingerly and reverently, like an antiquary exhibiting a precious book.

"We're going to have a glass of each in succession," said Monfiori in his melancholy, slightly hollow voice, "and when we get to the end we'll start over, choosing only the ones we found to our liking. Perhaps we'll stop at one and keep savoring it for a long time. Then we'll go back to the beginning again."

He gave the waiter a pensive look. "Is that clear?"

The part in the waiter's hair tipped forward.

"This is known as the roaming of Bacchus," Monfiori told Kern with a doleful chuckle. "Some people approach their daily life in the same way."

Kern stifled a tremulous yawn. "You know this ends by making you throw up."

Monfiori sighed, swigged, smacked his lips, and marked the first item on the list with an X using an automatic pencil. Two deep furrows ran from the wings of his nose to the corners of his thin mouth.

After his third glass Kern lit a cigarette in silence. After his sixth drink -- an oversweet concoction of chocolate and champagne -- he had the urge to talk.

He exhaled a megaphone of smoke. Narrowing his eyes, he tapped the ashes from his cigarette with a yellowed nail.

"Tell me, Monfiori, what do you think of this -- what's her name -- Isabel?"

"You'll get nowhere with her," replied Monfiori. "She belongs to the slippery species. All she seeks is fleeting contact."

"But she plays the guitar at night, and fusses with her dog. That's not good is it?" said Kern goggling his eyes at his glass.

With another sigh, Monfiori said,

"Why don't you drop her. After all . . ."

"Sounds to me like envy--" began Kern.

The other quietly interrupted him:

"She's a woman. And I, you see, have other tastes."

Clearing his throat modestly he made another X.

The ruby drinks were replaced by golden ones. Kern had the feeling his blood was turning sweet. His head was growing foggy. The white spats left the bar. The drumming and crooning of the distant music ceased.

"You say one must be selective . . .," he spoke thickly and limply, "while I have reached a point . . . Listen to this, for instance -- I once had a wife. She fell in love with someone else. He turned out to be a thief. He stole cars, necklaces, furs . . . And she poisoned herself. With strychnine."

"And do you believe in God?" said Monfiori with the air of a man getting on his hobby horse. "There is God, after all."

Kern gave an artificial laugh.

"Biblical God . . . Gaseous vertebrate . . . I am not a believer."

"That's from Huxley," insinuatingly observed Monfiori. "There was a biblical God, though . . . The point is that He is not alone; there are numerous biblical Gods . . . A host. My favorite one is . . . 'He sneezes and there is light. He has eyes like the eyelashes of dawn.' Do you understand what this means? Do you? And there is more: '. . . the fleshy

parts of his body are solidly interconnected, and they won't budge.' Well? Well? Do you understand?"

"Wait a minute," shouted Kern.

"No, no -- you must think about it. 'He transforms the sea into a seething ointment; he leaves behind a trail of radiance; the abyss is akin to a patch of gray hair!'"

"Wait, will you," interrupted Kern. "I want to tell you that I have decided to kill myself . . ."

Monfiori gave him an opaque, attentive look, covering his glass with his palm. He was silent for a time.

"Just as I thought," he began with unexpected gentleness. "Tonight, as you were watching the people dancing, and before that, when you got up from the table . . . There was something about your face . . . The crease between the brows . . . That special one . . . I understood right away. . . ." He fell silent, caressing the table's edge.

"Listen to what I'm going to tell you," he continued, lowering his heavy, purplish eyelids with their wartlike lashes. "I search everywhere for the likes of you -- in expensive hotels, on trains, in seaside resorts, at night on the quays of big cities." A dreamy little sneer fled across his lips.

"I recall, in Florence once . . ." He raised his doelike eyes. "Listen, Kern -- I'd like to be present when you do it . . . May I?"

Kern, in a numb slouch, sensed a chill in his chest under his starched shirt. *We're both drunk*, the words rushed through his brain, *and he's spooky*.

"May I?" repeated Monfiori with a pout, "Pretty please?" (touch of clammy, hairy little hand).

With a jerk and a groggy sway Kern rose from his chair.

"Go to hell! Let me out . . . I was joking . . ."

The attentive gaze of Monfiori's leechy eyes did not waver.

"I've had enough of you! I've had enough of everything." Kern dashed off with a splashlike gesture of his hands. Monfiori's gaze came unstuck with what seemed like a smack.

"Murk! Puppet! . . . Wordplay! . . . Basta! . . ."

He banged his hip painfully on the edge of the table. The raspberry fatty behind his vacillating bar puffed out his white shirtfront and began to float, as though in a curved mirror, amid his bottles. Kern traversed the gliding ripples of the carpet and, with his shoulder, shoved a falling glass door.

The hotel was fast asleep. Mounting the cushiony stairs with difficulty, he located his room. A key protruded from the adjoining door. Someone had forgotten to lock himself in. Flowers meandered in the dim light of the corridor. Once he was in his room he spent a long time groping along the wall in search of the light switch. Then he collapsed into the armchair by the window.

It struck him that he must write certain letters, farewell letters. But the syrupy drinks had weakened him. His ears filled with a dense, hollow din, and gelid waves breathed on his brow. He had to write a letter, and there was something else troubling him. As if he had left home and forgotten his wallet. The mirrory blackness of the window reflected his stripelike collar and his pale forehead. He had splashed some intoxicating drops on his shirt front. He must write that letter . . . no, that wasn't it. Suddenly something flashed in his mind's eye. The key! The key protruding from the neighboring door. . . .

Kern rose ponderously and went out into the dimly lit corridor. From the enormous key dangled a shiny wafer with the number 35. He stopped in front of this white door. There was an avid tremor in his legs.

A frosty wind lashed his brow. The window of the spacious, illuminated bedroom was wide open. On the wide bed, in open-collared yellow pajamas, Isabel lay supine. A pale hand drooped, with a smouldering cigarette between its fingers. Sleep must have overcome her without warning.

Kern approached the bed. He banged his knee against a chair, on which a guitar uttered a faint twang. Isabel's blue hair lay in tight circles on the pillow. He took a look at her dark eyelids, at the delicate shadow between her breasts. He touched the

blanket. Her eyes opened immediately. Then in a hunchbacked kind of stance, Kern said:

"I need your love. Tomorrow I shall shoot myself."

He had never dreamt that a woman, even if taken by surprise, could be so startled. First Isabel remained motionless, then she lunged, looking back at the open window, slipping instantly from the bed, and rushed past Kern with bowed head, as if expecting a blow from above.

The door slammed. Some sheets of letter paper fluttered from the table.

Kern remained standing in the middle of the spacious bright room. Some grapes glowed purple and gold on the night table.

"Madwoman," he said aloud.

He laboriously shifted his shoulders. Like a steed he trembled with a prolonged shiver from the cold. Then, suddenly, he froze motionless.

Outside the window, swelling, flying, a joyous, rapid barking sound approached by agitated jolts. In a wink the square of black night in the window opening filled and came aboil with solid, boisterous fur. In one broad and noisy sweep this wooly fur obscured the night sky from one windowframe to the other. Another instant and it swelled tensely, obliquely burst in, and unfolded. Amid the whistling spread of agitated fur flashed a white face. Kern grabbed the guitar by its fingerboard and, with all his strength, struck the white face flying at him. Like some fluffy tempest, the giant wing's rib knocked him off his feet. He was overwhelmed by an animal smell. Kern rose with a lurch.

In the center of the room lay an enormous angel.

He occupied the entire room, the entire hotel, the entire world. His right wing had bent, leaning its angle against the mirrored dresser. The left one swung ponderously, catching on the legs of an overturned chair. The chair banged back and forth on the floor. The brown fur of the wings steamed, iridescent with frost. Deafened by the blow, the angel propped itself on its palms like a sphinx. Blue veins swelled on its white hands, and hollows of shadow showed on its shoulders

next to the clavicles. Its elongated, myopic-looking eyes, pale-green like predawn air, gazed at Kern without blinking from beneath straight, joined brows.

Suffocating from the pungent odor of wet fur, Kern stood motionless in the apathy of ultimate fear, examining the giant, steamy wings and the white face.

A hollow din began beyond the door in the corridor, and Kern was overcome by a different emotion: heart-rending shame. He was ashamed to the point of pain, of horror, that in a moment someone might come in and find him and this incredible creature.

The angel heaved a noisy breath, moved. But his arms had grown weak, and he collapsed on his chest. A wing jerked. Grinding his teeth, trying not to look, Kern stooped over him, took hold of the mound of damp, odorous fur and the cold, sticky shoulders. He noticed with sickening horror that the angel's feet were pale and boneless, and that he would be unable to stand on them. The angel did not resist. Kern hurriedly pulled him toward the wardrobe, flung open the mirrored door, began pushing and squeezing the wings into the creaking depths. He seized them by their ribs, trying to bend them and pack them in. Unfurling flaps of fur kept slapping him in the chest. At last he closed the door with a solid shove. At that instant there came a lacerating, unbearable shriek, the shriek of an animal crushed by a wheel. He had slammed the door on one of the wings, that was it. A small corner of the wing protruded from the crack. Opening the door slightly, Kern shoved the curly wedge in with his hand. He turned the key.

It grew very quiet. Kern felt hot tears running down his face. He took a breath and rushed for the corridor. Isabel lay next to the wall, a cowering heap of black silk. He gathered her in his arms, carried her into his room, and lowered her onto the bed. Then he snatched from his suitcase the heavy Parabellum, slammed the clip home, ran out holding his breath, and burst into Room 35.

The two halves of a broken plate lay, all white, on the carpet. The grapes were scattered.

Kern saw himself in the mirrored door of the wardrobe: a lock of hair fallen over an eyebrow, a starched dress shirtfront spattered with red, the lengthwise glint of the pistol's barrel.

