

THE NABOKOVIAN

Published semi-annually
at the University of Kansas
by the Vladimir Nabokov Society

Editor: Stephen Jan Parker

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

Subscriptions: individuals, \$11.00 per year; institutions, \$14.00 per year. For surface postage outside the USA add \$4.00. For airmail postage to Europe, add \$8.00; to Australia, India, Israel, New Zealand, Japan add \$9.00. Back issues: #31 with 15-year index is \$9.00 for individuals and \$11.00 for institutions; other issues are \$7.00 each for individuals and \$9.00 each for institutions; add \$4.50 for airmail. (Number 1, 2 and 14 are available only in xerox copy.) Checks should be made payable to the Vladimir Nabokov Society.

Address all inquiries, submission of items, and subscription requests to:

The Nabokovian
Slavic Languages & Literatures
The University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66045

THE NABOKOVIAN

Number 34

Spring 1995

CONTENTS

News by Stephen Jan Parker	3
Nabokov's First American Questionnaire by Gennady Barabtarlo	9
Colloquy on Browning's Door Compiled by Stephen H. Blackwell	16
Annotations & Queries by Gennady Barabtarlo <i>Contributors:</i> A. Bouazza, Eric Roman, V. Myl'nikov	26
The Latvian Nabokov: "Breiterstrater-- Paolino" & "Tokalosh" by D. Barton Johnson	31
Annotations to <i>Ada</i> : 4. Part I, Chapter 4 by Brian Boyd	39
Abstracts by Pekka Tammi, Brian Walter, Stephen H. Blackwell, Nassim Berdjis	51
Addenda to the Annual Nabokov Bibliographies: 1978-1992 by Jason Merrill	58

News

by Stephen Jan Parker

Items

- Fire has irreparably damaged the Rukavishnikov estate in the village of Rozhdestveno, just outside of St. Petersburg. Apparently due to a worker's carelessly discarded cigarette, a fire started on the top floor of the building and then progressed to the first floor. It was reported that there was enough time to save most of the contents of the Nabokov Museum which occupied several rooms on the first floor.

- As reported in the April 10 issue of *The New York Times*, a casting call for the title role in a new film version of *Lolita* drew 215 applicants ranging in age from 12 to 26 to East 14th Street in Manhattan. Another open casting call was scheduled for later on in Southern California. The director of the movie remake is Adrian Lyne, whose credits include "Fatal Attraction," "Indecent Proposal," and "Flashdance." The playwrights David Mamet and Harold Pinter have been involved with the script, a version of which is now being prepared by Stephen Schiff, a writer for *The New Yorker*. The film is to be shot this summer.

- Jan Holmstrom was the first to inform us of the world premiere of the opera "Lolita" in Stockholm on 14 December 1994. He wrote: "The opera was not a great success. Reviewers praised the singers, the conductor, the director, and the scenographer. But not the libretto and the music which were described as monotonous, unprogressive, infinitely drawn out, a sluggish stream.... One critic ended his review, "seldom have I been so bored." Mr. Holstrom also notes that "Bris, an organisation for children's rights, protested the performance: 'The Royal Opera should not spend taxpayers' money to subsidize depraved insidious

propaganda for incest." A brief review in the February issue of *Time* also panned the production, in particular, Rodion Schedrin's score and libretto.

*

Nabokov Society

The International Nabokov Society sponsored three paper-reading sessions and had a business meeting in San Diego in late December. Two of the panels met downtown under the auspices of the Modern Language Association, while the other was held at the AATSEEL convention, up the road at Mission Bay. Nabokovians became adept at using the #34 bus, which linked the two conventions along a 40-minute route with views of the city's port facilities and its numerous sailors' bars.

The first MLA panel, held from 3:30 to 4:45 on December 27 when many people were still arriving, was attended by an audience of thirty five; it featured four papers chosen in open competition by our vice president, D. Barton Johnson. James English of the University of Pennsylvania led off by discussing Nabokov's affinities with recent computer fiction in "The Monstrous Semblance of a Nabokov Novel: Hypertext and *Pale Fire*." He was followed by Suellen Stringer-Hye from Texas A&M, who surveyed the intertextual linkages between *Ada* and Melville's *Pierre*. The next paper, by Jodi Kilcup from the University of Alaska at Anchorage, was called "Blending Fiction and Fact: Nabokov's Painterly Definition of Autobiographical Truth" and focused on parallels with Monet's impressionism. Don Johnson gave the last paper, "That Butterfly in Nabokov's *Eye*," which described the lengthy research needed to identify the Copper butterfly whose classification history furnishes a metaphor for the narrator's activities in that story. During the short discussion period attention focused on whether *Pale Fire* was a late modernist or a postmodernist work, an issue raised by Professor English.

The second MLA panel, held from 8:30 to 9:45 in the morning of December 29, attracted thirty people. Organized by John Lavagnino of Brandeis University, it considered the implications of "aesthetic bliss," the famous phrase in Nabokov's "Afterword to *Lolita*." John Lavagnino began with "Aesthetic Bliss' and *Lolita's* Reception," in which he reflected on some strikingly varied responses to Nabokov's novel. Zoran Kuzmanovich of Davidson College then examined some key passages from the text in "'Sitting with the Small Ghost of Somebody I had Just Killed': Humbert's Darkened Bliss." Nabokov's complex framing of Humbert's story came to the fore when Brian D. Walter of Washington University considered "A Robust but Pliant Philistine: John Ray as *Lolita's* Ironic Muse." This session had more time for discussion, which addressed *Lolita's* relationship to Joyce and Dostoevsky as well as the current status of Harold Pinter's screenplay.

At the end of the session, John Foster reported briefly on the meeting of the Society's Officers and Board of Directors. It was decided that next year's thematic panel at the MLA would cover "Nabokov's Non-Fictional Prose," which would include his published lectures and interviews, his letters, his essays, and his prefaces, but not his autobiographical writings. This session will be chaired by Brian D. Walter from Washington University, and Don Johnson will chair the open session organized by the society's vice president.

The AATSEEL panel, held from 3:15 to 5:15 on December 29, convened in a memorable setting -- on the upper deck of a paddle-wheel steamboat anchored in Mission Bay. Chaired by Maxim Shrayer of Yale University and attended by an audience of twenty-five, it opened with "How the Fourth Chapter of Nabokov's *The Gift* was Made" by Marina Kostalevsky of Yale University; the paper emphasized Boris Eikhenbaum's

influence on Nabokov's approach to biographical issues. The second paper, by Stephen Blackwell of Indiana University, dealt with "Black Holes, Fissures and Pauses: Paradox and Negativity in Nabokov," using examples from *Invitation to a Beheading* and *The Gift*. Gavriel Shapiro of Cornell University then presented "The Monogram which However Had Not Quite Come Off," on the emblematic use of both Cyrillic and Roman letters in *Invitation*, as illustrated by a wealth of carefully chosen slides. The final paper, "Envisioning *Prin*" by Alexander Dunkel from the University of Arizona, considered similar emblematic moments in the fourth chapter of that novel. The meeting concluded by choosing Anna Brodsky of Washington and Lee University as next year's secretary; Julian Connolly of the University of Virginia will be the chair.

A meeting of the society's Officers and Board of Directors, along with other interested members, was held on December 27 after the first MLA session. In attendance were John Foster (president), D. Barton Johnson (vice president), Gene Barabtarlo and Julian Connolly (board members), and Charles Nicol, Galya Diment, Gavriel Shapiro, and Suellen Stringer-Hye. John Foster began the meeting by reporting on the MLA review of the Society's status as an allied organization. He has drafted a ten-page report using his own analysis of the society's activities over the last eight years as well as information supplied by Don Johnson, Stephen Parker, and Charles Nicol. Thanks to e-mail, he has also gotten suggestions from Gene Barabtarlo, Phyllis Roth, Sam Schuman, and Beth Sweeney. He will incorporate further suggestions into the report before submitting the final document.

Don Johnson reported on the Society's new journal *Nabokov Studies*, whose first issue appeared in September. A second issue will soon be ready for the publisher, and Don is willing to edit a third issue as well. But he does not wish to continue as editor indefinitely, and has asked the Society to start

making new arrangements for the journal. Drawing on his experience with a search committee for the *Slavic and East European Journal*, Julian Connolly suggested that the Board and Officers should follow similar procedures in organizing a formal search for a new editor. This proposal was accepted.

