THE VLADIMIR NABOKOV

RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Stephen Jan Parker

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

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Number 6 Spring 1980

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NEWS ITEMS AND WORK IN PROGRESS

by Stephen Jan Parker

From Sam Schuman: The past few years have seen the publication of Nabokov's Lectures on Literature, the Nabokov/Wilson correspondence, and several studies of his work in relation to contemporary and earlier literature. Accordingly, the Vladimir Nabokov Society announces that the subject of its 1981 meeting (in late December, in New York, at the Roosevelt Hotel in conjunction with the AATSEEL meeting December 28-30 and coordinated with the MLA Convention) is "Nabokov...and others." Specifically, we are seeking as papers for presentation at our meeting: new studies of Nabokov's use of modern or early literature, Russian or Western; his influence upon (or use as a source in) the works of others; and his relations with the literary community during his lifetime.

The deadline for proposals (of at least two, fairly detailed, pages) or papers is 15 July 1981. Please submit material for consideration to:

Sam Schuman, President,
Vladimir Nabokov Society
Honors Center
University of Maine
Orono, ME 04469

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From William McGuire (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 08540) comes an announcement of the upcoming publication of the paperback edition of Nabokov's Eugene Onegin scheduled for June 1981 release. It will be in two volumes and will include everything in the four-volume revised cloth edition with the exception of the Russian text, lexicon, and two appendices. These two appendices, on Prosody and on Gannibal, are still available in a separate Princeton/Bollingen paperback.

Mr. McGuire also notes that he proposes editing a collection of critical articles on Nabokov's edition of Eugene Onegin, and while he believes he has managed to find all the significant pieces, he would be grateful to hear of any such articles, particularly those which he might likely have missed.

*

Another project is announced by Phyllis Roth (English Department, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866). She has contracted with G. K. Hall to do a volume on Nabokov in their series, Critical Essays on American Literature. She is seeking new, previously unpublished essays on Nabokov, with particular interest in essays discussing the relationship between the short fiction and the long, the Russian and the English; essays which place Nabokov in possible contexts or traditions; essays which offer especially original approaches to individual works or to the corpus. Interested parties should send essays or proposals directly to her.

*

Simon Karlinsky (Slavic Languages & Literatures, University of California, Berkeley CA 94720) writes: "I would like to absolve myself of responsibility for several inaccuracies in the entry on Vladimir Nabokov in the Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature (Second Edition) which is signed with my initials. The errors were introduced in the text I prepared (and also in the text of my entries on Bely and Chekhov) by parties unknown during the process of editing. I was not shown the galleys and was shocked by the extent to which my texts were altered. The editor-general of the dictionary, Professor William B. Edgerton, promised to reinstate my original wordings in the next printing, or at least to remove the obviously erroneous statements which I did not make. My other current Nabokov project is writing the introduction to the volume of lectures on Russian authors and helping out with the editing of that volume."

*

J. E. Rivers (Box 4248, Boulder, CO 80306) writes that the book that Charles Nicol and he coedited, Nabokov's Fifth Arc: Nabokov and Others on His Life's Work, has been accepted by the University of Texas Press and will be published by them in the fall of 1981. It will contain the first American publication of the "Notes to Ada by Vivian Darkbloom," keyed for the first time to the standard editions of the novel, and the first English translation of the "Postscript to the Russian Edition of Lolita."

*

Grove Koger (3385 East Franklin Road, Meridian, ID 83642) brings to our attention the announcement of the upcoming publication in June of Daniel Albright's Representation and the Imagination: Beckett, Kafka, Nabokov, and Schoenberg (University of Chicago Press).

*

News of an important project comes from Michael Juliar (Treehaven #1, Apt. 19B, Matawan, NJ 07747). A collector of Nabokov, Mr. Juliar has been putting together an extensive, special bibliography of N's works. Mr. Juliar writes: "This bibliography was compiled for the Nabonut--not the one who collects the nectar-laden themes of Vladimir Nabokov--but that other one, that incomprehensible one, who collects the sized, stitched, and substantial books of this many-tongued author." He estimates that the bibliography is now about 75% complete in his goal of providing "as comprehensive and as reliable a listing of what could be gathered by the Nabokov collector and what could have meaning to the Nabokov scholar. I describe fifty major species of Nabokov titles in detail adequate to identify their first editions or printings, their variants, states, issues and points, and further editions and printings in hardcover and softcover. Also included are prepublication items (galleys, proofs, etc.), books to which Nabokov has made a contribution and in which that contribution appears in book form for the first time, translations, by title of source and by language, English and Russian language periodical appearances (a separate list for entomological journals), adaptations to the stage, screen, phonograph, and tape recorder, and much, much more." Mr. Juliar welcomes correspondence from any collectors or librarians with unusual bibliographic items.

*

The Newsletter will on occasion review newly published works by Nabokov as well as books which will aid the Nabokov scholar, such as Samuel Schuman's A Reference Guide (reviewed in VNRN no. 4). Though not altering its policy of not reviewing critical studies of Nabokov's writings, the Newsletter at the request of its readers, and for the purpose of disseminating information rapidly, will now note the nature of book-length critical studies.

Thus, according to Ellen Pifer, in the preface to her Nabokov and the Novel (Harvard University Press, 1980), "my intention in this book is to demonstrate that even the most intricate of Nabokov's artifices reflect the author's abiding interest in human beings, not only as artists and dreamers but as ethical beings subject to moral law and sanction." She continues, "rather than provide a comprehensive survey of all of Nabokov's fiction, I deliberately focus attention on those novels which are the most highly wrought and aesthetically self-conscious." Works receiving extensive commentary are King, Queen, Knave, Invitation to a Beheading, Bend Sinister, Despair, and Ada.