"Must finish it off," he exclaimed tonelessly, and opened the wardrobe.

There was nothing but a gust of odorous fluff. Oily brown tufts eddying about the room. The wardrobe was empty. On its floor lay a white squashed hatbox.

Kern approached the window and looked out. Furry little clouds were gliding across the moon and breathing dim rainbows around it. He shut the casements, put the chair back in its place, and kicked some brown tufts under the bed. Then he cautiously went out into the corridor. It was quiet as before. People sleep soundly in mountain hotels.

And when he returned to his room what he saw was Isabel with her bare feet hanging from the bed, trembling, with her head between her hands. He felt ashamed, as he had, not long ago, when the angel was looking at him with its odd greenish eyes.

"Tell me, where is he?" asked Isabel breathlessly.

Kern turned away, went to the desk, sat down, opened the blotter, and replied, "I don't know."

Isabel retracted her bare feet onto the bed.

"May I stay here with you for now? I'm so frightened. . . ."

Kern gave a silent nod. Dominating the tremor of his hand, he started writing. Isabel began speaking again, in an agitated, toneless voice, but for some reason it appeared to Kern that her fright was of the female, earthly variety.

"I met him yesterday as I was flying on my skis in the dark. Last night he came to me."

Trying not to listen, Kern wrote in a bold hand:

"My dear friend, this is my last letter. I could never forget how you helped me when disaster crashed down on me. He probably lives on a peak where he hunts alpine eagles and feeds on their meat. . . ."

Catching himself, he slashed that out and took another sheet. Isabel was sobbing with her face buried in the pillow.

"What shall I do now? He'll come after me for revenge. . . . Oh my God. . . ."

"My dear friend," Kern wrote quickly, "she sought unforgettable caresses and now she will give birth to a winged little beast. . . ." Oh, damn! He crumpled the sheet.

"Try to get some sleep," he addressed Isabel over his shoulder, "and leave tomorrow. For a monastery."

Her shoulders shook rapidly. Then she grew still.

Kern wrote. Before him smiled the eyes of the one person in the world with whom he could freely speak or remain silent. He wrote to that person that life was finished, that he had begun feeling of late that, in place of the future, a black wall was looming ever closer, and that now something had happened after which a man cannot and must not continue living. "At noon tomorrow I shall die," wrote Kern, "tomorrow, because I want to die in full command of my faculties, in the sober light of day. And right now I am in too deep a state of shock."

When he had finished he sat down in the armchair by the window. Isabel was sleeping, her breathing barely audible. An oppressive fatigue girdled his shoulders. Sleep descended like a soft fog.

III

He was awakened by a knock on the door. Frosty azure was pouring through the window.

"Come in," he said, stretching.

The waiter noiselessly set a tray with a cup of tea on the table and exited with a bow.

Laughing to himself, Kern thought, "And here I am in a rumpled dinner jacket."

Then, instantly, he remembered what had happened during the night. He shuddered and glanced at the bed. Isabel was gone. Must have returned to her room with the approach of morning. And by now she has undoubtedly left He had a momentary vision of brown, wooly wings. Getting up quickly, he opened the door to the corridor.

"Listen," he called to the waiter's departing back. "Take a letter with you."

He went to the desk and rummaged about. The fellow was waiting at the door. Kern slapped all his pockets and took a look under the armchair.

"You may go. I'll give it to the porter later."

The parted hair bent forward, and the door closed softly.

Kern was distressed at having lost the letter. That letter in particular. He had said in it so well, so smoothly and simply, all that needed to be said. Now he could not recall the words. Only senseless sentences surfaced. Yes, the letter had been a masterpiece.

He began writing anew, but it came out cold and rhetorical. He sealed the letter and neatly wrote the address.

He felt a strange lightness in his heart. He would shoot himself at noon, and after all, a man who has resolved to kill himself is a god.

The sugary snow glistened outside the window. He felt drawn out there, for the last time.

The shadows of frosted trees lay on the snow like blue plumes. Sleigh bells jingled somewhere, densely and merrily. There were lots of people out, girls in fur caps moving timorously and awkwardly on their skis, young men exhaling clouds of laughter as they called loudly to each other, elderly people ruddy from the effort, and some sinewy blue-eyed oldster dragging a velvet-covered sled. Kern thought in passing, why not give the old chap a whack in the face, a backhanded one, just for the fun of it, for now everything was permissible. He broke out laughing. He had not felt so good in a long time.

Everyone was drifting to the area where the ski-jumping competition had begun. The site consisted of a steep descent merging halfway down into a snowy platform, which ended abruptly, forming a right-angled projection. A skier glided down the steep section and flew off the projecting ramp into the azure air. He flew with outstretched arms, landed upright on the continuation of the slope, and glided on. The Swede had just broken his own recent record and, far

below, in a whirlwind of silvery dust, turned sharply with one bent leg extended.

Two others, in black sweaters, sped past, jumped, and resiliently hit the snow.

"Isabel is jumping next," said a soft voice at Kern's shoulder. Kern thought rapidly, don't tell me she is still here. . . . How can she . . . and looked at the speaker. It was Monfiori. In a top hat, pushed over his protruding ears, and a little black coat with strips of faded velvet on the collar, he stood out drolly amid the woolly crowd. "Should I tell him?" thought Kern.

He rejected with revulsion the smelly brown wings -- must not think about that.

Isabel mounted the hill. She turned to say something to her companion, gaily, gaily as always. This gaiety gave Kern a scary feeling. He caught what seemed a fleeting glimpse of something above the snows, above the glassy hotel, above the toylike people -- a shudder, a shimmer. . . .

"And how are you today?" asked Monfiori, rubbing his lifeless hands.

Simultaneously voices rang out around them: "Isabel! Airborne Isabel!"

Kern threw back his head. She was hurtling down the steep slope. For an instant he saw her bright face, her glistening lashes. With a soft whistling sound she skimmed off the trampoline, flew up, hung motionless, crucified in midair. And then. . . .

No one, of course, could have expected it. In full flight Isabel crumpled spasmodically, fell like a stone, and started rolling amid the snowbursts of her cartwheeling skis.

Right away she was hidden from view by the backs of people rushing toward her. Kern slowly approached with hunched shoulders. He saw it vividly in his mind's eye, as if it were written in a large hand: revenge, wingstroke. The Swede and the lanky type in horn-rimmed glasses bent over Isabel. With professional gestures the bespectacled man was palpating her motionless body. He muttered, "I can't understand it -- her ribcage is crushed. . . ."

He raised up her head. There was a glimpse of her dead, seemingly denuded face.

Kern turned with a crunch of his heel and strode off resolutely toward the hotel. Beside him trotted Monfiori, running ahead, peeking into his eyes.

"I am going upstairs to my room now," said Kern, trying to swallow his sobbing laughter, to restrain it. "Upstairs. . . . If you wish to accompany me. . . ."

The laughter neared his throat and bubbled over. Kern was climbing the stairs like a blind man. Monfiori was supporting him, meekly and hastily.

Translated by Dmitri Nabokov

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TWO POEMS

(Berlin, 27 Sept. 1924)

Whence have you flown? What is this sorrow you are
breathing?
Explain to me, why do your lips, O Winged one,
seem deathly pale, why are your wings with ocean
scented?

The demon answers me: "You're famished and you're
young,
but sounds are not the thing to sate you. Do not touch
them,
those strings discordant you yourself have strung.

No music's more sublime than silence. You're created
for unrelenting silence. Recognize its seal
upon a stone, on love, in stars above the roadway."

He's vanished. Night dissolves. God orders me to
sound.

Vladimir Nabokov
translated by Dmitri Nabokov

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Otkuda priletel? Kakim ty dyshish' gorem?
Skazhi mne, otchego tvoi usta, letun,
kak mertvye, bledny, a kryl'ia pakhnut morem?

I demon mne v otvet: "Ty goloden i iun,
no ne nasytish'sia ty zvukami. Ne trogai
natianutykh toboi nestroinykh etikh strun.

Net vyshe muzyki, chem tishina. Dlia strogoi
ty sozdan tishiny. Uznai ee pechat'
na kamne, na liubvi i v zvezdakh nad dorogoi."

Ischez on. Taet noch'. Mne Bog velel zvuchat'.

Vladimir Nabokov
1924

Spring

The Engine toward the country flies.
A crowd of tree trunks, shying, nimbly
goes scurrying up the incline:
the smoke, like a white billow, mingles
with birches' motley Apriline.
Velours banquettes inside the carriage
of summer covers are still free.
A yellow trackside dandelion
is visited by its first bee.

Where once there was a snowdrift, only
an oblong, pitted isle is left
beside a ditch that's turning verdant:
of springtime smelling, now grown wet,
the snow is overlaid with soot.

The country house is cold and twilit.
The garden, to the joy of doves,
contains a cloud-reflecting puddle.
The columns and the aged roof,
also the elbow of the drainpipe --
there's need of a fresh coat for all,
a pail of green paint; on the wall
the merry shadow of the painter
and the ladder's shadow fall.

Vesna

Pomchal na dachu parovoz.
Tolpoiu legkoi, orobeloj
stvoly vzbegaiut na otkos:
dym zaskvozil volnoiu belo
v aprel'skoi pestrote berez.
V vagone barkhatnyi divanchik
eshche bez letnego chekhla.
U rel's na zheltyi oduvanchik
saditsia pervaja pchela.

Gde byl sugrob, teper' dyriavij
prodolgovatij ostrovok
vdol' zeleneiushchei kanavy:
pokrylsia kopot'iu, razmok
vesnoiu pakhnushchii snezhok.

V usad'be sumerki i stuzha.
V sadu, na radost' golubiam,
blistaet oblachnaia luzha.
Po staroi kryshe, po stolbam,
po vodostochnomu kolenu -
pomazat' nanovo pora
zelenoi kraskoi iz vedra -
lozhitsia veselo na stenu
ten' lestnitsy i maliara.