A final act of the Board was to ratify a two-year extension of Sam Schuman's term as board member. This extension was needed to fill the vacancy created by board member Don Johnson's election to the vice presidency in December 1993. John Foster also announced that the election of a new vice president would take place in the fall of 1995, with ballots to follow the format introduced by Gene Barabtarlo in 1993. Members will thus have an opportunity to propose panel topics for the next two years.

-- Report submitted by John Burt Foster, Jr., Nabokov Society President.

*

Ms. Beatrice Chiaradia has provided the following list of VN works received November 1994 - March 1995.

- November - *Intransigenze* (Strong Opinions), tr. Gaspare Bona. Milan: Adelphi.
- *The Luzhin Defense*. London: Penguin.
- December - *Wanhooop* (Despair), tr. Anneke Brassinga. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
- *De Verdediging* (The Defense), tr. Anneke Brassinga. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
- *Glorie*, tr. Gerrit de Blaauw. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.

- *Doorzichtige Dinger* (Transparent Things), tr. Sjaak Commandeur. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
- January - *Lezioni de Letteratura Russa* (Lectures on Russian Literature), tr. Ettore Capriolo. Milan: Garzanti.
- *Z Nieprawej Strony* (Bend Sinister), tr. Rafal Smietana. Cracow, Poland: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- March - *Let Op De Harlekijn*, tr. Anneke van Huisseling. Amsterdam, De Bezige Bij.
- *Nicolai Gogol*, tr. Terezinha Barretti Mascarenhas. Sao Paulo, Brazil: Ars Poetica.

*

Our thanks to Ms. Paula Courtney for her essential aid in the preparation of this issue.

*

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NABOKOV'S FIRST AMERICAN QUESTIONNAIRE

by Gennady Barabtarlo

For some reason, perhaps personal and unshared, I could never imagine the arrival of the Nabokovs at New York, late in May of 1940, without a stir of strange excitement, so strong that I always sensed its ripples in certain passages in "Aleppo Once," "Time and Ebb," and even in *Prin's* second chapter. And the allure gathers poignancy because *Speak, Memory* breaks, so memorably and eloquently, the very moment the family of three starts walking downhill towards the *Champlain* under steam in Saint Nazaire's harbor (maritime images sharply increase in volume on the last page), to sail to the other shore of the Atlantic—where the memoir will never follow, but the reader's fancy should, enticed by the last words that do not "terminate the phrase." (Brian Boyd sums it up in his II, pp.3-7). Even as I roamed, a few years ago, along and round the reconstructed concrete corpse of the enormous French Line pier on the Hudson, where almost no marker or view remained unchanged since 1940, I could feel the familiar thrill as keen as ever, and maybe keener than ever.

Small wonder, then, that I consider the discovery, by Mr. Brian P. Gross, of the ship manifest quite exhilarating. I think that the readers will find it of much interest, too, for it adds curious detail to Boyd's account and gives nuances to the works of fiction mentioned, as well as to the book of memoirs. It is amusing to learn, for instance, that Nabokov overlooked, or chose not to point up the singular fact that the long-pursued American visas, obtained at length after securing a French exit visa (the pains are described, with concentrated bile, in "Aleppo" and *SM*, p.292), were issued on his "adopted" birthday, April 23rd 1940.

Mr. Gross, "a reader of Nabokov" (814 Carley Rd, Santa Rosa, CA 95405), passed a version of this material to the Nabokov network in October of 1994

and has kindly agreed to have it printed here, for the benefit of many more Nabokov readers. He writes:

"A few years ago, while doing some research (unrelated to Nabokov) in the National Archives of the United States, I decided to find the passenger manifest for the *Champlain*. After a small Nabokovian twist (the directory was blank where the Nabokov entry should have been, forcing me to guess the location of the correct manifest), I was rewarded with the record of the arrival of the Nabokovs to the U.S."

The sheet (No.8) of the *List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States Immigrant Inspector at Port of Arrival*, a copy of which Mr. Gross has obligingly sent me, runs thirty-seven columns across two folio-size pages and lists, alphabetically, thirty passengers, from no. 1 "Mehlmann, Kisig," a salesman from Amiens, to, curiously enough, no. 30 "Schindler, Otto," a tailor born in "Vienna, Germany" (coming to America with nothing but German to speak, poor man). The Nabokovs take up lines 3, 4, and 5, and I use their name-and-patronymic initials (respectively, VV, VE, and DV) in setting vertically information that runs crosswise in the original.

All the data are typed in, with many markings and ticks jotted over as the passengers were about to disembark. The "H. Smith 1:10 p.m." scribbled at the bottom of the sheet seems to fix the exact time of the event and the name of a processing officer. Extrapolating the numbers, one can reasonably suppose that the total of the *Champlain's* passengers was about 300 (probably two or three more sheets of the same length); on the other hand, the small print on top says that "This (white) sheet is for listing of *third-class passengers only*" (which is rather strange, considering that the fare was \$1,120, according to Boyd-I, p.521. But see below). All passengers were sailing "from Saint Nazaire (France), May 19th, 1940, arriving at port of New York (U.S.A.) May 27, 1940." The date, rubber-stamped on arrival, is important

because it establishes that it was *not* the 28th as was assumed previously, an error that may well go back to the original mix-up, mis-remembered by Nabokov as the correct day (cf. *Strong Opinions*, 54), and repeated by Field (*Life*, 231) and Boyd (II, p.11). No wonder the Nabokovs were not met on landing by Nathalie Nabokoff and Robert de Calry as had been arranged,—their first American princident, perhaps.

I give, below, all the answers except the most trivial, such as sex, ability to read and write (DV had both, by the way—unlike another six-year-old on board, Lotte Nachmann), whether a polygamist, anarchist (this last question was Pnin's undoing—see *Pnin*, p.11), deformed or crippled. My commentaries are in square brackets.

	VV VE	DV	
Family name	Nabokoff	Nabokoff	Nabokoff
Given name	Vladimir	Vera	Dimitri*
		[*It could be the legal spelling on the dotted line of their Nansen passports. Some Russians believe that the traditional "Dimitri" gave way to "Dmitri" in cultivated circles under the influence of Chekhov's <i>Lady with the Lapdog</i> , his "Christmas story" for 1899, in which the wife of <i>Dmitri Dmitrich</i> Guroff, a bas-bleu of a well-known variety of <i>intelligentnaia poshlost'</i> , "read much, did not use the letter <i>yer</i> in her missives, and called her husband not Dmitri but Dimitri, while he secretly considered her dim, narrow, inelegant, was afraid of her and did not like to spend time at home."]	
Age	41	38	6
Calling or occupation	Author	Housewife	None

Able to read what language	French-English-Russian	French-English-Russian	Russian
Nationality (country of which citizen or subject)	Without	Without	Without*
	[*as were all the rest of the passengers on this list]		
Race or people	Russian*	Hebrew	Russian
	[*All on that list, except for the Nabokovs, were Jews from Central and Eastern Europe (the <i>Champlain</i> was chartered by an American Jewish rescue organisation)].		
Place of birth	Russia, St Petersburg	Same	Germany, Berlin
Immigration Visa, Passport Visa, or Reentry Permit number	QIV* 2525	QIV 2526	QIV 2527
	[*This may stand for "The Quota Immigration Visa". All other passengers on this list, excepting one family with American passports, had their visas so prefixed]		
Issued	Paris, 4/23/40*	Same	Same
	[*One other family on the list, the Pfeffers ("Max Pfeffer, publisher"), also received their visas on that day. They might spot each other in the waiting room of the issuing office and, once on board ship, mark the coincidence and become acquainted].		
Last permanent residence	France, Paris	Same	Same

[Second Page]

The name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came, or if none there, then in country of which a citizen or subject

Cousin: Anna Feigin, 9 Ave Alphonse XIII, Paris, France

Final destination (intended future permanent residence)

Mass. Brookline Same Same

Whether having a ticket to such final destination

No No No

By whom was passage paid

Self Self Father

Whether in possession of \$50, and if less, how much

Yes* Yes Yes

[*The actual amounts per family are penned over in this graph. The Nabokovs had \$600; on List 8, only the Pfeffers had more (\$1,600). This seems to gainsay part of the well-known taxi-cab anecdote recorded by Field (*Life*, 231) and Boyd-II, 12: "The only money they had—what was left over after Paris friends and well-wishers had chipped in for their tickets— amounted to little more than a hundred dollars." The tickets, according to Boyd, cost \$1,120, half of which sum was paid by the HIAS, the other raised by Nabokov through a benefit reading of his prose and among "various wealthy Jewish families" in Paris (Boyd-I, 522). Did he really receive that much money in such a short time (\$560 for the fare, plus 600)? Could a third-class cabin on a rescue ship chartered specially for refugees, many of whom were poor or ruined (some on the list declared only \$35 or even \$10 in hand) be so expensive? Might the price quoted by Boyd have really been in francs? Were the Nabokovs carrying someone else's half-a-thousand, charged, perhaps, by an acquaintance to deliver the money in America?]