*

Coinciding with the publication of Nabokov's Lectures on Literature there has been a flurry of Nabokov items appearing in the alumni publications of those universities at which he taught. A piece by Marina Naumann, "Vladimir Nabokov and Alice in Wellesley's Wonderland" appeared in the fall 1980 issue of Wellesley's alumni magazine. The Cornell Alumni News has had over the years a number of items on Professor Nabokov. A notable one, describing T. C. Heine Jr.'s experience in 1954 as the only student in Nabokov's Russian Literature course, appeared in the April 1977 issue. Most recently the November 1980 issue featured an excerpt from the Lectures, a piece entitled "Vla-dí-mir Na-bó-kov" by Chester Rosson, and a reminiscence by Marc Szeftel entitled "Lolita at Cornell." This in turn was followed by a lengthy letter to the editor from Stephen Parker correcting some inaccuracies in Rosson's piece (March 1981 issue), and another short piece quoting Robert M. Adams on Nabokov (April 1981 issue).

*

Dale E. Peterson (English Department, Amherst College, Amherst, MA 01002) writes that his article entitled "Nabokov's Invitation: Literature as Execution" is scheduled to appear in PMLA early in 1982. It is a discussion of the correlation between Nabokov's particular practice of literary modernism and his interest in the ethics of fiction-making.

*

Susan Vander Closter (English Department, Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802) has recently completed a Ph.D. dissertation which, she writes, responds to those critics who, like Joyce Carol Oates, find Nabokov too stylistically cold, experimental, and solipsistic. Demonstrating the interdependency of style and theme, she focuses on Nabokov's concept of artistic memory and on the growth of his autobiographer-artists in Speak, Memory, The Gift, and Ada. She adds: "I am, I suppose, an incurable Nabokov fan who believes he has revolutionized the nature of American prose, has transformed autobiography, and has created a new portrait of the literary artist."

*

Judson Rosengrant (7927 SE Harrison, St., Portland, OR 97215) notes that his AATSEEL paper (abstracted in this issue) represents part of a chapter of his Ph.D. dissertation (in progress at Stanford University under the direction of Edward J. Brown) which is a comparative study of style in the English and Russian versions of Speak, Memory. The dissertation addresses what he takes to be the four principal aspects of literary style--the lexical, the phonological, the grammatical (syntactic), and the tropological--and it relates the discussion to general issues of stylistics and translation theory.

*

Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (English Department, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912) writes that last spring she completed her honors thesis at Mount Holyoke College, "Hidden Monograms and Illegible Signatures: the Search for Authorship in the Work of Vladimir Nabokov," and is now at work on a master's thesis at Brown University under Mark Spilka, which is tentatively entitled "From Little Nell to Lolita: The Little Girl as Heroine." It will focus particularly on The Old Curiosity Shop, Dostoevsky's The Insulted and the Injured, and Lolita.

*

Opening in Boston to largely negative reviews, Edward Albee's dramatization of Lolita underwent some rewriting and restaging while playing for two weeks to box office record crowds at Boston's Wilbur Theatre. Opening his syndicated review in The Boston Globe, Kevin Kelly wrote: "Edward Albee's inane, witless and superfluous version of 'Lolita' is so despicable I hardly know where to begin." The show then moved to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on Broadway where it again played to full houses during preview performances prior to the official opening on March 19. Attendance was spurred and publicity assured by the picketing of the theatre by members of Women Against Pornography protesting "the Lolita syndrome" which they described as "the rapidly growing number of images that make sexual objects out of little girls and legitimize their sexual abuse." Opening night reviews were no better than in Boston. "This show is the kind of embarrassment," noted Frank Rich in The New York Times, "that audiences do not quickly forget or forgive." On April 5 a

closing notice had been posted due to poor attendance. Thus, following Kubrick's 1962 film version and Allan Jay Lerner's short-lived 1971 stage musical, "Lolita, My Love," this latest theatrical adaptation of Lolita now becomes a footnote, its demise apparently largely attributable to reviewers' disgust, not so much with the casting or acting, but with Albee's banalization and commercialization of Nabokov's classic.

*

Timothy Lucas (3160 McHenry Avenue, 11, Cincinnati, OH 45211) adds additional information to his item reported in VNRN #5. The 1981-82 edition of Leonard Martin's TV Movies (Signet paperback) contains a capsule review of the Jerzy Skolimowski film of King, Queen, Knave: "Coarse, heavy-handed adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov story [sic] about a klutzy youth who falls in love with his sexy aunt." Maltin rates the movie "Bomb."

*

John G. Stewart (107 Ivy Drive, Apt. 8, Charlottesville, VA 22901) notes that he is still willing to provide copies of the color slides which he took of the Nabokov house in Leningrad (noted in VNRN no. 1) to any interested person (3½ x 5½ @ 65¢; 4 x 6 @ 80¢; 5 x 7 @ $2; 8 x 10 @ $4; postage extra). He also notes that the new wave rock group, The Police, has a hit single on their latest album, "Zenyatta Mondatta," called "Don't Stand So Close to Me," with the following lines:

"It's no use, he sees her,
He starts to shake and cough,
Just like the old man in
That book by Ná-bo-kov"

Such an item does not readily fit into the category of Nabokoviana, though it might qualify as paraNabokovologie; i.e., the study or notation of the ways in which VN and his works have infiltrated popular culture. The terms "Lolita" and "nymphet" are ready examples of the phenomenon, as is the crossword puzzle citation, "a book by Nabokov" (usually Ada, though also sometimes Glory, Mary, and even Pnin). The editor welcomes further items in this vein.

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The Newsletter would like to acknowledge and thank the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of the University of Kansas for its continuing support of this publication. Special thanks are due Ms. Paula Oliver, Ms. Cheryl Berry, and Ms. Sandra Ward for their assistance.