The birches' tops in their cool azure,
the country house, the summer days,
are but the same, recurring image,
yet their perfection grows always.
From exile's lamentations distanced,
lives on my every reminiscence
in an inverted quietude:
What's lost forever is immortal;
and this eternity inverted
is the proud soul's beatitude.

Vladimir Nabokov, 1925
translated by Dmitri Nabokov

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Verkhi berez v lazuri svezhei,
usad'ba, solnechnye dni
- vse obrazy odni i te zhe,
vse sovershennee oni.
Vdali ot ropota izgnan'ia
zhivut moi vospominan'ia
v kakoi-to nezemnoi tishi:
bessmertno vse, chto nevozvratno,
i v etoi vechnosti obratnoi
blazhenstvo gordoe dushi.

Vladimir Nabokov

VLADIMIR NABOKOV SOCIETY NEWS

by Susan Elizabeth Sweeney

Minutes of the 1991 Nabokov Society Business Meeting

The Society's annual business meeting was held on Saturday, December 28, from 4:45-5:15 pm, at the San Francisco Hilton. The scheduling of the business meeting--between the Society's second session at the MLA and the following cash bar--ensured a time and space for the meeting and enabled Nabokovians who are not members of the MLA to attend.

Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, outgoing president of the Society, welcomed members and guests and invited them to attend the two social events sponsored by the Society later that evening, as well as the AATSEEL session on "Nabokov and Art" on Monday morning (these and other Society events were listed on a flyer, along with a tear-off sheet for joining the Society). She asked chairs to send summaries of their sessions, and panelists to send abstracts of their papers, to Stephen Jan Parker for inclusion in the spring 1992 issue of the *Nabokovian*.

New officers were elected by acclamation. Gennady Barabtarlo is the new president of the Nabokov Society; John Burt Foster, Jr., is the new vice president. Stephen Jan Parker, editor of *The Nabokovian*, remains secretary-treasurer.

The meeting next turned to a discussion of Nabokov Society events at next year's AATSEEL and MLA conventions. According to suggestions made last year, Society members had prepared and proposed topics for the 1992 AATSEEL and MLA sessions before the business meeting. Charles Nicol, chair of next year's AATSEEL session, chose the topic, "The Russian

Years: Autobiography and Biography." Ellen Pifer, who was unable to attend the business meeting, had proposed the timely topic, "Nabokov's Discovery of America," for an MLA session. Because she is spending this spring in France, however, she did not think that she would be able to select papers and chair the session; Zoran Kuzmanovich volunteered to chair it in her place. The other MLA session will be chaired by John Foster, our new vice-president (following a policy established at the 1990 business meeting); it will have an open topic. Another topic proposed by the outgoing president -- Nabokov and Popular Culture -- was put aside to be considered, next year, for a 1993 MLA session.

Several members expressed interest in holding social events--like the cash bar and dinner held this year--at next year's conventions. The president remarked on the cost of having even a small cash bar catered by the convention hotel (\$129.95 at the Hilton). She advised that next year's cash bar simply be held at the restaurant before the dinner, and that both be announced in the convention program. Other members suggested a social event to celebrate the New York Public Library's acquisition of the Nabokov archives, since next year's conventions will be held in New York City. (Any Nabokovians in the New York area who would like to help coordinate these social events should contact Society officers).

The president also announced other conferences and conventions. A conference on "Nabokov: Biography, Autobiography, and Fiction," organized by Maurice Couturier, will be held in Nice this June. There will be a Nabokov session at the AAASS in Phoenix, AZ next October; D. Barton Johnson volunteered to provide relevant information for interested members. Following Ellen Pifer's suggestion, the Nabokov Society is pursuing information about becoming an affiliated organization of the newly-formed American Literature Association.

After the business meeting, the Nabokov Society hosted the first two social events in the organization's history. When we began planning these events at the 1990 business meeting, we hoped that they would enable Nabokovians to meet and discuss their common interests, outside of the strictures imposed by different academic departments and different convention affiliations. The social events more than met these expectations; they were attended not only by Nabokov scholars from both MLA and AATSEEL, but also by Nabokov's former students, fellow lepidopterists, and devoted readers. The cash bar (5:15-6:45 pm) even featured, by happy coincidence, a bartender conversant in Russian. The elegant multi-course dinner at Bardelli's award-winning restaurant (7-9 pm) was beautifully planned and organized by Marilyn Edelstein; Geoffrey Green suggested restaurants in the vicinity of the conference hotels. During the evening, several members and guests remarked on the success of these social events and recommended that they become a Society tradition.

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Proposed Amendments to the Bylaws

At the 1990 business meeting, having just succeeded to the presidency of the Nabokov Society, I proposed that the vice-president "be given more to do," such as chairing one session at the MLA convention. Now that I am no longer the Society's president, I would like to suggest that both the vice-president and the president be assigned more specific

responsibilities in the bylaws. (The bylaws were recently reprinted in *Nabokovian* 26: 24-30.)

During my presidency I sought to make the Society's annual events at AATSEEL and MLA more of a forum for exchange among members, and more welcoming to new members and non-members. Following members' suggestions, in 1990 the Society began distributing handouts at sessions (providing officers' names, the schedule of events, and information about membership); in 1991, the Society began hosting social events as well. For the sake of convenience and consistency, I think that these tasks should be assigned to specific officers in the bylaws. In addition, descriptions of officers' duties in the bylaws need to be altered to reflect actual practice. For example, the bylaws mentions a Program Director; however, a program director has not been elected for many years (ever since the Society began sponsoring several sessions a year), and the president has fulfilled that function instead. The bylaws also describe a Secretary, who "shall prepare the agenda for business meetings of the Society"; on the one hand, Stephen Jan Parker has served as our secretary-treasurer since the founding of the Society; on the other hand, it is the president who has traditionally prepared the agenda for, and recorded the minutes of, the annual business meeting.

One way to make the bylaws more efficient, and more appropriate, would be Society officers to write down what it is that they actually do. As president, these were my responsibilities: to organize and conduct the annual business meeting, and report on it to the *Nabokovian*: to organize and conduct meetings of the Board of Directors; to act as liaison with the organizations with which we are affiliated (not an easy task, especially with the MLA!); to act as program director for each year's annual conventions (scheduling and coordinating sessions, social events, and business meetings); and to prepare a flyer introducing the Society to prospective members. I

believe that these tasks could be divided more efficiently between the vice-president and the president. Accordingly, I would like to suggest the following changes in the bylaws (new material is italicized):

1. Change all references to the "Vladimir Nabokov Research Newsletter" to "*the Nabokovian*."
2. Delete the inclusion of "Program Director" among the Society's officers (V.,B.).
3. Change the second sentence of the description of the president's duties (V., C., 1.) to read: "The President shall be the chief executive officer of the Society, preside at business meetings and *and report on them to the Nabokovian, preside at meetings of the Board of Directors*, have the management of the business of the Society, and see that all orders and resolutions of the Board of Directors are carried out.
4. Insert this sentence immediately after the revised second sentence in the description of the president's duties (V., C., 1.): "*The President will also act as liaison with affiliated organizations (AATSEEL and MLA), and coordinate the scheduling of sessions, social events, and business meetings at the annual conventions of those organizations.*"
5. Insert this sentence immediately after the first sentence in the description of the vice-president's duties (V., C., 2.): "*The Vice-President will chair one MLA session during his or her term; he or she will also update an annual handout introducing the Society to prospective members (listing officers and events, and providing information on becoming a member), and assist the President in coordinating the Society's annual sessions, social events, and business meetings.*"

I would like to submit these proposed amendments for consideration at the Society's next business

meeting. I hope that other officers and members will suggest other changes, too--and that we'll end up with more accurate bylaws as well as a more effective organization.

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.]

KINBOTE ON PRESCOTT

As Jakob Gradus sits on a bench in Central Park, New York City, on the morning of Tuesday, 21 July 1959, awaiting the departure of a flight to New Wye, he idles away the time reading newspapers that happen to be "real"; i.e., that exist in the time-space continuum presently occupied by me and my reader. Appropriately to objects seen through the prismatic consciousness of V. Botkin, alias Charles Kinbote, alias Charles Xavier Vseslav, surnamed The Beloved, who narrates this event as its omniscient observer, the words, names, sentences, and concepts presented by these prosaic sheets of newsprint appear through a hazy shimmer of transpositions, altered spellings, interpolations, blurrings, metamorphoses. The "real" *Times* reported on page one that Nikita Krushchev had abruptly canceled a visit to Scandinavia, but not that he had substituted a visit to Zembla. That the United States was about to launch the *Savannah*, the world's first atomic-powered merchant ship, was a fact, though not reported in Tuesday's edition; the launching itself was described in Wednesday's (22 July, page one). A brief and noncommittal sentence in a weather report--"Lightning struck buildings in Newark and other New Jersey areas, causing damage and injuries"--exfoliated, in the version read by Gradus, into a description rich in tragic, farcical, and