Whether ever before in the United States, and if so, when and where?

No No No

Whether going to join a relative or friend, state name and complete address, and if relative, exact relationship

Friend: Serge Konnevtzky 88 Druce Str. Brookline, Mass*

[* D.B. Johnson is no doubt correct in suggesting (in an electronic communication) that this is a multiple misspelling of "Koussevitzky," the conductor of the Boston Symphony, on whose affidavit, secured by Countess Alexandra Tolstoy, the Nabokovs were coming to America. Indeed, according to Boston White Pages for 1940, "Serge Koussivitzky" [sic] lived at that address and left his telephone non-published]

Whether alien intends to return to country whence he came after engaging temporarily in laboring pursuits in the United States

[To think that only fifty years ago even the bureaucratic language had far better claim to elegance than much of today's educated usage. A modern "multiple-choice" declaration form, neutered and flint-stone clumsy, seems to be written by a victim of a "writing-intensive program": "Does non-US citizen intend to go back to the country of origin he/she came from after time-period specified on his/her I-94(a), I-94 (b), or equivalent? If checked "yes", skip to #24, if checked "no", you must answer questions 15-23"]

No No No

[The next several questions, here omitted, are of course answered in the negative by all the passengers, having to do with desire to overthrow government, with polygamy, organised anarchy, prior arrests, and such]

Condition of health, mental and physical

Good Good Good

[There were only two exceptions to this cheerful report on the list, but both cases carry a penned remark "Landing justified."]

Height 5'8"* 5'6" 4'5"

[*This can't be right: VV was 3-4 inches taller. I suspect he was not yet facile enough in converting from the decimal system, let alone his native one (so many *vershki* over two *arshins*). As for DV, he had added about two full feet in his first American decade or so.]

Complexion Fair Fair Fair

Color of hair Brown Fair Fair

Color of eyes Green Gray Gray

Marks of identification None None None

I should like to thank Mr. Gross once again for sharing this document, redolent at once of distress, anxious hope, and cheer, with the members of the Society.

Colloquy on Browning's Door

Compiled by Stephen H. Blackwell

Note: The following exchange took place between the 6th and 21st of February, 1995, on the electronic "journal" **NABOKV-L**, edited by D. Barton Johnson. The rejoinders are in chronological order, minimally edited.--Stephen H. Blackwell

* * *

Would anyone care to offer elucidating comment on a sentence in the chronology at the end of *Nikolai Gogol*? It's in the entry for "Winter 1836-1837": "Browning's door is preserved in the library of Wellesley College" (p. 159 of my *New Directions* paperback). An apparent non-sequitur which yet nets Browning a spot in the index. And, while we're at it: is it?

Allan McWilliams
U. of Arizona

* * *

Does anyone know if the door really exists and which Browning owned it? It could not possibly be Robert Browning since at the time he was not even twenty years old. Elizabeth, who was older, did not become a Browning till later. But I do think Nabokov, playing yet another hoax and trick, wants his reader to associate it with Robert Browning, even though it may have been a name of one of Wellesley's presidents, for all I know. He does not provide one with Mr. Browning's first name in the index, either. Nabokov did not believe in indexes or chronology (that

is why he starts Gogol's book with the writer's death), did them reluctantly when asked (as was the case in the Gogol book) and poked fun of them while at it. I think the significance of the Browning's door entry was not Browning but Wellesley College where he taught at the time of finishing the book. He is most likely making fun of Wellesley's--and America's (especially when compared to Europe)--lack of "real" history by commemorating a trivial event of this kind. By making his readers assume that the door belonged to the most famous of all Brownings, who happens to be English, not American, Nabokov may be also underscoring the lack of American literary history as well. And then, of course, he also liked Robert Browning.

Galya Diment
University of Washington

* * *

I always assumed this was true. VN taught at Wellesley, after all. E. A. Poe's door used to be on Colonel Gimbel's suite in Pierson college at Yale. A door from Poe's Philadelphia house, I think. These odd things do happen. Dicken's inkwell is in Longfellow's house in Cambridge.

David R. Slavitt

* * *

I have used the fine library at Wellesley and must say that I have never noticed this door there, so it must be kept well away from serious business, or else it just look like all the other doors in the place. I do think I've heard this tale before, though it may just have been in reading *Nikolai Gogol*. As to what it means, here is

my interpretation: you will have noticed in this Chronology a rather playful attitude towards the idea of giving a useful account of Gogol's life in this form. Generally we know that Nabokov and his doubts about biography (see particularly his lecture on "le vrai et le vraisemblable"), though he was also drawn into it (as in *The Gift*, and indeed at various points in the main text of this book). There is a tendency to paint little scenes but also point up their literary rather than factual basis, or otherwise make clear the distance between a life and our ability to reconstruct it in writing; the Chronology sometimes plays the game of depicting Gogol's life, and sometimes it makes fun of the game or seeks to remind us of its rules. This particular entry in the Chronology which tells us about Browning's door is the third in a sequence that details some of Gogol's European wanderings, and it starts out by telling us that in Paris Gogol lived on the corner of the Place de la Bourse and rue Vivienne. Well, if it's important to know the geographical location at which much of the first part of *Dead Souls* was written, wouldn't it be still more instructive to have before you the very door of the house where it all happened? We have that for Browning. Alas, this important resource for the scholar has apparently been lost in Gogol's case.

John Lavagnino
Department of English and American Literature,
Brandeis University

* * *

I am still at a loss about the date, even assuming that such a door exists and it is at Wellesley. Browning was born in 1812; he published his first poem--anonymously--in 1833. He traveled to Russia in 1834--that may be yet another link for Nabokov in connection with Gogol. He also was in Italy in 1838, when Gogol was there too. By 1836 Browning was just

gaining fame--Paracelsus was published in 1835. It is possible that Wellesley would acquire his door after just one successful work?

Galya Diment

* * *

I wish I could remember exactly, and I will try to find the correct information about this, but I do recall some association between the Wellesley Library and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's door. I was a student at Wellesley when Nabokov taught there and took several courses in the Russian language from him.

Naomi B. Pascal
University of Washington

* * *

That would really make lots of sense since Wellesley is a woman's college. It also would explain why Nabokov steers away from giving the first name or an initial--he is playing a trick on us all. The problem with the date is then also explained, since she was an accomplished poet by then. She was also, of course, still a Barrett, and was yet to even meet her future husband-to-be but that is precisely why Nabokov can play this joke on us. He may have even foreseen that we would look into Robert Browning's biography--which he probably knew--find about his Russian trip and try to connect it to Gogol this way. Gave him quite a few chuckles, I am sure, at our expense.

Galya Diment

* * *

While we're brainstorming (a word I hope VN would have hated, by the way), every time I read notes about this subject I cannot help associating it with Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown(ing) (a story I can imagine VN disliking if not wildly hating) and the door out of which this character ventures out into the world to eventually become a sour, dour misanthropist. I can still see his wife's ribbons fluttering in the breeze in my mind's fuzzy eye. This all may be totally out in left field, as I do not know whether VN ever read Hawthorne (but I bet he did).