THE 1980 NABOKOV SOCIETY MEETING

by Samuel Schuman, Program Director

On Monday, December 29th, 1980, from 7:00 to 9:00 in the evening, the fifth annual program of the Vladimir Nabokov Society took place. This year's gathering was convened at the Marriot Hotel at the Astrodome, in Houston, Texas. It was the first V. N. Society meeting to take place under the official auspices of AATSEEL (American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages). The Society's meeting was, therefore, severed completely from its previous--tenuous--tie to the MLA. Approximately 35 persons attended the session. Papers (which are abstracted elsewhere in this issue) were presented by Professors J. D. O'Hara of the University of Connecticut; Timothy Shipe, University of Iowa; Ellen Pifer, University of Delaware; and Geoffrey Green of the University of Southern California. D. Barton Johnson of the University of California at Santa Barbara served as respondant. A special report on "Underground Nabokov Scholars in the USSR" was presented by John V. Hagopian of SUNY-Binghampton. Two recent journeys to Russia persuaded Professor Hagopian that there is considerable interest in Nabokov there, and that a surprising amount of covert Nabokov scholarship is taking place.

Charles Nicol conducted the Business Meeting of the Society following the academic session. Stephen Parker gave a combined Secretary/Treasurer/Editor of the Newsletter's report. The Society is in good health in terms of finances and membership; the Newsletter solicits contributions. Officers for the next two years were elected: they are Samuel Schuman (University of Maine at Orono), President, D. Barton Johnson, Vice-President. There was considerable discussion of the affiliation status of the Nabokov Society. The will of those in attendance was that continued ties with AATSEEL were desirable, while simultaneous pursuit of "affiliated organization" status with MLA should not be abandoned.

An announcement regarding the organizer and the topic for next year's program appears in this issue of the Newsletter.

ABSTRACT

"The Tamara Theme"

by J. D. O'Hara

(Abstract of the paper presented at the meeting of the Nabokov Society, Houston, December 29, 1980.)

Nabokov used in his fiction many matters from his life; Mademoiselle, the grand trains of Europe, the motels of the USA, and his own testimony show this. His opinions about his life are less visible in the fiction, even his opinions on a dominant event, his exile from Russia. He has expressed himself on the subject repeatedly in his many interviews, and his fiction repeats the theme with equal interest. But many critics impose upon his fiction or extract from it ideas about exile rather foreign to Nabokov's own. An early and blatant example is the notion behind the title Escape into Aesthetics.

But from Mary onward, Nabokov developed and varied a character and situation that embodied the essence of his exile. His last years in Russia were filled intensely with butterflies, schooldays in St. Petersberg, summer in the country, versifying, and a varied, emotional, and sentimental love affair developing delicately, ripening into surreptitious passion, and fading into finely muted throbs of nostalgia. In Mary the hero Ganin, exiled in Berlin, hears that a similar woman is leaving Russia and heading toward her husband and, unknowingly, her former lover. Throughout the novel he dreams of taking her back; in the end he leaves Berlin without her. Russia has been given her fictional image.

In Look at the Harlequins, that strange parody autobiography, Vadim's first novel is not Mary but Tamara. In Speak, Memory the teenaged love is named Tamara. And in Invitation to a Beheading--whose hero's wife is Marthe--the name Tamara is used to identify the public park "where we used to roam and hide in this world," where "everything is filled with the kind of fun that children know." The Tamara Gardens blur, in this long passage from chapter 8, into an ideal world about which Cincinnatus is fantasizing. There, he writes, things are better; there is "the simplicity of perfect good"; "there, tam, là-bas." And there in that Russian tam, which states a spatial there and can imply a temporal then, we see the significance of the name Tamara.

The essential Tamara story is a sweet and simple matter of early love now lost. In itself it is fine; Nabokov has no objection to affection, sensuality, nostalgia, etc. But as time necessarily passes and space necessarily shifts, Tamara constitutes a danger, a danger that we see in Mary, in Marthe, in Nina Rechnoy/Lecerf, and much more complicatedly in Annabel Leigh, in Ada, and in some actual Odon of Kinbote's concealed boyhood.

Van refers to one of his real father's many mistresses as "a temporary Tamara." So are they all, through a necessity far more general than the Russian Revolution; youth cannot last. Many of Nabokov's characters--most obviously Fyodor in The Gift--can use their past without being warped by it. Some, however, like Humbert and Kinbote and Van, cruelly and perversely try to meddle with time, space, and the lives of others in order to recapture at best a distorted image of their innocent youth. Nabokov treated the theme of youth and exile in many ways, but centrally and consistently he returned to it by embodying it there, tam, là-bas in Tamara and her distant lure.

ABSTRACT

"Nabokov's Gift: The Art of Exile"

by Ellen Pifer

(Abstract of the paper presented at the meeting of the Nabokov Society, Houston, December 29, 1880.)

Despite the potentially shattering force of current events on his own life, Nabokov was not interested in promoting social or historical formulations in his fiction. In The Gift (Dar, published serially during 1937-38), Nabokov's eighth novel and his finest work in Russian, the main character confronts the necessity for cultivating a form of that "inner disentanglement" from social conditions that had been discovered by his author ten years earlier with King, Queen, Knave. In one particular episode of The Gift, Nabokov specifically demonstrates how dangerous to the writer's vision is the psychic baggage of labels and stereotypes we unconsciously assume as members of collective society.