symbolic associations: "Last night, in Newark an apartment house at 555 South Street was hit by a thunderbolt that smashed a TV set and injured two people watching an actress lost in a violent studio storm" ("Squall Line Here Brings Heavy Rain," 21 July: 58; *Pale Fire* 274-75). The Charel Jewelry Company in Brooklyn became the Rachel Jewelry Company; the Lehman Brothers became the Helman Brothers; the Thatcher Glass Manufacturing Company became the Decker Glass Manufacturing Company because the English *thatch* and the German *decken* are both derived from the same Indo-European word meaning "to cover," a mirrory etymology that would naturally appeal to the mind of a lunatic who gave his tutors the names Campbell and Beauchamp (for both Lehman and Thatcher, *New York Times* 21 July 1959: 41; for Charel, 55: col. 9, item 35; *Pale Fire* 275; as for Kinbote's tutors, Gaelic *cam beul*, "crooked mouth," became *Campbell*; rendered in medieval Latin documents as *de bello campo*, "of the fair field," this was retranslated into Norman French *Beauchamp*, according to Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, *A Dictionary of Surnames* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988], s.v. "Campbell"). A museum in Whitehorse, in the Yukon (*New York Times* 20 July 1959: 10), mysteriously acquired a White Animals Room (compare Zembla's Exposition of Glass Animals, *Pale Fire* 112). A Swedish child became a "Zemblan moppet" and her exclamation, "Adjo, adjo, vallkommen till Sverige (Goodbye, goodbye, welcome to Sweden)" ("30 Children Join Picnic of Nations," *New York Times* 20 July 1959: 12) became "*Ufgut, ufgut, velkam ut Semberland* (Adieu, adieu, till we meet in Zembla!)" The eruption of the pro-Red revolt in Iraq and Carl Sandburg's praise for the high intellectual level of the Soviet exhibition at the New York Coliseum reach Gradus (and us) unchanged, as does Orville Prescott's description of his Scandinavian vacation, apart from Kinbote's attack on Prescott as follows: "A hack reviewer of new books for tourists, reviewing his own tour through Norway, said that the fjords were too famous to need (his) description, and that all Scandinavians loved

flowers" (*New York Times* 20 July 1959: 1 [Iraqi revolt], 4 ["2 Octogenarians Hail Soviet Fair"], 23 ["Books of the Times"]).

One would, in fact, be hard put to find a piece of travel writing--outside of the kind supplied free by hotels and airlines in illustrated brochures--worse than the one Orville Prescott obtruded into his column, "Books of the Times," on 20 July 1959. For the live specific impression, as Nabokov would say, Prescott substitutes the dead general idea:

I am full of enthusiasm for Scandinavia and for the Norwegians, Swedes and Danes . . . Norway's fjords are too famous to need description. . . . All Scandanavians love flowers, but the Swedes seem to love them most of all. . . . Most Scandinavians are as blond and blue-eyed as Americans think they ought to be. The children are wonderfully engaging and look like models for illustrations of Hansel and Gretel or Little Red Riding Hood. The food is good. . . . The hotels are excellent.

As the diction of the foregoing indicates, Prescott's whole piece is compiled out of general and abstract words and phrases, many of them clichés: "birch and pine forests . . . picturesque medieval ruins . . . beautiful farming country . . . barns painted barn red . . . 96,000 lakes." In the language of an earlier age of literary criticism, these are all gradus words (on Gradus as cliché, the death of poetry, see my essay in *The Explicator* 36 [Spring 1978]: 22-23; the *OED*, s.v. "gradus," offers this citation dated 1887: "A fair descriptive passage is spoilt by a commonplace or gradus epithet"). One is compelled to reflect how much more vivid Kinbote's Zembla is than Prescott's Scandinavia, this vividness being little more than a matter of Kinbote, like the deceased New Wye farmer, Hentzinger, knowing "the names of things": "when the rowans hung coral-heavy, and the puddles tinkled with Muscovy glass," to take a passage at random (75).

There the story might end, but for the fact that, the previous summer, Prescott had published, in "Books for the Times," a review of *Lolita* containing the following sentiments:

There are two equally serious reasons why [*Lolita*] isn't worth a serious reader's attention. The first is that it is dull, dull, dull in a pretentious, florid, and archly fatuous fashion. The second is that it is repulsive.

"*Lolita*" is not crudely crammed with Anglo-Saxon nouns and verbs and explicitly described scenes of sexual violence. Its depravity is more refined. Mr. Nabokov, whose English vocabulary would astound the editors of the Oxford Dictionary, does not write cheap pornography. He writes high-brow pornography. Perhaps this is not his intention. Perhaps he thinks of his book as a satirical comedy and as an exploration of abnormal psychology. Nevertheless, "*Lolita*" is disgusting. (18 Aug. 1958: 17)

As is customary with slashing reviews, Prescott's, in its final paragraphs, adverts, in a calmer tone than that of the preceding ones, to the general moral and esthetic principle in whose defense it condemns the work at hand. A maniac, it explains--or at any rate a maniac whose mental condition is so deteriorated that he lacks free will and the capacity for moral choice--cannot be the first-person narrator of a literary work. He may be the main character, and Prescott mentions *King Lear* as an example of this, but if the whole fiction is perceived from the maniac's point of view, the fiction must fail; the narrator's "ravaged brain belongs to the psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, not to novelists."

Two interesting facts emerge from a survey of these writings by Prescott. First, it was his penchant for the general as opposed to the specific that kept him from really reading *Lolita* one summer, and from really

seeing Norway the next. In *Lolita*, he saw only a narrative by a maniac on a lewd theme in a vocabulary that astounded him; in Norway, fjords too often described to be described. Second, Nabokov composed *Pale Fire* as if his main intent had been to defy Prescott's critical principle about a maniac as first-person narrator of a fiction. Kinbote is much more helplessly insane than Humbert. Humbert, though afflicted with a forbidden desire, is free of delusions; but Kinbote is possessed with false notions about persons, events, and a whole country that exists only in his mind.

Kinbote reads the *New York Times* in the Wordsmith University Library, takes notes for his Commentary on Shade's poem, elaborates his fantasy about Gradus, transmutes what he reads into art; Nabokov seizes this opportunity to score off a critic and set forth the critical shibboleth to subvert which he has composed the present novel.

-- David Renaker, San Francisco State University

ON NOTARIES AND DOCTORS (GLORY AND GUMILEV)

Vladimir E. Alexandrov makes an educated guess when he surmises (in *Nabokov's Otherworld* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991] 224) that the fate of the Russian acmeist poet Nikolai Gumilev--shot as a spy in 1921--may be "the main inspiration behind Martin's heroic fantasies" in *Glory*. This is a healthy antidote to the naive reading of *Glory* as merely an autobiographical document ("Nabokov imitated his father in *Glory*," Andrew Field, *VN* [New York: Crown, 1986] 142). Literary subtexts underlie even the seemingly most personal of Nabokov's fictions.

But one might want to add that Gumilev is relevant to *Glory* in more ways than one, since his work is also parodied in the novel. Compare this complaint by Martin's prosaic-minded Uncle Henry, which turns

out to be an unwitting echo of a line from a famous poem:

In my time young men became doctors, soldiers, notaries, while he [Martin] is probably dreaming of being an aviator or a gigolo. (128)

V moe vremia molodye liudi stanovilis' vrachami, ofitserami, notariusami . . . (Podvig 149)

And Gumilev:

*I umru ia ne na posteli,
Pri notariuse i vrache,
A v kakoi-nibud' dikoi shcheli,
Utonuvskei v gustom pliushche*

("Ia i vy" [1918] in *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, ed. G.P. Struve and B.A. Filippov [Washington, D.C.: Victor Kamkin, 1964] 2:10)

I won't die in a bed with some doctor and lawyer [notary] puffing up my pillow, but in some narrow ditch, covered with wild ivy

("You and Me" in *Selected Works of Nikolai S. Gumilev*, ed. Sidney Monas [Albany: State U of New York P, 1972] 92)

As one notices, the hidden subtext supplies a plausible foreview of Martin's fate once he has crossed the border to Zoorland.

Interestingly, the same subtext was again ironically evoked by Nabokov forty years after *Glory* in his 1972 lyric "*Kak liubil ia stikhi Gumileva!*" ["How I used to love Gumilev's poems!"] (*Stikhi* 297). This latter allusion was first noted by the--then--Soviet poet Andrei Vozhesenskii in his shrewd article "*Geometrika ili Nimfa Nabokova.*" *Oktiabr'* 11 (1986): 14.

Taken the moderately high incidence of references to Gumilev elsewhere in Nabokov (e.g. in *The Eye* 67; "Torpido Smoke" 31; "The Admiralty Spire" 136; *Look at the Harlequins!* 246), one suspects that this lode of subtexts might merit further digging.

--Pekka Tammi, Academy of Finland

THIS "BURLEY KRESTOVSKI"

In the eleventh issue of this publication (1983, 41-42), Leszek Engelking pointed to certain Polish allusions in *Lolita*. The Polish scholar unraveled a number of cultural associations related to the surname Zborovski--the maiden name of Humbert Humbert's first wife. Here I shall discuss some literary-historical connotations which the name of another incidental *Lolita* character of ostensibly Polish ancestry, Peter Krestovski, brings to mind.

Krestovski is mentioned four times in the course of the novel. He is introduced obliquely as "a retired policeman of Polish descent" who, together with "the retired plumber" (*Annotated Lolita* 87), is engaged in building a wharf on the bank of Hourglass Lake. In the following paragraph, Humbert Humbert, amused at their being prospective witnesses of his meditated but never carried out drowning of Charlotte, dubs the still nameless character and his anonymous pal "the man of law and the man of water" (88). Krestovski is finally named when sunbathing Charlotte, infuriated by "those disgusting prying kids," wants "to speak about that to Peter Krestovski" (90), whose former profession explains her otherwise puzzling choice. And finally, Humbert mentions the character both by name and by his former profession, in a flashback about hunting in the pine forest near the lake with John Farlow and "a burley ex-policeman called Krestovski" (216).