James McShane
Queens Borough Public Library

* * *

Pilgrimage to "Browning's Door"

Last evening, I went to see Browning's door at Wellesley College. It is located on the fourth floor of the Clapp library, just outside the "Special Collections" room. Forgive my lack of expertise in doors. The door appears to be made of oak (?), with four inlaid panels and a seam down the middle. It has a brass knocker (again--excuse my terminological ignorance) and a large brass mail slot (marked "LETTERS") a little below waist level (depending on your waist). On the threshold, a plaque reads, "The Door of 50 Wimpole Street. Given to Wellesley College by Mrs. Charles F. Griffith of Philadelphia. May 1937."

At Wellesley, the letter slot seems to have been the door's most prominent feature. In the August 1937 *Wellesley College Magazine* appears Caroline Hazard's dedicatory address of May 20. In 1930, it turns out, Hazard had acquired for the college Robert Browning's remarkable love-letters to Elizabeth Barrett, which

had, of course, passed through the door's slot. The first letter was written in January, 1845, a week after Browning began reading Barrett's two volumes of poems published in 1844. They met on May 20, 1845 at 50 Wimpole, and married on September 12, 1846.

For Hazard, the creative romance emanating from the letters and the door is augmented by the fact that the acquisition of the letters was made possible by a benefactor with a remarkable love story of his own, a philosopher from Harvard named George Herbert Palmer. Evidently, his wife also wrote poetry, and after her death, Palmer stocked Wellesley's (now destroyed) Browning room with rare books and first editions. His antiquarian connections uncovered the Browning letters in 1930.

All of this is to suggest that in the Wellesley College tradition, the door's primary significance was a symbol of an alliance of loving creativity. It may be that the letters themselves hold clues to Nabokov's mention of the door in the Gogol book. (The letters are published, but I have not looked at them). On the other hand, perhaps the entry is simply Nabokov's tribute to great and creative loves.

When I first read *Nikolai Gogol* years ago, I assumed that the Browning entry was merely Nabokov's joke on the editors who insisted on a chronology but did not read it. Even such a reading remains satisfying, if not complete. In response to Galya Diment's observation, I think that when Nabokov laughs, he does so at the expense not of his good readers, but of his careless ones. In the chronology, I sense an inclusive chuckle.

Stephen Blackwell

* * *

My wife, whose field of expertise is psychoanalytical approaches to lit, was shocked, SHOCKED! to learn that Robert Browning had been

slipping things into that prominent slot "a little below waist level", especially with that "brass knocker" above! I realize that "BB" would eschew any such considerations, but I no longer fear his raising a rowe [sic.--sb] over this.

Ki semenat ispinaza, non andet iskultsu!
J. A. Rea

* * *

After following the discussion about Nabokov and Browning's door, I was surprised to discover on the front page of Saturday, February 11, 1995's Boston Globe an article about a new biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which contained a photo of Browning's door and brief description of how Wellesley College came to own it. It seems that Wellesley College students also found a use for the mail slot, passing valentine cards. That is until the College decided to nail the slot shut.

Jonathan Thomas
Collection Development Librarian
Boston College Law Library

* * *

It strikes me as particularly ironic that Nabokov chose to feature the door which is associated with one of the most famous Victorian romances in a work of Gogol, of all people, who was not particularly known (to use a Victorian understatement) for his romantic feelings towards women. An accident--or a fully-intended gesture?

Galya Diment

* * *

My goodness! First we have observations on Browning's letters posted through a slot "below waist height". Now we have confirmation that the slot was used for Valentines until the slot was "nailed shut" <ugh!>... and to top it all the latest information comes from a Mr. John Thomas. Where will all this end!!--

Roy Johnson

* * *

On Browning's Door. I think Blackwell is quite right that VN doesn't hoodwink his reader; rather, he invites him to wink at Laughlin's misplaced pedantry. But there is more to it, for the playful entry is packed tight.

"Winter 1836-37.

"Paris. Lived on the corner of the Place de la Bourse and rue Vivienne. Wrote there a large portion of the First Part of *Dead Souls*. Browning's door is preserved in the library of Wellesley College. On warmish days he took Chichikov for strolls in the Tuileries. Sparrows, grey statues."

The door is inserted as a tribute to Gogol's famous non-sequitur zigzags, a stylistic trademark quirk that VN points up at every turn in his book (and in his lectures). Examples are immense in number, but it seems offhand that the closest in tone is the one at the close of "The Diary of a Madman".

Taking Chichikov for strolls in the Tuileries paraphrases the famous line in *Eugene Onegin* (I v Letnii Sad guliat' vodil--And to the Letnii Sad took him for walks, in VN's translation. See also his not to his line). Of course, Pushkin died a violent death that very "Winter of 1836-37," while Gogol was in Paris evolving a plot of his *Dead Souls* that Pushkin had palmed him (according to Gogol). (Cf. the next entry.)

The chirping and twittering of the sparrows sitting on the grey statues in the Gardens, droppings and all, are imitated in "chichikov" and "tuileries." Gogol, Pushkin, and the frivolous, onomatopoeic, multi-planed "Vivienne" form a string familiar to the reader of *The Gift*, while Browning, he or she, seems immaterial.

Gene Barabtarlo

* * *

I was just glancing at the 1971 reissue of *Nikolai Gogol*, and I noticed that Browning's Door, the Browning index listing, and indeed a great many humorous index items were expunged from that late edition. I wonder whose decision that was!

Stephen Blackwell

* * *

Compiler's Afterward

As a closing remark, I would like to point out two connections that arose after the "colloquy" had run its course. First, about the *Boston Globe* article and the biography it features: the main topic of the biography in question (*Dared and Done*, by Julia Markus; Alfred A. Knopf) is the part-African heritage of Elizabeth Barrett's paternal lineage: her grandfather, purportedly, was the son of a plantation owner and a slave in Jamaica. The article includes a photograph of Barrett, which is also housed at Wellesley and displays distinctly African facial features. Nabokov would have had access to these materials. I think we know of another poet with an African great-grandfather....

Second, Barabtarlo's reference to *The Gift* may be doubly apt: recall the scene at the beginning of Chapter Two: "Among the birches there was an old acquaintance, with a double trunk, a birch-lyre, and beside it an old post with a board on it; nothing could be made out on it except bullet marks; a Browning had once been fired at it by his [Fyodor's] English tutor--also Browning--and then Father had taken the pistol, swiftly and dexterously ramming bullets into the clip, and knocked out a smooth K with seven shots" (78-9). This is probably just charming coincidence, but it is matched by another: just as Robert Browning found Elizabeth Barrett through her poetry, so also Zina Mertz finds Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev through his.

Stephen Blackwell
Indiana University

ANNOTATIONS & QUERIES

by Gennady Barabtarlo

[Submissions should be forwarded to Gennady Barabtarlo at 451 GCB University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, U.S.A., or by fax at (314) 445-3404, or by e-mail at gragb@mizzou1.missouri.edu • Deadlines are April 1 and October 1 respectively for the Spring and Fall issues. • Most notes will be sent, anonymously, to at least one reader for review. • If accepted for publication, the piece may be subjected to slight technical corrections. Editorial interpolations are within brackets. • Authors who desire to read proof ought to state so at the time of submission. • Kindly refrain from footnotes; all citations and remarks should be put within the text, or if necessary, as endnotes. • References to Nabokov's English or Englished works should be made either to the first American (or British) edition or to the Vintage collected series. • All Russian quotations must be transliterated and translated.]

THE ONEIROLOGICAL LIFE OF BEN SIRINE

I wonder how many readers, after finishing chapter two of *Ada's* second part, were predominantly seized by a "selfinvolved enigma", as was Leopold Bloom with respect to the identity of M'Intosh (*Ulysses*, London: Bodley Head, 1986, p. 600). In the Nabokovian case, the enigma should be:

Who was Ben Sirine?

Indeed, the very realization that "Ben Sirine" involves a play on VN's *nom de plume* V. Sirin (or Sirine in French transliteration) may make any further inquiry into this name seem redundant. However, the claim that he was an "ancient Arab" and an expounder of anagrammatic dreams", and that he is mentioned as such by Nafzawi (fl. 1400 A.D.) is true

(*Ada*, p. 344). What follows is a concise biography of Ben Sirine or, more accurately, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Sirin (pronounced "seereen").