In this episode, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, a young writer, is seated on a Berlin streetcar, to give yet another foreign language lesson to an untalented student. The Russian émigré's recognizable feelings of isolation and hostility distort Fyodor's perceptions of the German citizens around him, ultimately draining them of all humanity. Soon a "lean man in a short coat with a fox-fur collar" sits down across from Fyodor, bumping the young man with the corner of his briefcase as he settles down in the seat. In the passenger's physical features and gestures Fyodor discerns only the repulsive characteristics of the "typical" German. Fyodor's mounting repulsion is soon punctured, however, by the reality of specific detail. The "typical" German seated opposite Fyodor takes "a copy of Vasiliev's newspaper from his pocket" and coughs with the "Russian intonation" of a fellow émigré: Fyodor is wise enough to recognize in this abstract defeat a real victory. He heartily applauds the vital resistance of life, and human beings, to generalizations. Like most of Fyodor's experience in The Gift, this moment in the tram marks an essential stage in his development as a writer, because the exercise of Fyodor's literary "gift" will require that he forsake conventional forms of perception, which are "unworthy of an artist."

Like Fyodor's encounter on the Berlin streetcar, Nabokov's experience of exile contradicts conventional expectations; as he once said, when discussing his second novel, King, Queen, Knave, Nabokov turned the "glaring disadvantage" of exile into a "subtle protective device." Not only did Nabokov abandon social formulations in his literary practice, he ultimately rejected his contemporaries' obsession with social-historical process--the tendency of generations of novelists, and Western intellectuals in general, to perceive in that process the very force and form of human fate. By contrast, Nabokov identified himself as "the type of artist who is always in exile even though he may never have left the ancestral hall or the paternal parish." Even as a boy of ten, he found the suggestion of exile, brought on by a vacation beyond the borders of Russia, to be a fruitful or "rosy" state of consciousness. As he said in his autobiography, Speak, Memory, "homesickness has been with me a sensuous and particular matter."

To be displaced from one's habitual surroundings, estranged from the familiar, is to be brought into a more intense and evocative relationship with that environment. "Home" becomes that remote but essential reality which one's imagination and memory struggle, "unquenchably," to discover and repossess at a distance. For Nabokov, the condition of exile--of existing at the furthest reaches from one's "home" or origins--is the quintessential condition of human beings on this planet. By exiling himself from the security of a deceptively familiar social environment, Nabokov nurtured that sense of essential estrangement which underscores our existence and provides the focus for "reality" in his fiction. To us, exile may seem an unfortunate accident of history; but for Nabokov it came to represent both an ontological condition and an artistic necessity. Ultimately he refused to assign any historical date whatsoever to his lifelong experience as an exile. My "happy expatriation," he said, "began practically on the day of my birth."

ABSTRACT

"'Nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die': The Speech of Memory in Nabokov's Fiction"

by Geoffrey Green

(Abstract of the paper presented at the meeting of the Nabokov Society, Houston, December 29, 1980.)

Any scholar investigating the question of autobiographical motives in Nabokov's fiction must come to terms with the ambiguous nature of the subject: on the one hand, Nabokov prided himself on being a person with "no public appeal"; his "harmonious and green" personal existence was self-contained and had little connection with his fiction, other than his fondness for issuing "treasured items" from his past to favored characters in his work; on the other hand, he suggested repeatedly that there is an intricate and close relationship between the processes of memory and creative imagination. Time, for Nabokov, was an essential refrain. To preserve one's memories, and to bestow upon them a measure of protection from the destructive effects of time was to engage in an artistic process. The point of conjunction between actual, recalled events and fictional, invented ones was "a delicate meeting place between imagination and knowledge." When viewed from this perspective, Nabokov's occasional statements that his work is devoid of autobiographical

interest become the affirmative yearnings of an author who did not "believe in time." A brief examination of one event in Nabokov's life--the murder of his father--in terms of its appearance in his fiction should suggest an approach to Nabokov which conceives of fiction as a partial projection of autobiographical materials, and of the act of fictionalizing as a poignant and exigent attempt to resist the flow of time.

One of Nabokov's earliest short stories --"The Return of Chorb"--is based on the concept of a meaningless, arbitrary death. Nabokov demonstrates that he had begun to associate preservation of memory with imaginative creation. In "A Russian Beauty," the sudden and apparently meaningless end of a woman's life is provided as the context by which we must understand the meaning of her existence. In "A Dashing Fellow," Nabokov establishes that it is death which reveals the tenor of a life--not how we may die, but the certainty that we will die: and it is the tracing backward from this realization, through the particulars of a person's life, which provides the pure and energized artistic essence of that life.

Nabokov's conceit in "Ultima Thule" and "Solus Rex" was that the depiction of a strange and exotic imaginary landscape could serve as a therapy for the apparently irrelevant events which surround its author; further, that an illusory reality could develop to the point where it was of equivalent importance to an actual reality.

In Bend Sinister, Nabokov proposed that time is a relative illusion, a matter of creative inventiveness: past events may be summoned forth, either to blot out the present, or to preserve the eternity of the memory; present events may be hurtled back into the distant past to dispose of them, or to preserve them; imaginary events may be evoked in order to continue, on a parallel realm, a reality no longer consistent with present circumstances, or to achieve a pure and absolute revision of an event in the past--all events are constant and nonexistent, lurking in a shadowy time regulated by the will to remember, the will to create.

It is in Pale Fire that we encounter that projection of memory into fiction which incorporates all previous manifestations. Nabokov, dwelling on the arbitrary murder of his father many years before, conceives of an author, John Shade, who is mourning the loss of his daughter; as a result of a brush with death--which clearly incorporates certain details from the personal materials of Nabokov's life and his father's murder--Shade decides to create an equivalent, literary, reality which would be purer than his own actual reality. Shade's life, and his creations--that is, his poem and the commentary he creates to surround it (the novel, Pale Fire)--exist as a further commentary upon the unfinished work which Nabokov's father abandoned with his death; the novel, which is created from the fictional projections of Nabokov's life, imagination, and memory, comments upon and perpetuates the "unfinished poem" which is Nabokov's love for, and memory of, his father.