Unlike Zborovski (properly Zborowski), a well-known Polish surname, Krestovski sounds more

Russian or Ukrainian and is familiar to those versed in nineteenth-century Russian literature. [The Polish name phonetically closest to it, known since the late fourteenth century, is Krzestkowski, sometimes also spelled Krzestowski; see Witold Taszycki, *Slownik staropolskich nazw osobowych*, 7 vols. (Wroclaw: Zaklad Narodowy im. Ossolilskich, 1965-), 3:164-65.] It may call to mind Nadezhda Dmitrievna Khvoshchinsky-Zaionchkovsky (1824-89), who published her works under the pen name V. Krestovsky. Her prose, although of rather low artistic merit, was quite popular with the so-called progressive intelligentsia between the 1850s and 1870s. After 1857, when a genuine Krestovsky entered the literary scene, she started signing her works, "V. Krestovsky--pseudonym."

It appears more likely that with his fleeting character in *Lolita* Nabokov alludes to the genuine V. [Vsevolod Vladimirovich] Krestovsky (1839-95). By pointing to his character's "Polish descent," Nabokov creates an ironic subtext: Krestovsky wrote *The Flock of Panurg* (*Panurgovo stado*, 1869) and *Two Forces* (*Dve sily*, 1874), combining these two novels into the dilogy *The Bloody Bluff* (*Krovavyy puf*, 1875), in which he paints the 1863 Polish uprising and its participants in very negative colors. In 1892, Krestovsky's anti-Polish sentiments won him the post of editor-in-chief of a daily newspaper, *The Warsaw Diary* (*Varshavskii Dnevnik*).

The adjective "burley," in the final mention of Krestovski in *Lolita*, suggests a bilingual pun: phonetically it resembles the Russian verb *burlit'* and its derivative adjective *burlivyi*, meaning respectively "to seethe" and "seething" or "turbulent." Therefore "burley" may hint at the turbulent life of Vsevolod Krestovsky.

Born into a family of the Ukrainian gentry, Krestovsky received a historical-philological education at St. Petersburg University. Initially he

aligned himself with the radical critic Dmitry Pisarev. Shortly afterwards, however, he came under the spell of Apollon Grigor'ev, the influential critic with moderate Slavophile leanings. Krestovsky's first novel, written at the beginning of naturalism, is characteristically entitled *The Slums of Petersburg* (*Peterburgskie trushchoby*, 1864), and perhaps the first name of the *Lolita* Krestovski--Peter--alludes to its setting. In his later writings, Krestovsky took a very chauvinistic anti-Polish and anti-Jewish stance. In 1868, he joined the military, serving first in the uhlan regiment and later in the Guards. In 1877-78, he was a military correspondent at the Russo-Turkish war. In 1880, he was appointed the secretary for land-based military communications to the Commander of the Russian naval forces in the Pacific, admiral Lesovsky; in 1882, he served as a senior special assignments officer to the Turkestan governor-general Cherniaev, and afterwards as a colonel in the frontier guard. It is perhaps this latter and latest military service of Krestovsky as well as his conservative (*okhranitel'nye*) attitudes in general that are implied in the police career of his *Lolita* namesake.

The name of Peter Krestovski may also be seen as a distinctive tribute of Nabokov to his father, Vladimir Dmitrievich. Vladimir Nabokov senior, a renowned Russian statesman of the early twentieth century, was the leader of the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party faction in the First Duma, to which he was elected in March of 1906. When the government dissolved the Duma in July of that year, Nabokov, together with some other Kadet parliamentary delegates, protested this action in the famous Vyborg Manifesto, which called upon the people not to pay taxes and to refuse military enlistment until the Duma was reassembled. Consequently, Nabokov was barred from political activity--this interdiction was in effect until the February Revolution of 1917--and was sentenced to a jail term. Almost two years later, after a series of unsuccessful appeals, he served three

months in solitary confinement in the then new, and later notorious, St. Petersburg prison--Kresty.

--Gavriel Shapiro, Cornell University

GREEN EGGS AND HAM

Brian Boyd's *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* excerpts at length a letter from Nabokov to Edmund Wilson that does not appear in *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, detailing Nabokov's near-fatal attack of food poisoning brought on by eating bad Virginia ham. Upon reading this I was immediately struck by the similarity of Nabokov's suffering to that of Gradus in the the commentary to line 949 of *Pale Fire*.

Kinbote suggests that Gradus' upset stomach was caused by eating on Tuesday morning a "still quite palatable small, softish, near-ham sandwich, vaguely associated with the train journey from Nice to Paris last Saturday night" (273-74): "my own opinion . . . is that the French sandwich was engaged in an intestinal internecine war with the 'French' Fries" (280). However, the normal symptoms of severe food poisoning come on quite quickly, in most cases within hours, as was the case for Nabokov. Since Gradus consumed the sandwich shortly after 8 a.m., it seems just as likely that his first symptoms ("not feeling too steady," 277), felt around 2 p.m., indicate that the real culprit was the "pinkish pork" he had for lunch (276). Kinbote imaginatively describes the "not so good sea swell undulating in his entrails" during Gradus' air trip. Gradus becomes sick shortly after reaching the campus and again while pursuing Kinbote in the library. In Gerald Emerald's car, the symptoms persist (283) and his weakened condition undoubtedly affects his accuracy, helping to spare Kinbote but kill Shade.

Nabokov's own bout, which set in within only a couple of hours of consuming the Virginia ham, seems to me more severe, more uninterrupted, and more life-

threatening. He gives Gradus a sufficiently severe case to slow, but not stop, his approach. I have been reminded (a tip of the trilby to G.B.) that Pnin, too, consumes ham and suffers his peculiar palpitation in the first chapter of *Pnin*. He later consumes Virginia ham without falling ill (76). Gradus may have dodged one "bullet" (the out-of-date sandwich) only to be struck by the next (the pinkish pork). Kinbote was fortunate, perhaps, in being a vegetarian.

--Michael Chenoweth (University of Reading)

QUERY: THE COLOR OF SNEEZES IN *PALE FIRE*

I would like to ask readers if they have noticed anything unusual in the proximity of Kinbote's (247) and Izumrudov's (251) sneezes and green accessories. Kinbote parachutes into the green field outside of Baltimore in a green parachute and soon sneezes twice. Izumrudov is dressed in a bottle-green velvet jacket and covers his face after sneezing once--hiding his identity from Gradus, I take it.

The green jacket is a handy marker for Emerald and his Zemblan counterpart Izumrudov, but why should it also mark Kinbote, and why the sneezing? While Nabokov is dismissive of the use of symbols in his work, it may be germane that Shade's derisory comment is as follows: "The author uses the striking image green leaves because green is the symbol of happiness and frustration" (156). Is this deliberately planted to conceal something?

--Michael Chenoweth

THE DEFENSE MARGINALIA

1. Owing in part to the purposely lingering description of one of Luzhin's pre-chess hobbies, *The Defense*, more than most of Nabokov's Russian novels, can be

viewed as an enormous jigsaw puzzle, so intricate as to frustrate hope of seeing *all* its gaping spots ever filled (although Brian Boyd's 1987 article [in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 4] has provided the lid of the box, with the picture on it). Among several prefigurations of Luzhin's suicide by defenestration, the earliest seems to have been overlooked, yet Nabokov's beginnings and ends are often charged to be connected. At the end of the first chapter, Luzhin sits in the manor's attic after his escape from the train station, watching his pursuers from that elevated vantage point. Not finding him in the downstairs rooms, they make three attempts to run up the large stairs which climbed, apparently, round a stairwell: the father tried first but returned before reaching the landing; a minute later, Mme Luzhin "came quickly up it, hitching up her skirt, but she also stopped short of the landing, *leaning, instead, over the balustrade*, and then swiftly, with arms spread out, she went down again." And at last the whole crowd of them went up, again "*leaning at every moment over the balustrade*" (24, italics mine). Does this leaning over the railings imply merely that they think Luzhin may be hiding under the stairs (a cupboard stands there, crammed with old magazines--see 61)? But a servant could have been dispatched to inspect the nook; besides, why should it have prevented first the father and then the mother from reaching the landing and the attic? Both are certainly afraid to confront their difficult son, now probably frantic with grief (they suspect). But could they also fear that this grief might have pushed the boy over the brink? Are they mortified by the wild thought of seeing his body spread prone on the bottom of the well? If so, then the end of Chapter One aligns with the end of the last chapter almost as implicitly as the novel's opening sentence aligns with its last.

2. In the last chapter, Valentinov reappears as an evil agent. A globe-trotter, a slightly macabre incarnation of Fogg, he now wants to inveigle Luzhin into his motion picture project which apparently would entail finishing the game against Turati, adjourned in a

precariously balanced position. Luzhin's wife does her best to ward off Valentinov's attempts to reach Luzhin by telephone. At a soiree in their apartment, the maid who was especially bad at managing telephone calls (232) all but spills out Valentinov's name (in the Russian original she mispronounces it as "Fati," which Nabokov probably judged too thick a pointer and replaced with "felty" in the English version), and then actor Bars stops short of divulging his name to Mrs. Luzhin (233). When Valentinov telephones the next day, she decides to conceal the fact from Luzhin and, having looked up the studio's number in the telephone book (an object of one of Luzhin's drawings, with a skull placed on it), rings him back in order to cancel any further contacts. She tries to imagine that mysterious and, she feels certain, dangerous man and place him mentally in Luzhin's clouded past, but fails. And yet she has met him, even talked to him at the Christmas charity ball in Chapter 12. There, she loses sight of Luzhin for a while, and the whole scene is made to resemble a bad dream in which one strains oneself frantically in order to rejoin the other but cannot. As she tried to get to her husband in time (and when she does at last, it will be too late to prevent the disastrous encounter with his former classmate), "at every step she was stopped by acquaintances," one of whom sidetracks her to a company of movie-people at the table. "One of these men seemed particularly obnoxious to her: he had very white teeth and shining brown eyes" and he sprinkled "his Russian with the most hackneyed German expressions" (195). They are not introduced to each other (although they probably dance), but this is most certainly Valentinov, whose "wonderful brown eyes and an extraordinarily attractive laugh" (and a "death's head ring" on the finger) are particularly noted in Chapter 5 (81), and who mixes German and Russian in his rather insolent telephone conversation with Mrs. Luzhin. "All at once" (*vdrug, ni s togo, ni s sego*--lit. "all of a sudden, for no reason whatsoever--") she feels depressed, and meanwhile in the other corner of the apartment

Luzhin sinks in the armchair, to be joined presently by Petrishchev and his disturbing memories.