The first renowned Muslim interpreter of dreams, Ibn Sirin was born in 654 and died in 728/9 A.D. He was a cloth merchant (not a prosperous one since he was imprisoned for, and finally died in, debt), deaf, very pious, irascible, eccentric (also in the way he dressed), and a reliable transmitter of Hadith. Little is known of Ibn Sirin's activity as an oneirocritic (*mu'abbir*), although this eventually eclipsed that of *muhaddith* (transmitter of Prophetical traditions). In the middle of the 9th century his fame as an interpreter of dreams began to be attested. Several of his interpretations are mentioned in *Kitab al-Hayawan* (Book of Animals) of Al-Jahiz, the great essayist and historian (d. 868/9 A.D.; cf. C. Pellat, *The Life & Works of Jahiz*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1969), and by Ibn Qutayba (d. 889 A.D.; see M. J. Kister in *Israel Oriental Studies*, vol. 4, 1974, pp. 67-103). His authority and prestige were such that from the 10th century onwards he was credited with diverse oneirocritical works which were clearly forgeries. More fantastic is the fact that his name is attached to treatises in Turkish, Persian, Greek and Latin (see T. Fahd, *La Divination arabe: Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'Islam*, Leiden 1966, 312-15, 355, no. 117)!

Finally, the whole issue of anagrams and dreams in *Ada* remains to be investigated (in the light of Ibn Sirin's oneirocritical expositions, perhaps); and I would like to draw attention to *Ada's* comment: "that wicked world which. . . may have existed only oneirologically" (p. 15).

--A. Bouazza, The Netherlands

In the letter accompanying his note, Mr. Bouazza writes: "B. A. Mason only confirms that Ben Sirine is indeed mentioned by Nefzawi in his *The Perfumed Garden* (*Nabokov's Garden*, p. 165, Ardis 1974). I hope my note will arouse some interest in Nabokov's

treatment of dreams (unfortunately neglected by Nabokov scholarship, although so apparent in his writings from *Glory* through *LATH*) and in Ibn Sirin's oneirocriticism, which is much more sophisticated and ingenious than Freud's pissenlit *Traumdeutung* and devoid of myth-based generalizations--did the former influence the latter? Suffice it to refer to M. Steinschneider's "Ibn Schahin und Ibn Sirin: Zur Literatur der Oneirokritik" in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, xvii (1863), 227-44." G.B.

RE-CAST IN CONCRETE

Methinks that Mrs. Stringer-Hye misses some of Nabokov's tongue-in-cheek humor in her interesting note in TN 33:24-27.

"*Maisons closes*" are brothels (also known as "*maisons de tolerance, de passe, or de rendez-vous*"). And Nabokov would have had a chance to see them in Paris and everywhere else in France for they were not shut down until soon after the war (I think in 1946) over tax-rates. Several of them were as famous as the Moulin Rouge, the Casino de Paris, or the Lido are today. They were called "*maisons closes*" because the shutters were either nailed shut or kept shut at all times.

I further suspect that the great-necessity houses could also refer to the "*maisons closes*" (it might be another French euphemism of which I am ignorant or could derive from the attitude that prostitution is a "necessary evil"). However, older usage in French also records "*faire ses necessites*" [to use the restroom] or "*chalet de necessite*" [restroom or rather, outhouse; "chalet" refers to a wooden construction, a shed or small house in the country]. The description of outhouses would quite adequately fit that of boxes. [Source: Dictionary *Le Petit Robert*, 1981]

Dr. Lagosse: in French the word means the (female) kid, i.e., prepubescent girl. Isn't Nabokov kidding us

here with pseudo-history mixed with accurate history, which affords him another shot at Sigmund Freud?

--Eric Roman, University of South Carolina

TWO WORLDS IN ONE STRUCTURE ("Christmas")

Nabokov's short story "Christmas" has a definite binary structure. Its parts, put in opposition (birth--death; light--darkness; warmness--coldness; miracle--routine), are combined in one stylistic model. The semantic code of the above-mentioned opposition is carried by the plot and has also a binary expression in terms of the inner world (the hero's house) and outer world (everything outside). The outer world bears absolutely positive nominations (in lexical and plot structures) and included categories such as birth, light, warmness, miracle; on the contrary, the inner world is represented in terms of death, darkness, coldness, routine.

The transition from one world into another involves a metamorphosis (a moth emerging from the cocoon) and the changing of the character's mind and emotional mood. The border dividing these two worlds is marked with the noun "door" and, being lexically neutral (characteristic features are absent), changes its functional (verbal) semantics because of the hero's positional shift.

The category of *light* stresses the positive meaning of the outer world in its phenomenological appearances ("the dazzling frost," "blinding distant landscape," "the brilliance of the snow" etc.). The inner, limited world is pictured in different stylistic colors ("the parquet floors crackled eerily under his step" [but what of "a floorboard emitt<ing> a merry pistol crack underfoot" earlier in the Story? GB], "the shrouded furniture," "instead of a tinkling chandelier <source of light--VM>, soundless bag hung from the ceiling").

Thus the entire paradigm of the miracle is represented in the light--warmth--life formula, and as a result of the hero's action--he moves material objects from a cold place into a warm one--that place, the enclosed world, changes its negative semantics into positive, and then a miracle happens: the cocoon (a "dead" object) transforms into a living, spirited object--the moth.

--V. Myl'nikov, Volgograd, the Russian Federation

[The above is a fragment of Mr. Myl'nikov's dissertation in progress, on the "metastructure in ... *Pale Fire*, *Ada*, and *LATH*" which means "determining the relationship and interaction between text and metatext," the latter being "commentary or notes written by Nabokov as a fictional character." GB]

THE LATVIAN NABOKOV: "BREITERSTRATER--
PAOLINO" & "TOKALOSH"

by D. Barton Johnson

With the foundering of the Soviet juggernaut, bits and pieces of Nabokoviana (and psuedo-Nabokoviana) keep floating to the surface. Following the Bolshevik revolution and ensuing diaspora, a vigorous Russian émigré press sprang up in the remotest outposts of the emigration--from Harbin to Buenos Aires. Almost all of the resulting publications were ephemeral, but the books, magazines, and newspapers often found their way into libraries where they were preserved. The Russian papers and journals from major Western European centers have by now been rather thoroughly ransacked by Nabokov scholars. The situation in the countries that came under Soviet domination during and after World War II was quite different. Collections of émigré publications such as those in Riga and Prague became inaccessible, their fates unknown. Only now, with the demise of the Soviet Union, are the émigré holdings of Baltic and Eastern European libraries coming to light.

Last spring, while browsing in the stacks of the University of California, Santa Barbara library, I ran across a four-volume bio-bibliography of Russian publications in Latvia published in the Stanford Slavic Studies series [vol. 3:1-4]: Iurii Abyzov, *Russkoe pechatnoe slovo v Latvii: 1917-1944gg* (Stanford, 1991). Edited by Lazar Fleishman and his Stanford colleagues, Abyzov's monumental work catalogues even the signed contents of the daily papers during Latvia's inter-war period of independence. Knowing that Nabokov had published a few early pieces in the émigré Baltic press, I checked under his name and found a page and a half of listings dating from 1922 through 1932, plus three 1943 entries. [The unlikely story of three 1916 Nabokov poems published in Nazi-occupied Latvia is related in my earlier *Nabokovian* note "Nabokov Poetry in Occupied Russia:

1943," #32, (Spring 1994) pp. 17-20.] The listings included poems, stories, and book extracts--all, of course, credited to V. Sirin, Nabokov's Russian pen name. Closer inspection revealed that almost all of this material was reprinted from originals that had appeared in émigré papers in Germany. Michael Juliar's bibliography listed the German originals, but often did not contain the Baltic reprints. Some of the Baltic Nabokov was new, however. Two items in particular caught my eye: "(V. Sirin). *Brajtenshtreter-Paolino*. Rasskaz.--S1, 1925, No. 38-39"; and "(V. Sirin). *Tokalosh*. Rasskaz--LRS, 1925, No. 234-236." (The listings are on page 100 of Abyzov's third volume. The "S1" of the first listing refers to the Riga daily Russian newspaper *Slovo* of 28-29 December 1925; the "LRS" of the second--to *Libavskoe russkoe slovo*, of 20-22 October 1925, a daily paper published for Russians living in the Latvian town of Liepaja.)