ABSTRACT

"Nabokov's Metanovel"

by Timothy Shipe

(Abstract of the paper presented at the meeting of the Nabokov Society, Houston, December 29, 1980.)

The prefaces which Nabokov wrote for the English translations of his Russian novels suggest an apparent contradiction in the author's stance toward the relation of his autobiography and his fiction. One of the major concerns of these prefaces is the autobiographical parallels in the early novels. Nabokov forces us to consider the material of his autobiography in any reading of the English versions of the Russian novels, and insures that a reader who is not familiar with Speak, Memory will be aware of the presence of autobiographical details in a given work. However, another major concern of the prefaces is to discourage or debunk autobiographical readings. Virtually all of the prefaces contain a disclaimer whose object is to discourage readers from attempting to use what they know of the author's life to account for his fiction. The worst culprits, for Nabokov, are those who attempt Freudian readings of his works.

But if Nabokov objects to treating his life as an influence on his fiction, he is not averse to treating fiction as an influence on or premonition of "life." A recurrent theme in Nabokov's commentary on his own works is the notion that by placing an autobiographical detail in a work of fiction, he runs the risk of erasing it from his life. If the past exists only in a person's memory of it, then altering his memory actually alters the past; and this, for Nabokov, is the effect of fictionalizing his life. The project of Speak, Memory is, in part, to counteract this process, to save life from fiction. However, the effect of fiction on the life of the author need not be one of negation; fiction can prefigure life, can force life to follow its example. Nabokov points out an instance of this in his preface to The Gift: the refusal of the editors of Sovremennye Zapiski to publish the novel's fourth chapter was prefigured by a similar incident within the work itself.

Even with respect to his most unabashedly "autobiographical" novel, Mary, Nabokov plays, in retrospect, with the concerns and expectations of the reader who seeks the author's life in his fiction. In Speak, Memory, he suggests that documents from his real life--letters from "Tamara"--were included verbatim in Mary, and that he is making use of the letters thus preserved in writing the autobiography. But in the preface to the English translation of Mary, he claims that he did not consult the novel when writing Speak, Memory.

Clearly, Nabokov's warnings against seeing his life in his fiction cannot merely be taken at face value. We may read Nabokov's fiction, the different versions of his autobiography, and his commentaries on his own works, as parts of a larger fiction, a sort of "metanovel" whose theme is the complex relations between an author's life and his *oeuvre*. What then becomes important is not the "accuracy" of the autobiographical accounts, the "sincerity" of the author's assertions about his works and their genesis, or anything we may be able to determine about the "real" life or the "actual" textual history of his writings, but rather the artistic interweaving of fictionalized versions of all of these elements in a consciously manipulated dialectic. Even critical writing *about* Nabokov is incorporated into this metanovel, and the critic is forced to admit the possibility that he or she may become subservient to Nabokov's fictional designs.

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.)

A Note on the Arabic Etymology of Nabokov

John Updike in his "Professor Nabokov" in the *New York Review of Books* (September 25, 1980), suggests that Nabokov's surname "may stem from the same Arabic root as the word *nabob*, having been brought into Russia by the fourteenth century Tatar prince Nabok Murza." This is indeed problematic. The radicals n-b-b have the general sense of increasing, coming from the noun n-b. And from this root, for example, there is *nababan*, to become excited (see al-Fara'id). There is also the sense of rising above something, or of revealing one's self very much like the verb *kashafa*. Also from this root we get *nabq*, *a lotus* fruit, and *nabaka*, hill. Crooke's edition of *Hobson-Jobson* lays claim to *nabob* from the *singular* *na'ib* (pl. *nuwwab*), meaning representative, delegate; thus there is the *Nawab* of Surat; however, it now has no *specific* rank to it. The word, in the sense of an esteemed title, achieved currency in India in the 18th century when many Indians who had returned from the East with newly acquired fortunes were referred to as nabobs, obviously also suggesting that the etymology of nabob is probably n-b-b. Thus Updike's comment about the probably origins of Nabokov's surname could very well be correct.

--Jack D. Rollins, Indiana State University

Un Squelette des Ombres

In the Foreword to Invitation to a Beheading, after disclaiming the epic catalogue of influences hurled at him in the last three decade, Nabokov acknowledges the "one author . . . never . . . mentioned in this connection - the only author whom I must gratefully recognize as an influence upon me at the time of writing this book; namely, the melancholy, extravagant, wise, witty, magical, and altogether delightful Pierre Delalande, whom I invented." While Nabokov may have invented the Discours sur les ombres from which the epigraph to Invitation is taken [and which is also alluded to in The Gift, ED.] he did not have to invent the author. In the Dictionnaire de Biographie Francaise, X (Paris, 1965), for "Delalande, (Pierre-Antoine)" we read: Il naquit á Versailles le 27 mars 1787, entra assez jeune au Muséum, oú son père avait fait une longue carrière de tachydermiste, mais travailla également la peinture dans l'atelier de Berré et exposa au Salon quelques paysages et quelques animaux. Devenu aide-naturaliste de Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, Delalande accompagna ce savant au Portugal en 1808. Seul, il fut, en 1813, envoyé sur les côtes de Provence d'où il rapporta poissons et mollusques. Au début de janv. 1815, Delelande fut adjoint à l'ambassade du duc de Luxembourg envoyée auprès de L'empereur du Brésil. Il rapporta de l'Amérique du sud de très importantes collections. Celles qu'il réunit dans l'Afrique du sud, au cours d'un voyage de deux ans et demi (1818-1821) entrepris au Cap, chez les Hottentots, en Cafrerie, en compagnie de son neveu Verreaux, âgé de 12 ans, furent bien plus importantes encore. On note, parmi les 13 000 sujets qui furent rapportés, des squelettes de baleine, de girafes, d'hippopotames, de rhinocéros bicornis et même des squelettes humains. Delalande réunit encore 10 000 insectes, un herbier très complet, des minéraux. A son retour en France, il fut décoré le 23 mai 1821. Il s'apprêtait à donner un récit de ses expéditions lorsqu'il mourut des suites de quelque maladie exotique, le 27 juill. 1823." (662-3).