3. Among numerous double-entendres with pointed significance that infuse the book and come in ever denser crowd toward the end, the final one rings a particularly plangent note. Luzhin makes rapid rounds of the apartment devising a way of killing himself, and for the third or fourth time over the last two chapters his desperate wife almost involuntarily resorts to mentioning the need to visit Ivan Luzhin's grave. According to Boyd's convincing theory, she acts on the senior Luzhin's prompt, and when she says, for one last time, "Tomorrow we'll go to the cemetery" (251), it means that the ghostly *souffleur* is simply repeating the last line of the script because he "obviously has nothing new in reserve" (Boyd, 1987, 594). But "tomorrow," or the day after, Luzhin *will* be taken to the cemetery and lie there beside his father whose grave he had been unable to find during his blundering visit (that event had triggered the series of others that led to his meeting his future wife). When the game against Turati was adjourned, bewildered Luzhin took the words "Go home, home," whispered by someone nearby, for the "key to the combination"; he tried to stagger back in time, to reach the manor of his suddenly remembered childhood, but collapsed in a deep, death-like trance (near a certain house with a fenced garden). In the last chapter, he indeed grasps the solution: muttering under his breath "Home, home... there I'll combine everything properly" (244), he runs into Valentinov waiting in ambush, and very soon "the key is found" (246) and Luzhin decides on his move (suicide) which redefines the word "home" in a way similar to that in the earlier episode. The late Luzhin Senior, knowing the inevitable end, seems to expect his son's arrival in a fashion remindful of Mr. R.'s famous welcome.

4 At the beginning of the next to last chapter, the Luzhins, on her suggestion, take a turn into an unfamiliar section of Berlin, and Luzhin suddenly

recognizes the house where his late father used to live, and at this point his wife starts urging him to go and visit the grave and will keep reminding him of this duty till the very end. This house--a "gray stone house separated from the street by a small garden behind iron railings" (204)--may well be the one by which Luzhin had collapsed on his intuitive way "home" from the unfinished game against Turati. The evidence is scant but haunting: it has a front garden and a fence round it (143). This detail is repeated when the two German drunks stumble upon Luzhin "all hunched up on the sidewalk, beside a garden fence" (146). In *Zashchita Luzhina* Nabokov uses in both episodes quite specific Russian terms for the fenced garden and the fence which seem to nudge the reader to drawing a connecting line: cf. "on razgliadel *palisadnik... potianulsia k reshetke...*" (153); "na paneli, u *reshetki palisadnika, lezhal...*" (155)--and "sero-kamennogo doma, otdelennogo ot ulitsy nebol'shim *palisadnikom za chugunnoi reshetkoi*" (215; italics mine). I very much doubt that this could be a coincidence. If it is not, then we have a new crotchet in the mysterious pattern of guidance that Luzhin's dead father creates for Luzhin from July of 1928 to February of 1929.

5. Incidentally, I once endeavored to pin down the fateful day in the summer of 1928 to which the plot suddenly shifts in the middle of Chapter Four. The calculation is possible thanks to the unexpected and ostensibly queer degree of exactitude with which Luzhin answers the young lady's casual question of how long he has been playing chess. Eighteen years, three months, and four days, says Luzhin after a pause filled with mental computation, and since we know that it all started on the night of the anniversary of his grandfather's death, which fell on the Easter Sunday night (see 39 and 44), the task is easy. Russian Easter in 1910 was on April 18 (but it fell on March 27 in Gregorian-style countries), and so Luzhin's singular courtship begins on *July 21st* (Nabokov Sr.'s birthday).

6. No reader, even first-time, can fail to notice that the chess theme in *The Defense* is expressed persistently in musical terms. The fundamental reason for this is, as Boyd has shown, the steering role of Luzhin's maternal grandfather who was a composer of great sophistication and whose vicarious agency, in the person of a violinist performing his works at the memorial concert, ushers chess magical harmony into Luzhin's life by means of a musical analogy: "Combinations like melodies. You know, I can simply hear the moves." (43). Musical expression, no matter how technical, is vastly more accessible to most than chess terminology. When Luzhin first learns chess algebraic notation, he discovers in himself the facility comparable to his grandfather's--of reading "a score for hours [*chasami chital partituru*]" and hearing "in his mind all the movements of the music as he ran his eye over the notes, now smiling, now frowning, and sometimes turning back like a reader checking a detail in a novel--a name, the time of the year." (56-57). One name in particular deserves such backtrack checking in this regard. In describing the course of the critical game against the parlous Italian Turati, Nabokov employs metaphors of musical composition. A chess game in Russian is *partia*; and *partia* with *Turati* merges neatly, with little residue, into *partitura*, Russian (Italian) for musical score. At the end of Chapter 11, in bed after the wedding, Luzhin's wife's predormant fancy merges the word "partia" in the sense "a good match" with its other meaning: "an unfinished, interrupted match," "such a good game.... Give the Maestro my anxiety, anxiety..." (184), which sends back to the end of Chapter 9, where a distraught man sent by the tournament organizers to the sanatorium to see whether Luzhin would resume the game against Turati, keeps muttering "An unfinished game! And such a good game (*partia!* Give the Maestro my anxious wishes..." (153).

7. Among Luzhin's meticulously drawn objects there is a handsome cube with a "tiny shadow" (208). When the cube is done, Luzhin takes the drawing and leaves the

study, and his wife says "with a sigh: 'I wonder where dear Luzhin will hang this one'" (208). Forty-five pages later it transpires that he has hung it in the bathroom: when he bolts in there and locks himself up, one of the first things we notice is "a pencil drawing" on the wall--"a cube casting a shadow." Curiously enough, in the earlier scene Luzhin's mother-in-law, on seeing the cube, remarked: "*Zdorovo, priamo futuristika*" [Regular futurism, I'd say]. In the English version, this is replaced by the witty "cubism"--which voids a possible inference.

8. In many symptomatic ways, Luzhin's strained awareness of the hostile weft of pattern all around him is similar to the "referential mania" of the wretched young man in "Sign and Symbols." This latter senses that "phenomenal nature shadows him wherever he goes... everything is a cipher and of everything he is the theme... He must be always on his guard..." All of which very much resembles Luzhin's alertness to the combinative advances on his precarious position, especially acute in the second half of the book. "His vision became darker and darker and in relation to every vague object he stood in check" (140). Those blind suspicions are essentially correct in both cases, and they drive both characters to self-destruction--even by the same method, evidently (use of gravity, the principal among the very few "natural" ways of suicide). And just as the short story's superposing theme is the theme of human pain and tenderness, both expended and replenished at every step, so the novel ultimately blends "such pity" and "such pain" (151), the pity and the pain of both consuming passion and consummate compassion. There is a curious, though most probably coincidental, detail of further analogy. The set of fruit jellies in small jars launches the series of omens in "Signs and Symbols" and also points to its tragic outcome at the story's end. As Luzhin runs "home" after the game against Turati, he fancies that he "would live on the contents of large and small glass jars" (142). The contents must be fruit jam (nineteen and a half years earlier, during his first

escape, he also thought that would subsist on "cheese and jam from the pantry," 22), for Luzhin definitely has a sweet tooth: a spoonful of raspberry jam can stunt his strongest desires (see 123).

9. The very last item of Nabokov's Foreword to the English *Defense* is "the stone of the peach" that he "plucked in [his] own walled garden" and gave to his hero. That peach stone comes out of Luzhin's pocket when he empties it in a poignant farewell gesture, in front of his stunned wife, and in the little pile of his poor belongings left on the phonograph, that stone somehow takes the place of a wedding ring, or rather an engagement ring, which Luzhin returns before making his "slight bow". Their acquaintance, and courtship, began as she was following him along a path and picking up things he kept dropping through a hole in his coat pocket, among them a nut (for which she did not stoop). When Luzhin asks her hand of her mother, he seems to combine this "footpath" episode with the later one in which a boy on a highway hit him between the shoulder-blades with a pebble: "Consider this footpath. I was walking along. And just imagine whom I met. Whom did I meet? Out of the myths. Cupid. But not with an arrow--with a pebble. I was struck" (114). These two uncollected objects, the nut out of Luzhin's pocket and the pebble off his back, seem to roll into one large peach stone laid out onto the phonograph cabinet, a strange and touching symbol of that strange and touching union. The Foreword is not all tongue-in-cheek.

When Pnin lapses into his rememorative trance in Chapter One, he sees himself as a little boy bedridden with fever, peering at the bed-screen's picture of a squirrel that holds a reddish something in its paws, and solving the dreary riddle of what that object could be ("a nut? a pine cone?"). On regaining consciousness of the present, he sees a live squirrel sampling a peach stone. Introducing Pnin's condition, comparing this melting sensation of sinking into one's past with dying, the narrator declares that "death is

divestment," and Luzhin's emptying his pockets before taking his life, life that has begun to replay his past with some ominous variations, stands in vague correlation with this dictum. The hero of "The Visit to the Museum", when he emerges from the horrid maze and steps into the eternal wintry darkness of Leningrad and senses deadly danger all around him, starts frenetically throwing everything out of his pockets, every shred of identity (the list of contents is remarkably like Luzhin's, but no nuts or peach pits) but then realizes that in order to survive in this other world he would have to divest himself entirely: "to tear off and destroy my clothes, my linen, my shoes, everything, and remain ideally naked." One hopes that if the eternity that "inexorably spread out" before Luzhin as he let go of the ledge must be composed of dark and pale squares, then at least he was meant to *move* the pawns there, not to be one (as he sees himself in a hellish dream shortly before the end, on 236), while eating assorted nectars from large and small jars.