At best, if at all, it was going to take several months to get copies, but I submitted ILL requests. Thanks to Maxim Shrayer (Yale) who had just been working there, I was able to direct part of my requests to the famed Russian émigré library in Prague. Meanwhile I started querying colleagues, mostly via NABOKV-L, the electronic discussion forum. From Finland, Pekka Tammi quickly supplied a copy of "Brajtenshtreter-Paolino." Although unaware of any such publication, Brian Boyd was able to identify the "Brajtenshtreter--Paolino" reference. In later 1925 Nabokov had given a talk at the Tatarinov-Aykhenvald literary circle in Berlin extolling a boxing bout between the Basque Lumberman, Paolino Uscudun, and the German champion Hans Breitensträter. See Boyd I, p. 257 for details. The Russian scholar Boris Rivdin located the essay and published it in the Russian language periodical *Daugava* (Riga) in issue #3 for 1993.

Nabokov opens with some comments on the role of play (and sport) in human affairs (including art), and then provides a short survey of boxing history and its champions, including those he has seen. As a personal sidelight, he describes the not unpleasant experience

of being knocked out. The remainder centers on the Breitensträter-Paolino fight which took place on 1 Dec. 1925 in Berlin. Apart from a very few flashes, the whole is stylistically flat and reeks of what now seems like adolescent machomania. Abyzov erred in calling the account a "rasskaz," or "short story."

The second item, "Tokalosh," proved both more elusive and more interesting. "Tokalosh" was, indeed, a story. The great majority of the young Nabokov's Baltic publications appeared in the newspapers *Segodnia* (Today) or *Slovo* (The Word). The story "Tokalosh" was one of only two Sirin items to appear in the *Libavskoe russkoe slovo*, a small paper that chiefly reprinted material from the larger émigré papers. The story is spread over three issues, those of 20-22 October, 1925.

"Tokalosh" is the rather odd and faintly ridiculous name of the hero. The story is set in Russian Central Asia in the early years of the century. The first person narrator, Vladimir (Vol'ka, Volik, Volodya), looks back to his tenth year. His father has just been appointed to a high-ranking position, apparently that of provincial governor of a remote and dangerous border area. The father one day receives a childishly penned letter from Tokalosh seeking a post. The father and mother discuss the matter at the dinner table and remind the boy of the morose, bearded older man who had once playfully pulled his sled. Tokalosh is given an administrative post in a nearby German settlement. He does well and during local disruptions occasioned by the Russo-Japanese War distinguishes himself for his initiative and courage. The father wants to promote him, but there is some unspoken impediment. Three years pass and the narrator attends the wedding of Tokalosh and his young ward, a penniless orphan, whom he has had raised and educated in Kiev. She is visibly unhappy about the marriage, and the boy, previously an admirer of Tokalosh, now has doubts about his hero. Tokalosh is at last made a district chief where his incorruptible honesty and wisdom in dealing with the diverse, antagonistic inhabitants become legendary, as does

his bravery in repulsing bandit raids. An infrequent visitor at the governor's home, he remains a taciturn, awkward figure who imbibes only to toast the health of his adored young sons, aged two and three.

The young narrator is approaching graduation from his gymnasium when news comes that Tokalosh has been killed by bandits. The widow and her children come to stay with the narrator's family while his father helps with her affairs, her pension, and so on. As she leaves, she thinks to ask his advice about a document that her husband had told her would provide her with money. The document proves to be an insurance policy for 50,000 rubles. A month later the father comes to his son's room and shows him the official investigative report that he has ordered into Tokalosh's death. After surrounding the camp of the notorious bandit, Dali Ali, Tokalosh had insisted on entering alone, presumably in order to negotiate a surrender. Fearlessly advancing into the pointed muzzle of his opponent, he had been shot down. The report showed that Tokalosh had spent the preceding night in prayer. Asked by his father his impression of the report, the narrator replies that Tokalosh is a hero. His wiser father, pointing to the insurance policy and Tokalosh's night of prayer, agrees that he was a true hero--but one who had committed suicide in order to assure the financial future of his young wife and family. The father goes on to tell the boy how many years before he had befriended Tokalosh, a simple, illiterate peasant and exiled religious dissenter, who had become a village elder. The father ends his tale: "Volodya, there may come a time when your faith in our people will be sorely tested. Among the many others they teach you about in your gymnasium, remember Tokalosh".

The plot and the cloying dénouement do not sound much like Nabokov. Nor did VN ever set a story in either that time frame or locale. Further, the language is flat and cliché-ridden. My suspicions are further aroused by the signature, S. (rather than V.) Sirin. The name occurs only once--at the end of the third installment. Abyzov has silently "corrected" it to "V.

Sirin" in his bibliographical listing. All of the dozen Baltic Nobokov pieces that I have seen are signed V. or V1. Sirin, and Nabokov is not known to have used the initial "S" as part of his pseudonyms. Could there have been another Sirin, an "S." Sirin, writing in the emigration? The Abyzov bibliography, which lists all of V(1). Sirin's works under the entry "Nabokov", does not yield any publication by an S. Sirin in the "S" alphabetical entries. Nor is an S. Sirin to be found either in Ludmila Foster's massive bibliography of émigré literature or in I.F. Masanov's standard *Slovar' psevonimov russkix pisatelei . . .* Also against VN's authorship is that, with the exception of the boxing essay, all of VN's Latvian publications of the twenties are reprints of known pieces that had first appeared in Germany. Although the *Libavskoe russkoe slovo* was a small paper that ran heavily toward reprints, it so far appears to be the only publisher of "Tokalosh." Where did they get the story? Nabokov is not known to have had contacts with the paper. If the *Libavskoe russkoe slovo* had carried no other Nabokov material, I would unhesitatingly write off "Tokalosh" as an improbable oddity, not a story by VN. On the other hand, the *Libavskoe russkoe slovo* did, according to Abyzov, publish one known Nabokov story: "Zvonok" (The Doorbell) appeared in issues 126-129 for 1927, or about two years after "Tokalosh." ("Zvonok"'s original publication had been in *Rul'*, No. 1969, 22 May 1927, p. 2-4--according to Juliar, who does not list the closely concurrent Latvian publication.) I have not seen the "Baltic" "Zvonok" [Doorbell], so I do not know how it was signed, i.e., S. or V. Sirin.

The insipid style of "Tokalosh," while weighing against VN's authorship, is not incontrovertible evidence either way. The style of the boxing essay which appeared a couple of months after "Tokalosh" is also mundane, although in spots clearly Nabokov's. In late 1925, Nabokov's prose style was just hitting its stride. "The Return of Chorb" had been written in October after the completion of the first draft of *Mary* and the stylistically stunning "A Guide to Berlin" was done in December, the same month as the trite boxing

essay. Generally speaking, the earlier prose is uneven. Only a few of the stories, such as "Bachman" and "The Potato Elf," stand out among the dozen or so VN wrote in 1924 and 1925. Nabokov had published one story, "The Sprite" (Nezhit') as early as 1921, and one might imagine that "Tokalosh" is a bit of juvenilia that belatedly made its way to publication.

Another conceivable scenario is that "Tokalosh" is a pastiche--half-Lermontov (armed clashes with exotic bandits); half-late Tolstoy (exaltation of the Russian peasant, Nature's own nobleman.) If nothing else, the chosen narratorial point of view (the boy's) does not lend itself to pastiche. Another remote variant of the parody theory could be derived from the unusual name of the eponymous hero, 'Tokalosh,' which evokes the brand name of a pimple ointment--'Tokalon' (guaranteed to improve your love life)--that was heavily advertized in comic-strip format in the émigré press. VN's perverse delight in commercial poshlost led him to compare the style of the new (1934) émigré journal *Chisla* [Numbers] to the Tokalon face cream ads. (My thanks to Brian Boyd for calling my attention to this. See his letter in the *Times Literary Supplement* of March 6, 1986, for a reproduction of the ad.) One might suppose that VN wrote "Tokalosh" as a literary analogue of 'Tokalon' in an obscure slap at the nostalgic, nationalistic literary drivel that filled many émigré publications. This speculation hinges, inter alia, upon whether "Tokalon" was being promoted in 1925, as it was in 1934.