The important facts in Delelande's biography will make it clear why, in the last words of Nabokov's Foreword, readers of them might "jump up, ruffling their hair." Although the Dictionnaire gives us no reason to think Delalande wise, witty or magical, it clearly identifies him as a naturalist and collector of dedication. As such, and not least in a foreword (written in Oak Creek Canyon, Arizona and so, presumably on a butterfly-hunting expedition) where Chateaubriand, his favourite author, is quoted, it would not be at all surprising to find Nabokov not simply knowing of but using Delalande. I would submit that he does just this, and alleges invention only to tease and be found out.

--Patricia Brückmann, Trinity College, Toronto

Another "Nova Zembla"

Most readers of Pale Fire with a taste for explication and annotation (and it is difficult to imagine reading the novel without such a taste) know by now that Nabokov's great-grandfather Nikolai Aleksandrovich (1795-1873) may have inspired the naming of Kinbote's fantasy island. Field notes (Nabokov: His Life in Part, p. 47),

> It was this Nabokov who went on the 1817 expedition to the Arctic island of Novaya Zemlya--our Nabokov, of course, prefers the English mumble or bumble, Nova Zembla--where a small river...was named for him.

It was recently pointed out to me, by a sharp eyed garden catalog reader, that there is a species of hardy Rhododendron named "Nova Zembla." It is described in one publication as:

> Very hardy, with rich red flowers and dark shiny leaves. Always dependable. 5 feet.

Another, more passionate characterization, calls attention to:

> Blazing, deep fiery-red flowers and exceptionally handsome foliage.

A true Kinbotian plant--one horticultural direction urges to "give them some shade."

--Sam Schuman, University of Maine, Orono

Mr Pim

"You have a lovely child, Mr. Humbert. We always admire her as she passes by. Mr. Pim watched Pippa suck in the concoction."

Lolita, p. 209

The reference to 'Mr. Pim" is inaccurately glossed by Carl R. Proffer (Keys to Lolita, p. 20) as "Mr. Pim is the title and hero of an obscure novel by A. A. Milne" but accurately assigned by Alfred Appel, Jr. in The Annotated Lolita" to the play Mr. Pim Passes By, (1919) by A. A. Milne (1882-1956)", the creator of Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh. Might I add to this that Mr. Pim Passes By was first presented at the New Theatre, London, on January 5, 1920. Carraway Pim was played by Dion Boucicault (Dionysus George Boucicault, 1859-1929, son of Dionysus Lardner Boucicault, 1822-90, author of The Colleen Bawn, Arrah-na-Pogue and The Shaugraun), the female lead, Olivia, by Irene Vanbrugh (Mrs. Boucicault) and the jeune premier, Brian Strange, by Leslie Howard. I was quite unable to fathom how VN knew of the existence of this dim little piece until I realised he could have seen it in London in 1920 on its original run. "Wistful, kindly, gentle Mr. Pim, living in some world of his own whither we cannot follow" (stage directions, and how Humbert would have relished this description!) nods in and out of the action, threatening to wreck a conventional marriage in his wistful, kindly way. Since "coincidence of pattern is one of the wonders of nature" (Speak Memory, p. 157), I experience a special frisson to recall that I played the jeune premier, Brian Strange, in Mr. Pim Passes By, in Wellington, New Zealand, at the beginning of 1941.

--Bruce Mason, Wellington, New Zealand.

A Note on the Name "Pnin"

Often in his fiction Nabokov utilized a character's name as a means of characterization or oblique identification. Some of these names can be deciphered quite readily, as, for example, Annabel Leigh in Lolita. Others, like the name "Pnin," are more difficult to interpret. One possibility is that the name is based on the Russian root "p/n", which carries the meanings of "kick" or "string up" (cf. Charles E. Townsend, Russian Word-Formation, New York: McGraw Hill, 1968, p. 250); the root appears in such words as "pnut'"--"to kick" and "raspjat'"--"to crucify." However, this line of investigation has little to recommend it.

A more promising possibility is that the name "Pnin" is used by Nabokov to echo the social status of the most famous Pnin in Russian letters, Ivan Petrovich Pnin (1773-1805), a progressive thinker and the illegitimate son of Field-Marshall Prince P. N. Repnin. During the eighteenth century it was not uncommon for a Russian nobleman to give his illegitimate son his own name, but with the first syllable truncated; thus Repnin becomes Pnin. B. O. Unbegaun comments on this in his book, Russian Surnames (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972): "As this curious treatment was applied to well-known names, far from concealing the special origin of its bearer, such a name underlined his distinguished lineage" (p. 234). The name Pnin, then, might suggest to a Russian reader the illegitimate scion of a distinguished and aristocratic family.

In the case of Timofey Pavlovich Pnin, this association is most appropriate, for throughout the novel, Nabokov weaves around the figure of Pnin the aura of dispossessed or deposed royalty. Examples of this are Pnin's dream at the end of Chapter Four of "fleeing . . . from a chimerical palace" (p. 109), which in turn reflects Victor's dream about the abdication of "the King, his father" (not his real father, Eric Wind, but "his more plausible father"--again, an echo of the illegitimate son motif), and the comment in Chapter Five about Pnin's dip in the river where he "swam in state," using a "dignified" breast stroke (p. 129). Pnin's name, then, is an emblem of his true position in life: deprived by fate of his rightful position of prominence and rank as a scholar in his fatherland, Russia, the dispossessed émigré nevertheless retains an inner nobility, the traces of a distinguished lineage, that allow him to overcome and transcend the trials and travails of emigration.