--Gennady Barabtarlo, University of Missouri

NABOKOV PAPERS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
(URBANA-CHAMPAIGN) ARCHIVES

by Gennady Barabtarlo

Among the documents recently donated by Mrs. Julia Gauchman, from the editorial archive of Vadim Rudnev, chief editor de facto of the *Contemporary Annals*, mostly for the years 1933 and 1934, there are three postcards from Nabokov, who lived at the time in 22, Nestorstrasse, Berlin. I had given Brian Boyd copies of the letters, and he used information contained in the latter two in his Nabokov biography (see vol. 1, p. 409 and nn. 5 and 6). The last letter in this series appears to precede immediately the first one in the batch published in *The Nabokovian*, No. 24. The letters are important because they fix the dates of composition of *Invitation to a Beheading* and *The Gift* and supply curious details of the success that *Despair's* serialisation reaped, somewhat to Nabokov's surprise. All three documents are published here in the (transliterated) original and in my translation, together with a draft of Rudnev's letter to Nabokov that prompted his reply of 11.11.1933. (Words in square brackets are crossed out in the original but restored for the sake of syntax; those in elbow brackets are explanatory interpolations).

30.X.1933.

Mnogouvazhaemyi Vladimir Vladimirovich!

My pristupili k sostavleniiu 54-oi knizhki "S.Z." i, kak bylo uslovleno s Vami, razschityvaem nachat' v nei pechatat' Vash roman. Kakoi imenno, -- esli verno to, chto, [kak] peredaval nam I.I.Fondaminskii, u Vas gotov uzhe, ili pochti gotov eshche odin roman, krome "Otchailaniia"?

Pozvol'te mne, na pravakh uzhe dolgoletnego nashego s Vami sotrudnichestva v obschchem dele, izlozhit' Vam so vsei otkrovennostiiu i priamotoi nashi

soobrazheniia. [Zhurnal vykhodit tak redko], budushchee ego stol' neopredelenno, chto razschityvat' na posledovatel'noe provedenie v nem oboikh romanov my ne mozhem. Esli ...

[Translation:

Much Esteemed Vladimir Vladimirovich!

We have begun putting together volume 54 of the C.A. and, as agreed, we intend to start printing your novel in it. Now, the question is which novel exactly, -- if it is true that, as I.I. Fondaminski tells us, you have completed, or almost completed, another novel besides *Despair*.

Allow me, on the strength of our plurennial collaboration on a common venture, to share with you our thoughts with total candor and directness. Our magazine comes out so infrequently and its future is so uncertain that we cannot count on serializing the two novels in succession. If ...]

1.

[Postmarked Berlin, 11.11.1933].
Mnogouvazhaemyi Vadim Viktorovich,

k sozhaleniiu ia lishen vozmozhnosti ispolnit' Vashu pros'bu,¹ ibo, kak ia uzhe pisal na-dniakh Il'e Isidorovichu, eshche dazhe ne pristupil k pisaniiu novogo romana. Vot uzhe polgoda kak ia zaniat podgotovitel'noi rabotoi, i do sikh por ona ne okonchena.

Prostite, chto neskol'ko zaderzhalsia s otvetom.

S iskrennim privetom,

V. Nabokov

[Translation:

Unfortunately, I am unable to oblige you, for, as I wrote to Ilia Isidorovich <Fondaminski> the other day, I have not even begun writing the new novel. For the past half-year I have been busy doing preparatory work, and this work is not yet finished. I apologize for the somewhat belated reply.

Sincerely, V. Nabokov]

2.

[Postmarked Berlin, June 9, 1934]

Blagodariu vas, dorogoi Vadim Viktorovich, za vse te pis'ma, kotorye vy mne pereslali. Krome nikh i krome prikhodiashchikh na moi adres, eshche prikhodiat v "Slovo" i t.d. -- ia ne sovsem ponimatu pochemu eto vdrug nachalas' takaia orgiia zaprosov i predlozhenii, -- i, glavnoe, vsio vertitsia vokrug "Otchaianii", -- ne ozhidal. Moi agent v Londone uzhe prodal i "Kameru" i "Otchaianie" -- tak chto v etom smysle s Angliei pokoncheno.

Bol'shaia pros'ba: kogda budete posylat' korrekтуру, ne mozhete li vy priložit' lishnii (ili dva?) ekzempliar? Svoi zapas ia davno razbazaril, a mezhdru tem otovsiudu prosiat.

Zaranee blagodariu i shliu vam iskrennii privet.

V.Nabokov.

[Translation:

Thank you, my dear Vadim Viktorovich, for all the letters that you have forwarded.² In addition to them and to those that reach me at home, there are letters received at Slovo <Publishing House> etc. -- I can't quite explain this sudden orgy of inquiries and offers, -- and to think that everything revolves around *Despair*. I didn't expect it. My London agent has sold

both *Camera* <Obscura> and *Despair*, so I am done with England in this respect.

I have a great favor to ask: could you enclose, along with the proofs, an extra copy (or two)?³ I have long since squandered my supply, yet requests keep coming from all sides. I thank you in advance and send my sincere greetings.]

3.

25. XI.34

Dorogoi Vadim Viktorovich,

blagodariu vas za knizhku, ottiski, den'gi (143 m. 50 p. v okonchatel'nom raschete za "Otchaianie"), a takzhe za vashe miloe pis'mo i za peresylku pis'ma iz Ameriki. Prostite, chto tol'ko teper' pishu, -- v poslednee vremia denno noshchno diktoval v mashinku novyi roman "Priglasenie na Kazn'". Eshche dnei desiat' provozhus', sveriaia, a zatem prishliu vam ekzempliar. Sud'ba "Sovr. Zap." mne blizka ne tol'ko po lichnomu interesu, -- vsei dushoi zhelaiu vam preodolet' novye trudnosti!

Ochen' vam priznatelen za soobshchenie o zdorov'e A.O. Poslednie svedeniia, kotorye my imeli storonoi byli chrezvychaino neuteshitel'ny. Dai Bog, chtoby vsio oboshlos'. V chem sostoit metod lecheniia Manukhina? V kakom sostoianii legkie? Vstaet-li A. O. ili dolzhna lezhat'? Ia budu vam ochen' blagodaren za vsiakoe izvestie o nei, -- a poka proshu vas predat' im oboim nash samyi nezhnii privet.

Zhmu vashu ruku, s iskrennim privetom, V. Nabokov.

P.S. Izdaiut-li chto-nibud' "Sovr. Zap." v smysle knig? Ne izdadite-li "Otchaianie"? A esli net, to ne posovetuete-li k kakomu izdatel'stvu obratit'sia?

[Translation:

Dear Vadim Viktorovich,

Thank you for the book <No. 56 came out in October>, the offprints, the money (143 marks and 50 pfennigs, the final accounting for *Despair*), as well as for your good letter and the forwarding of the letter from America. I apologize for not having written earlier -- I have been dictating, day and night, my new novel *Invitation to a Beheading*. I shall need me about ten days for checking, whereupon I shall send you a copy. The fate of the *Contemporary Annals* concerns me not merely out of personal interest; I wish with all my heart that you may overcome these new difficulties!

I am much obliged for the news about A<malia> O<sipovna, Fondaminski's wife>'s health. The latest report that reached us indirectly was highly distressing. Let's hope to God everything turns out alright. What is <Dr> Manukhin's method of treatment? How are her lungs? Does A.O. get up or must she stay in bed? I shall be very grateful to you for any word about her; in the meantime, I beg you to convey our loving regards to both of them.

I shake your hand, with sincere greetings. V. Nabokov.

P.S. Do the *Cont. Ann.* publish anything in the way of books? Would you consider bringing out *Despair*, and, if not, could you suggest a publisher I might approach?

In another file, containing the papers of Sophia Pregel (1894-1972), poetess and publisher, in the 1940s, of the New York Russian literary almanac *Novoselie*, I found the text of Nabokov's famous poem "Kakim by polotnom" ("No Matter How") sent to Mrs. Pregel-Brynnner on April 2, 1943 (postmarked the same day), with a brief note ("Posylaiu Vam, dorogaia Sofia Iulievna, etot eksprompt s druzheskim privetom. V.Nabokov-Sirin" [I am sending you, dear S.Iu., this improvisation, with friendly greetings]), whereas much later Nabokov dates it, in error, "early 1944" (see

Poems and Problems). The almanac had a strong Russo-Soviet patriotic bent, and the poem was not published there, of course (instead it was pirated by the *Socialist Messenger* [no.37, 1944], a Russian periodical in New York that had obtained a copy of the poem's text, which circulated widely among Russian émigrés).

Lastly, the University of Illinois Archives preserve various papers of Professor Philip E. Mosely (1905-1972) who was, between 1952 and 1961, president of the East European Fund, which spawned, in the early fifties, the Chekhov Publishing House. That energetic, profitless enterprise based in New York, with a dwarfish Statute of Liberty rising from a colossal, half-open tome for a publisher's device (and, oddly enough, "CHEPUHO" for the cable address: with the last letter changed to "a", it means folderol in Russian), brought out, in a mere five years, scores of Russian books, mostly by émigré writers, and tried, not entirely without success, to smuggle them across moats and ramparts to the Soviet readers. They printed the first complete version of *Dar* (1952), a volume of Gogol's stories with Nabokov's preface (1952), *Drugie Berega* (1954), and the *Vesna v Fial'te* collection of stories (1956), which appeared just before the venture folded, having transferred some of its stock to the YMCA Press and destroyed the rest, causing an uproar in Russian emigré circles and prompting a sharp inquiry from Nabokov -- but this story is so extraordinary, in its quaint mingling of the detective with the bureaucratic, that it deserves a separate report, which I intend to publish some day.