To sum up thus far: Nabokov was publishing in the Baltic émigré press at the time "Tokalosh" appeared and, subsequently, once, even in the same small paper. The story is signed S. Sirin, an ambiguous bit of evidence. On the other hand, the story does not sound like Nabokov who was just coming into his own after a rather erratic start as a prose stylist. The S. Sirin could have been an editorial error (it was a first appearance in the paper), or it could be the name or pseudonym of an unknown author.

This last possibility is not unlikely. In the discussion on NABOKV-L, both Gene Barabtarlo and

Alexander Dolinin called attention to the fact that "Sirin" (no initial) had been used as a pseudonym by one Dmitri Iur'evich Kobiakov (1903-1978) an émigré poet who was a near coeval of Nabokov. Kobiakov enjoyed a long career. According to Foster, he published a first volume of verse (and perhaps a second) before emigrating. In Paris he published three further verse volumes (*Keramika*, *Veshniak*, & *Gorech'*) and was co-editor of a short lived satiric journal called *Ukhvat* ("The Oven Fork"). His last published poems in emigration seem to have been in 1930. All of the citations I have seen use only his real name, Kobiakov. According to Masanov (III, p. 114) and Foster (II, 994), he seems to have used the name "Sirin" only once (or perhaps twice) for the publication of four children's picture booklets that appeared in Berlin in 1921 and/or 1922. (Neither source mentions "Tokalosh.") It would appear that Kobiakov (with the possible exception of "Tokalosh") used "Sirin" only very briefly, perhaps in Berlin before moving on to Paris. Perhaps he abandoned the name when Nabokov started publishing poems under the name Sirin in early 1921. But if this is so, why then would Kobiakov have resurrected the name "Sirin" for the 1925 "Tokalosh"? Also against the Kobiakov authorship is that, judging from available bibliographic information, he was a poet rather than prose writer during his émigré years. (I have not seen issues of *Ukhvat*.)

If these points speak against Kobiakov, there is at least one item in his biography that might support his authorship. Kobiakov returned to the USSR and in the 60s and 70s published a series of popular books on the Russian language. The best known is *Bessmertnyi dar: povest' o slovakh* ("The Immortal Gift: A Tale about Words"). Two such volumes appeared in Barnaul on the edge of Soviet Central Asia, not so far from the setting of "Tokalosh". Perhaps at the end of his life Kobiakov returned to the region of his boyhood.

Although the authorship of "Tokalosh" remains obscure, it seems virtually certain that Nabokov is not the author. All of the participants in the NABOKV-L

discussion (Boyd, Barabtarlo, Dolinin, Diment) offered strong arguments against VN's authorship. I, too, think it most improbable that "Tokalosh" is a rediscovered piece of Nabokov juvenilia or, slightly more plausibly, a Nabokovian joke. Kobiakov (a.k.a. "Sirin") may be the author, but this remains beyond proof. Perhaps further digging through émigré archives may provide the answer.

[I would like to thank several colleagues who contributed to this piece in one way or another. Lazar Fleishman at Stanford, Maxim Shrayner at Yale, Pekka Tammi at the University of Tampere in Finland, Brian Boyd, University of Auckland, N.Z., Gene Barabtarlo, University of Missouri, Columbia, Galya Diment, University of Washington, and Michael Juliar.]

ANNOTATIONS TO ADA

4. Part 1, Chapter 4

by Brian Boyd

Forenote After his prologue traces the complicated love-life of Aqua, Demon and Marina, and the resulting tangle of the Veen family tree, Van now moves to his own life.

For the first time he discloses that this is his own life, despite the third person narration. And since his memoir centers on his love for Ada, he explains, he will start not with a comprehensive account of his childhood but only with his one look at love and his one sampling of sex before he meets Ada at Ardis.

He will structure his whole autobiography around the alternating glow and chill of Ada's presence or absence. Although this first instalment of his personal past prefigures Ada, it also suffers, already, from the shadow of her absence.

Whenever Ada stays off-stage, Van brings on her understudies: the other women in his life, and the various roles of his own career: his other women as poor surrogates for Ada, his career as a sorry consolation for their separation. Here, as he introduces the love and sex themes--and their unsatisfactoriness without Ada--he simultaneously introduces the start of his academic career, his first school. But his boys' school seems a mere backdrop for his education in girls.

In Pt. 1 Ch. 4 Van establishes that Ada is not the first girl he has loved, or the first he has made love to, but he does so in such a way as to magnify the magic of his and Ada's ardor, just as Romeo's adoration for Rosalind offsets by contrast his and Juliet's passion for each other. At thirteen, Van loves Mrs. Tapirov's daughter, but he never speaks to her and later cannot even recall her name; his love for Ada lasts from the age of fourteen to his death at ninety-seven, they will speak to each other with a freedom and fullness they find with no one else, and her name will provide the

merge to form somebody I did not know but was bound to know soon" (SM 212-13); "as if Mother Nature were giving me mysterious advance notices of Tamara's existence" (SM 229).

But unlike Van, Nabokov stresses the romantic in his early loves, while allowing its natural conjunction with the sexual, once, at sixteen, he meets Tamara. Thinking back to his pre-Tamara phase, he recalls: "Our innocence seems to me now almost monstrous, in the light of various 'sexual confessions' (to be found in Havelock Ellis and elsewhere), which involve tiny tots mating like mad. The slums of sex were unknown to us." (SM 203) Van, by contrast, is initiated into sex before Ada, and not into the "slums of sex" but precisely into the pleasures accessible in his aristocratic world: the homosexual romps of an exclusive boys' school, the girl first procured by "the son of a thrifty lord."

In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov meets his earliest loves either on trips with his family to southern beaches (Zina, Colette) or on the summer retreat to his family estate (Polenka, Tamara). As if in a kind of wish-fulfilment combination, Nabokov will fuse his childhood summers away and his summers at the family estate into Van's visit to his "aunt" and "cousins" at Ardis, but in Pt. 1 Ch. 4 he has love and sex begin for Van as disconcertingly disconnected and as part of the hostile, unhomelike world of school. For Nabokov, family love and romantic love were warmly linked. The concluding chapter of his autobiography, though a kind of love song to his wife, focuses on their child. For Van, love and sex begin without the warmth of family love that surrounded Nabokov. He will more than compensate, in a strangely twisted sense, when he falls in torrid love with his sister.

ABSTRACTS

NABOKOV'S POETICS OF DATES

by Pekka Tammi

(Abstract of a paper delivered at the conference on semiotics at The University of California, Berkeley, in July, 1994.)

This paper stems from a larger research project by the author, devoted to Vladimir Nabokov's fiction and its intertextual links with Russian literature. The main analytic concepts for the study are derived from K. F. Taranovski (cf. his notion of **subtext**, Russ. **podtekst**) and Taranovski's followers within the still thriving Moscow-Tartu semiotic school (esp. their notion of **poligenetichnost**). Bits and pieces of the argument have been published over the years in *Scando-Slavica*, *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, *Semiotica*, and elsewhere. They will be collected under a single heading in the author's *Russian Subtexts in Nabokov's Fiction* (in progress).

One of the rare studies granting attention to dates as text-linking elements is by Z. G. Minc (*Poetika daty" i rannaia lirika Al. Bloka* 1989). Minc also points out that like other components in literary texts dates may function in a metonymical fashion, evoking broad subtextual/extra-textual contexts and altering our interpretation of the primary text in significant ways.

This approach is developed further and applied to Nabokov who—according to his own testimony—was "obsessed with fatidic dates." It is argued that dates and numerals in Nabokov are functional (1) within the intratextual bounds of single works (recurring numerals like "1952" in *Lolita*); (2) for the construction of intertextual links between Nabokov's works and many canonical texts of Russian literature (by Pushkin and others); (3) from the viewpoint of

Nabokov's personal mythology (e.g. the variously anagrammatized "23.4"/"342" threaded throughout his writing).

Dozens of potentially "fatidic" instances may (and will) be adduced from Nabokov's fiction and non-fiction. Special heed will be given to polygenetic links, that is, instances functioning simultaneously on each of the above levels (intratextual, intertextual, mythological).