--Julian W. Connolly, University of Virginia

ABSTRACT

"Nabokov's Autobiography: Some Questions of Translation and Style"

by Judson Rosengrant

(Abstract of the paper presented at the Annual Meeting of AATSEEL, Houston, December 1980.)

The final edition of Nabokov's memoirs, Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited, is the culmination of a long process of composition, revision, translation, and partial retranslation back into the original tongue. Except for Chapter Five ("Mademoiselle O"), which was first written in French and published in 1936, and then translated into English and published in 1943, the book's various chapters, or at least what were to become its chapters, were written in English from 1946 to 1950 and published separately as stories. They were then collected, revised for accuracy and style, organized according to their biographical chronology, and published in 1951 as Conclusive Evidence, the first redaction of the autobiography proper. This version, with the omission of Chapter Eleven ("First Poem"), was next translated into Russian, revised further, augmented, and published in 1954 as Drugie berega (Other Shores). This second, Russian redaction, in combination with the first, English one, then became the basis for the still further revised and augmented Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited, which was published in 1966.

This multiple translation of a work by the author himself is, to the best of my knowledge, unprecedented for a writer of Nabokov's stature--if not for any writer at all. In any case, it is very promising ground for a study of one of the most difficult and interesting of all problems of translation, the rendering of authorial style. Speak, Memory allows the student, as perhaps few other works do, the opportunity to see how an acknowledged master of style deals with the task of translating himself into another language of which he is also an acknowledged master; it allows the student to examine what it is that determines an author's style in one language and then to look at how the author himself reproduces that style in another language possessing very different means.

In my paper I briefly discuss the issues of style and translation from a theoretical standpoint, observing that style is the totality of those discretionary lexical, phonological, syntactic, and tropological patternings that give the text its special (and perhaps personal) configuration, and that the translation of style (at least as concerns the work in question) is the selection and combination of resources in the second language whose effect is analogous or functionally similar to that of the corresponding features in the original--that such translation is in fact the abstraction in one text and the application in another of a principle or principles of verbal organization. I then proceed to analyze some of the more obvious lexical features of Nabokov's English style as it is manifest in Part 1 of Chapter Seven

("Colette"/"First Love"), where he describes in typical fashion a railway journey from St. Petersburg to Biarritz in 1909. I distinguish two basic kinds of stylistically marked items (although arguably they are not kinds at all but rather differing degrees of a mode of relation to the textual background). First are those terms which, however neutral or colored they may be, derive their primary effect from collocations involving a departure, sometimes startling, from conventional (normative) usage. Second are those terms and phrases (Nabokov's peculiar diction) which derive their main effect from their coloration alone--from the somewhat discordant note they introduce into the tone of the narrative. Relying in particular on Conclusive Evidence, I compare the items in the English text with their Russian translations, giving careful consideration to their function in both languages. I conclude by remarking that while Nabokov does not hesitate in the Russian translation to alter the connotation (when there is a choice, that is) and sometimes even the denotation of many of the lexical items in the original text, rarely is he willing to sacrifice the principle of stylistic organization--the use of contrasting registries--that determined their selection in the first place. In the Russian, as in the English, he remains true to form.

ABSTRACT

"Wrestling with Doubles in Nabokov's Novels: Despair, Lolita and Pale Fire"

by Ellen Pifer

(Abstract of the paper presented at the Annual National Meeting of AATSEEL, Houston, December, 1980.)

Critics have pursued the elusive double throughout Nabokov's fiction, tracing its presence from the early Laughter in the Dark all the way to Ada. I wish to suggest, however, that the doubles critics detect may be more illusory than real--creating more false leads than profound relationships. In an early novel, Despair, first published in Russian during the 1930s, Nabokov overtly parodies the double theme; a close examination of this novel helps to clarify the apparent doubling in Nabokov's later novels, such as Lolita and Pale Fire. My argument is that, quite obviously in Despair and more obliquely in Lolita and Pale Fire, Nabokov's parody of the double serves as a "springboard" from which he launches his ultimate affirmation of the individual's uniqueness--the utter singularity of the self. As Nabokov himself has written, "The square root of I is I."

The protagonist and narrator of Despair is a solipsistic madman obsessed with the notion of resemblance, and especially with his own likeness. Not only is Hermann fascinated by the reflection of his face in

the mirror, he cannot refrain from projecting his mirror-image into the world around him. With a voyeuristic thrill, Hermann projects his imaginary double into the room where he sits and then watches his replica make love to his own wife. Hermann's fantasies eventually lead to more fatal delusions. While out walking one day, Hermann comes upon a sleeping tramp, perceives the stranger to be his exact "double," and immediately resolves to take advantage of this thrilling and "absolute sameness." Hermann decides to murder the tramp, named Felix, dress the corpse in his own clothes, and pass the dead man off as himself. In this way he hopes to collect on his own life insurance policy and start a new life.

Hermann succeeds in murdering Felix, but his plan nevertheless fails. The fact is, no one but mad Hermann detects the slightest resemblance between him and his supposed double--least of all the police, who express "surprise" at Hermann's lame attempt "to deceive the world simply by dressing up in [his] clothes an individual who was not in the least like [him]."