Philip Mosely, Michael Karpovich's student and Nabokov's fan (see Boyd-1, p.508), a history professor at Cornell between 1936 and 1943, was among several Russian scholars in America to whom Nabokov wrote from New York (immediately upon his emigration in the summer of 1940), probably on Karpovich's advice. Fourteen years later, their geographical positions being neatly reversed, they exchanged letters that reveal, among other things, that, already in 1954,

Nabokov meant to shape his Cornell lectures into a book.

Vladimir Nabokov
Goldwin Smith Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, N.Y.

September 1, 1954

Professor Philip E. Mosely
431 West 117 Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Professor Mosely,

May I seek your advice in the following personal matter? I expect to be on sabbatical leave in 1955-56 and during that time would like to complete two books (the annotated translation of EUGENE ONEGIN, on which I have been working on and off for more than two years now, and which is about one third done, and a volume of essays on Dickens, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Kafka, Proust and Joyce).

As you know, Cornell pays half of the salary in a sabbatical year. Mine is \$7000 per annum, before taxes and withholdings. Ordinarily I complement it with literary earnings, but in order to finish the two books I mentioned, I would have to divide all my time between them.

I would like to apply for a grant to one of the foundations. I wonder if the Rockefeller foundation could help me?

Anyway, I would be most grateful to you for advice or information in regard to assistance of this or any other kind.

Very sincerely yours, Vladimir Nabokov

Two weeks later, Mosely sends Nabokov a two-page reply, in which he says that in his view Nabokov is the

only person who can English Pushkin's masterpiece right ("both truthfully and poetically") and proceeds to give various details concerning application to pertinent funds, suggesting possible strategy, outlining prospects etc. Nabokov writes to him again on December 2nd:

Dear Professor Mosely,

Many thanks for your very kind and informative letter of September 14. It is only now that I have been able to act upon your suggestion and have written to the Rockefeller Foundation for an appointment <Mosely wrote that a visit would be preferable to a written inquiry which "usually gets a non-committal reply">.

I could not apply for a Guggenheim as I have held a Guggenheim Fellowship on two occasions already. Nor could I apply to the Ford Foundation or the Fulbright Commission since I do not want a teaching fellowship which would take too much of my time. I have so much to say and so little time in which to do it here that I would like to use the unique opportunity of a sabbatical leave for this purpose only.

Sincerely and cordially yours, Vladimir Nabokov.

Notes.

- * Nabokov's letters are published here with the kind permission of the Vladimir Nabokov Estate, which holds the copyright. I am grateful to the University of Illinois's Russian and East European Center and the Archives for the opportunity to peruse the archival holdings, and to the University of Missouri's Research Council for its financial support.

- 1 It appears that Rudnev ended his letter by asking VN to send him the other novel (presumably, *The Gift*) for consideration.
- 2 *Despair* fan mail, evidently.
- 3 The proofs of the concluding chapters of *Despair*, for volume 56 of the *Contemporary Annals*. Nabokov apparently is asking for offprints from books 54 and 55, where the first two-thirds of the novel appeared respectively in February and May of 1934.

ABSTRACTS

"Re-Inventing Nabokov: A Critique of the Feminist Critique in Roberta Smoodin's *Inventing Ivanov*"

by Susan Elizabeth Sweeney

(Abstract of a paper delivered at the MLA Convention, San Francisco, December 1991)

Although this paper is actually a reading of a reading of Nabokov, that two-time-removed relationship is appropriate both to Nabokov's metafiction and to the concern of contemporary feminist theory with what happens in the margins. Roberta Smoodin's first two novels, *Ursus Major* and *Presto!*, suggest a Nabokovian influence in their self-reflexivity, their theme of transcendent art, and their wordplay, imagery, and long sinuous sentences. Her third novel, *Inventing Ivanov* (1985), is in fact about the influence of Nabokov's life and art--and particularly on female characters, readers, and writers.

In his life and art, Ivan Ivanov--the expatriate Russian-American writer in Smoodin's novel--resembles Vladimir Nabokov, as well as Nabokov's impersonations of himself in the guise of "Vivian Darkbloom," "Vivian Bloodmark," "Vadim R.," and others. And the design of Smoodin's novel--in which a biographer's solipsistic search for the real life of Ivan Ivanov alternates with Ivanov's own elegant autobiography (in the form of a fictitious biography)--clearly alludes to several Nabokov novels as well as to his own life. Indeed, Smoodin explained in private correspondence that *Inventing Ivanov* began as a meditation on biography, and in particular as a

response to anecdotes she was told by someone who had known VN in Paris.

Smoodin's novel is thus concerned with Nabokov's influence at several different levels. Yet it does not simply repeat the story of rival male artists that is familiar in Nabokov's work and in contemporary critical theory. Instead, *Inventing Ivanov* considers VN's influence from a female point of view--examining his life and art in the context of female muses, female readers, and what Smoodin calls "the shadowy presence, always, of Vera Nabokov." In this novel, neither male author nor male commentator has the last word: the female muse does. As a writer of feminist metafiction, then, Smoodin critiques Nabokov by re-inventing him.

Yet *Inventing Ivanov* not only reveals Smoodin's anxiety about the way that male artists construct female identity in their lives and art. It also reveals her ambivalence toward her own act of re-invention. In the characters of Natasha and Victoria, in particular, Smoodin presents complementary stories of two women who are defined in specific ways by male discourse--and who each redefine themselves during the novel, but with different results. After Ivanov's death, Natasha re-invents herself, becoming the author of her own life; but Victoria ends hers, ironically and deliberately, according to the way in which women's lives have traditionally been written in male texts. Rachel Blau DuPlessis uses the phrase "writing beyond the ending" to describe female writers who imagine endings other than marriage or death for their heroines; that Smoodin writes beyond the ending in one case, but preserves it in another, suggests her own conflicted feelings.

Smoodin's ambivalence about women's ability to write their own stories thus extends to her own project

in writing *Inventing Ivanov*. As a female writer, she is aware of Nabokov's influence on her and yet still somewhat defined by it. Writing the novel may have exorcised that influence, however; Smoodin explains that her new novel, in progress, tells her own stories rather than Nabokov's stories from a female point of view.

"Kinbote's Transparent Closet in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*"

by Jean Walton

(Abstract of a paper delivered at the MIA Convention, San Francisco, December 1991)

This paper sketches out the parameters of a "gay" reading of *Pale Fire*, one which, instead of metaphorizing or pathologizing Kinbote's homoeroticism, focuses on it for its own sake, and treats it as a literal, not a figurative, component of the novel. Nabokov's multi-layered text, so rich in the dynamics of what Eve Sedgwick has termed the "epistemology of the closet," is rife with suggestive material for the reader who wants, *through* it, to perform a critique of "heterosexuality" (as Kinbote calls it) in modern culture. Kinbote, as a "closeted" deposed king, but also as a gay man in the rigidly heterosexist community of New Wye, is that person in the novel over whom, in Sedgwick's words, "everyone else in the world has, potentially, an absolute epistemological privilege." For readers who align themselves with this community, the pleasure of reading comes from "seeing through" Kinbote's closet, penetrating it before he voluntarily opens its door to us, indeed, penetrating Kinbote himself as though his identity were transparent to all but himself.

The novel is ambiguous about the links it makes between Kinbote's sexuality and his insanity. Critics articulate these links differently depending on whether for them homoeroticism is primarily an aesthetic, a moral, or a pathological phenomenon. Most often, Kinbote's insanity is understood to be interchangeable with his homoerotic desire; this reading is informed by the assumption that both insanity and homosexuality are pathological disturbances which define the subject as (in this case incurably) ill. Others discuss Kinbote's sexuality and madness as instances of perfect inversions of the norm, useful as a literary device, and productive of comic relief.

As Andrew Field puts it, "perverse sexuality by its very nature satisfies one of the most basic precepts of comedy . . . : the world turned on its head, tragedy and pain softened (but not lessened) by the presence of the absurd and the ludicrous." For David Rampton, it is the reassuring presence of heterosexuality in the novel, both in the person of Shade, as well as in the references to Kinbote's marriage to Disa, that lends depth and meaning to what is otherwise a frivolous, tedious, adolescent (precisely because of Kinbote's homoerotic desire) concoction. In the passage about Charles' dreams of Disa, Rampton praises, for example, "old Nabokov themes," one of which he identifies as "love as a permanently frustrated desire for a still unravished bride." It is mistaken to read the Disa dream passage as in any way heterosexual, however, since it is precisely this passage that reveals Charles' sexuality as so decidedly homoerotic that the marriage of convenience prescribed by "heterosexualist" law becomes the mechanism by which both he and Disa are made to suffer continual anguish. Far from being about his "frustrated desire for a still unravished bride," this passage demonstrates just the extent to which he will be made,

by a homophobic culture, to suffer for his homosexuality when he is forced into an arrangement whereby his homoerotic desire can function as nothing but an instrument of torture to wound the well-meaning Disa.

Charles Kinbote's homosexuality cannot be read either as a mirror image of heterosexual desire, nor as a figure for all sexual desire. The gesture that would metaphorize or falsely universalize the specific desire in this text results in eliding the important differences that characterize the experience of the gay man in the "heterosexualist" culture. What remains to be explored is the extent to which *Pale Fire* encourages its readers to join Kinbote's observers in placing him beyond the boundaries of a normal and normalizing community, thereby keeping him firmly enclosed in the transparent closet that displays, for our delectation, not only his madness, but his sexuality as well.