Such a numerological search—any search, for that matter—will eventually veer close to "overinterpretation" (in Eco's sense). At the same time, it is precisely the polyvalent nature of these linkages that allies them with Nabokovian poetics.

A ROBUST BUT PLIANT PHILISTINE:
JOHN RAY AS *LOLITA*'S IRONIC MUSE

by Brian Walter

(Abstract of a paper delivered at the Annual MLA Convention, San Diego, December 1994)

An important aspect of Nabokov's work is the way in which it defends itself against the philistine reader. In lectures and essays as well as within his fiction, Nabokov takes considerable pains to criticize the narrow-minded, even hostile reader whose allegiance to social convention blinds him to the pleasures of the author's cherished 'aesthetic bliss.' Nabokov's infamous dismissals of fellow authors--ranging from Faulkner to Orwell to Sartre--often stem from his estimation of their works' pandering to this corrupt reader.

One of Nabokov's key strategies for disarming the philistine reader of *Lolita* is the novel's foreword, 'authored' by John Ray. This character has proved a persistent problem in Nabokov criticism. Alfred Appel, for example, in *The Annotated Lolita*, explains Ray's combination of insightful artistic appraisal

with hackneyed moral criticism as little more than an oversight on Nabokov's part, an instance when his fictional "mask has not remained totally in place," producing "subtle oscillations between the shrill locutions and behavioristic homilies of Ray and the quite reasonable statements of an authorial voice projected, as it were, from the wings" (*The Annotated Lolita* 322).

My argument offers a different understanding of Ray within the larger context of Nabokov's contest with the philistine. Instead of an authorial oversight, Ray exemplifies the hostile reader whom the novel has won over to appreciation, despite his conventional social prejudices. As such, Ray represents Nabokov's most ingenious stroke against the social-minded critic. Set before the narrative, Ray's preamble appears to exert an impartial authority over Humbert's confessions, when in fact, Ray effectively relinquishes all authority by admitting that he has found nothing in the manuscript to require his editing. Ray's uselessness as an editor of Humbert's story allows Nabokov to defuse from the outset the authority of social-minded criticism over his most controversial novel. Created simply to set the novel's reader on the right track to appreciation, Ray serves as a model reader for learning to appreciate the artistic achievement of Humbert's memoir despite the criminal loathsomeness of its condemned narrator.

This reading lends itself to a further point: Ray in his conversion represents not only an ideal reader, but also a source of inspiration for the novel, a predisposed skeptic whom the novel must find a way to enchant. As a convertible philistine, Ray serves as an ironic muse for *Lolita*, a negative but critical motivation for the novel's art.

NABOKOV'S *THE GIFT*:
THE IMAGE OF READING IN ARTISTIC CREATION

by Stephen H. Blackwell

(Abstract of a Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University,
April 1995)

Vladimir Nabokov's works are saturated with the author's concern for his audience's response to them. The novels imply a complex and detailed theory about the ethical and aesthetic value of the reading activity in a work's overarching shape. Consequently, whenever one reads a Nabokov novel, one becomes conscious of the author's efforts to render the reading experience physically challenging, richly textured, and ultimately rewarding.

In *The Gift*, this aspect of Nabokov's concern takes an especially full shape. By writing a novel about a young author, Nabokov captured artistically not only the spirit of literary activity in general, but also dramatized in covert form the evolving relationship between the writer and his audience. In *The Gift*, this audience receives direct metaphorical representation, and its presence becomes an acknowledged shaping factor in the novel's development and composition. The reader assumes a major creative force within the novel itself. Because this personified reader is also the protagonist's lover, and because the protagonist is the concealed author of the entire novel, Nabokov's device proposes a strict code for reading activity: he demands a love-like relationship between reader and author. As a novel which presents its own reading (artistically encoded), *The Gift* is able to raise its own interpretation to a higher level of complexity.

Chapter One reviews the scholarship and explores Nabokov's relationship to modern theorists of reading. Chapter Two examines implicit theories of reading in Nabokov's sources. Chapter Three analyses the figure of the creative writer in *The Gift*. Chapter Four outlines the structure of the novel's probable reception. Chapter Five traces the theme of reading

through the novel. Chapter Six explores the convergence of author, hero and reader in the trope of the boundary.

IMAGERY IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S LAST RUSSIAN
NOVEL (*DAR*), ITS ENGLISH TRANSLATION (*THE
GIFT*), AND OTHER PROSE WORKS OF THE 1930S

by Nassim W. Berdjis

(Abstract of a Ph.D. Dissertation, Johannes
Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany, February
1995)

During the years from the conception until the completion of *DAR*, Nabokov wrote five additional novels, twenty-two short stories, and one drama. Many of these works are thematically interrelated, and this comparative study detects similarities and dissimilarities of literary features which Nabokov used in dealing with a broad variety of issues. Connecting *DAR* with other works of the same period grants insights into the increasing complexity of imagery achieved during that decade and in the English translations and retranslations. Images are analyzed according to structural and thematic criteria. As the time spans separating the Russian originals and their English translations vary from five years to several decades, the analysis reaches into the third decade of Nabokov's English oeuvre. By including the translations and finding connections between images within two versions of one work and among the works of that period, this study contributes to research on the relationship between Nabokov's Russian and English prose.

Following a survey of the genesis of Nabokov's works written parallel to *DAR/The Gift* and of their translation and publication history, David Lodge's application of Roman Jakobson's theory of the distinction between metaphor and metonymy is

modified in the context of current trends in that field, leading to the supposition that in modern literature metaphor and metonymy cannot be regarded as opposites separating poetry and prose, but that they rather serve as poles between which the writer's verbal virtuosity oscillates and which he uses separately and in conjunction with one another. Jakobson's attitude towards the study of imagery appears applicable to Nabokov's works, because individual perception and verbal expression are central to this linguist's theory, thus elevating images from rhetorical ornamentation to active elements of human consciousness and world view. Adding to the analysis of metaphors and metonymies from a predominantly artistic point of view, the scientific element is incorporated by using the dictionaries Nabokov recommended (*DAL* and *Webster's 2nd*).

In chapter 2, images are categorized according to the transition they achieve between two different realms, thus showing Nabokov's virtuosity in yoking together disparate phenomena and in superimposing interacting layers of meanings and associations. The cited examples show parallels, differences, and developments in the structure and form of metaphorical and metonymical images and interconnections. There are single images for aesthetic pleasure which contribute to the interpretation of their context as well as networks of images which form patterns of recurrence and relationships between images.

Chapter 3 shows that "telling names" connect a person or a named object with a strange but yet related context which implies certain characteristics without necessarily using matter-of-fact explanations. Similarly, puns employ single words and sounds as well as their combinations in order to transcend unambiguous semantic understanding by playing with simultaneously occurring shades of meaning. Chess imagery connects play and patterning, thus bridging images or word games and networks of such imagery.

Chapters 4 through 8 include analyses of single images and, if they form a pattern, of their role within

one work and within the whole time span. The artist's personality and work constitute the focus of chapter 4 in which creative activity and the relationship between empirical and fictional worlds are discussed. Chapter 5 elucidates some instruments the artist uses in his exploration of life and in his creative work, such as sense perceptions and memory. Chapter 6 focuses on the relationship between art and nature and between the artist and the natural scientist by comparing their activities and by showing the artist's perceptions of natural phenomena and of man-made objects. The following chapter deals with mathematical, geometrical, and architectural images, broaching questions concerning the relationship between the material and the metaphysical realms.

The discussion of the relationship between empirical and fictional worlds, of the effect of science and art on man, and of an ideologically confined as opposed to a free human(e) mind points towards questions about the meaning of earthly life and the existence and accessibility of other worlds. Thus, chapter 8 discusses images which characterize religion or which project religious elements on something else, as well as related issues of preexistence, birth, life, death, and an afterlife. An analysis of the relationship between the belief in life after death and artistic accomplishments then asserts the power and immortality of images in art. Aesthetic experiences challenge Nabokov's fictional characters and his readers to participate in an analytical process of scrutinizing details and detecting patterns for the sake of delighting in the capacities of human imagination, reason, and consciousness.