The virulent consequences of Hermann's obsession with duality suggests a recurrent theme in Nabokov's fiction: the failure of one character to recognize and respect the individuality of another is a moral as well as psychological aberration. In Lolita, Humbert transforms the twelve-year-old American kid into an aesthetic mirage possessing "no will, no consciousness--indeed, no life of her own." Ignoring Lolita's true identity, Humbert seeks to make her the slave of his

fantasies. Humbert's increasing self-identification with Clare Quilty is another delusion arising from Humbert's obsessions. After Lolita leaves him for Quilty, Humbert begins to project upon his successful rival his own feelings of guilt and depravity. For this reason, some critics have interpreted Humbert's murder of Quilty as a symbolic, and necessary, act of purgation. But Humbert is not purged by the death of "guilty" Quilty; the murder brings him no moral or psychological relief. As Humbert himself admits, "Far from feeling any relief, a burden even weightier than the one I had hoped to get rid of was with me, upon me, over me." That burden is the psychic weight of Quilty's corpse upon Humbert's conscience.

In Pale Fire, Charles Kinbote's obsession with the poet John Shade and his poem has similarly prompted critics to regard the two characters as intimately linked. Either Kinbote is said to be Shade's dark alter ego or else Shade is perceived as the pale reflection of the more brilliantly imaginative Kinbote. Yet the alleged intimacy of these two characters is itself an illusion fostered by Kinbote's mad mind, a mind obsessed like Hermann's with resemblance. Like Hermann, Kinbote longs to escape from painful reality by projecting mirror-images. The Northern kingdom of Zembla is Kinbote's "land of reflections, of 'resemblers'"--an imaginary kingdom from which he believes himself exiled. The dream-world of Zembla is a psychological landscape mirroring Kinbote's deepest fears and desires. Certain that he has been cruelly deposed from his throne, deprived of a world where he was loved and respected--a king--Kinbote seeks in Shade's poem, "Pale Fire," another reflection of his lost kingdom.

Remarking on Kinbote's obsession with resemblance, John Shade dismisses the subject by saying "Resemblances are the shadows of differences." Kinbote's Commentary to Shade's poem is the fascinating exercise of a mind bent on discovering resemblance where there is only difference. As Kinbote's longings and obsessions trace their wild course over Shade's poem, the reader perceives the vast psychic distance stretching between these two discrete souls. While John Shade has fashioned his poem into a window for peering beyond the limits of the present, Charles Kinbote gazes through its prisms to discover a remote and mythical past. The tenuous relationship between Shade's poem and Kinbote's Commentary is itself a dramatic illustration of the essential singularity of human nature and perception. As John Shade says, resemblances are the shadows of differences. And the double, in Nabokov's fiction, is only the shadow cast by the unique individual--perceived in this ghostly guise by a solipsist wrestling with his own delusions. "The square root of I is I."

ABSTRACT

"Life/Story: Autobiographical Modes in the Fiction of Nabokov, Barth, and Frisch"

by Timothy Shipe

(Abstract of Dissertation for the award of Ph.D., University of Iowa, 1980.)

The focus of this study is at the juncture of two critical concerns which have dominated work in narrative theory for the last decade. The first is fictional self-reference: a narrative's acknowledgment of its own fictionality. The second is the nature of autobiography: the problematics of the autobiographical subject, the necessary fictionality of autobiography, and the autobiographical nature of all writing. What Nabokov, Barth, and Frisch share is a concern with the problematic relationship of autobiography and fiction, of the author's "life" and his "story." This involves a use of autobiography which differs from the traditional "autobiographical novel," in which the author's life provides the source-material from which a character is created who inhabits a closed fictional universe. In the texts I consider, the authors manipulate public familiarity with their biographies in order to force the reader to question the possibility both of autobiographical fiction and of a closed fictional universe. At the same time, they make use of their own previous works in a way different from the traditional sequel, which simply shares the fictional universe of a previous work. In the works

I discuss, previous works appear as objects within the fictional universe. The resulting "auto-intertextuality" involves a radical questioning of the relationship of an author to his oeuvre and of one work to another within the oeuvre.

I give a reading of four texts and one composite of texts. The composite text, which I call Nabokov's "metanovel," comprises a network of references to Nabokov's life and oeuvre and the relation between the two, found in his fiction, in his autobiography, and in his commentaries on his own work. The effect of this "metanovel" is to problematize the relation of autobiography and fiction. Nabokov's novel Look at the Harlequins! takes most of its sense from the context of the metanovel. "Nabokov" is fictionalized, becoming the narrator's double; the narrator finds himself obliged to imitate Nabokov's works in his works, and Nabokov's life and works in his own life. Thus, the accepted boundaries between life and work are repeatedly violated.

Barth's novel Letters, like Nabokov's metanovel, involves a revised reading of the author's entire oeuvre in terms of the relationship of life to fiction; but here the reinterpretation occurs within the confines of a single text. A self-proclaimed sequel, Letters creates a fictional context for the genesis of the works which it follows and confronts Barth's earlier characters with the fictions based on their lives. The result is a critique of the nature and possibility of both the sequel and the autobiographical or biographical novel.

In Frisch's Mein Name sei Gantenbein, an anonymous narrator invents stories and characters based on his own experience. He is thus essentially in the position of an autobiographical novelist. The text reveals virtually nothing of the narrator beyond what can be derived from the stories he invents. He is defined by his fiction. Montauk is the only one of our texts which proclaims itself to be autobiographical. The "Max Frisch" of Montauk finds himself in the same dilemma as the narrator of Gantenbein: he exists only in terms of the fiction he creates. His encounter with an American woman is an attempt to escape his author role, and he determines to complete this escape by writing a frank autobiographical account of the affair. Montauk, though, is really a novel about how "Frisch" fails to write this confessional account, writing, instead, the novel Montauk. All of the works I discuss are about the impossibility of autobiography, the necessity of fiction.

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