

THE NABOKOVIAN

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CONTENTS

News by Stephen Jan Parker	3
A Reminiscence of Nabokov at Wellesley by Naomi B. Pascal	7
Second Nice Conference on Nabokov	11
Annotations & Queries by Gennady Barabtarlo <u>Contributors</u> : Abdellah Bouazza, D. Meshner	30
Annotations to <i>Ada</i> : 5. Part 1 Chapter 5 by Brian Boyd	41
Nabokov in Cyberspace by Suellen Stringer-Hye	61
1994 Nabokov Bibliography by Stephen Jan Parker	71

News

by Stephen Jan Parker

We open this issue by noting the publication of two important books. The October 30 release of *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, edited by Dmitri Nabokov (New York: Knopf, 659 pages), has been welcomed as a major literary event. Reviews have been nearly uniform in their high praise -- "a sumptuous volume," says the *New York Times* which lists it as one of the ten best books of 1994; "an authentic literary event and, even at \$35, the reading bargain of the year," according to *Time* magazine. This one-volume collection of all of Nabokov's short fiction consists of sixty-five pieces, including eleven stories only recently translated into English for the first time by Dmitri Nabokov.

The other noteworthy volume, published earlier this year, is *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, edited by Vladimir E. Alexandrov (New York: Garland). The 848 pages of this volume hold some 75 articles by 42 scholars focusing on all aspects of Nabokov's legacy. As the publisher rightly notes, the *Companion* constitutes a kind of encyclopedia of Nabokov and occupies a unique niche in Nabokov scholarship.

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Nabokov Society and Conference News

As usual, there will be two Society sessions at the MLA National Convention being held this year in Chicago. On Wednesday, 27 December (7:00-8:15 pm, Illinois Room, Chicago Marriott), the session "Nabokov's Nonfiction" will be chaired by Brian Walter (Washington University). Papers will be read

by Brian Walter, Marilyn Edelstein (Santa Clara University), and Kevin Ray (Washington University). On Thursday, 28 December (10:15-11:30 am, Stetson D Room, Hyatt Regency), the session "Vladimir Nabokov: Varia" will be chaired by D. Barton Johnson (UC Santa Barbara). Papers will be read by Samuel Schuman (University of Minnesota, Morris), Corinne Scheiner (University of Chicago), Thomas Seifrid (University of Southern California), Sarah Herbold (UC Berkeley).

For the one AATSEEL session, the Nabokov Society has the dubious distinction of being the last panel on the Convention program. The meeting is scheduled for 30 December (3:15-5:15 pm, Palmer House Hilton). It will be chaired by Julian Connolly (University of Virginia); Secretary, Anna Brodsky (Washington and Lee University). Papers will be read by Galina Patterson (University of Wisconsin), Natalie Repin (University of Illinois), Sunny Otake (University of Washington), and Alexander Dunkel (University of Arizona).

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Recently published volumes:

Jean Blot, *Nabokov*. Paris: Seuil, *Ecrivains de toujours*, 224 pages, illustrated.

Boris Nosik, *Mir i Dar Vladimira Nabokova: Pervaia russkaia biographiia* [The World and the Gift of Vladimir Nabokov: The First Russian Biography]. Moscow: Penaty. 552 pages, illustrated.

Christine Raguet-Bouvard, editor. *Europe*, Special Nabokov Issue, [Paris] no. 791 (March).

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Ms. Beatrice Chiaradia has provided the following list of VN works received in Montreux, May-August 1995:

- May - *The Annotated Lolita*. London: Penguin, revised edition.
- *Feralna Trzynastka* [Nabokov's Dozen], tr. Lszek Engelking and Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz. Gdansk, Poland: Wydawnictwo.
- *Machenka*, tr. Jorio Dauster. Sao Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras.
- July - *La Veneziana*, tr. Dmitri Nabokov. London: Penguin
- *Lolita*. Paris: Olympia Press, two volume facsimile edition.
- *Lolita*, tr. Enrique Tejedor. Barcelona: Biblioteca de Plata, second edition.
- September - *Lolita*. London: Penguin reprint
- *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. London: Penguin reprint.
- October - *La Meprise* [Despair], tr. Marcel Stora. Paris: Gallimard Folio, revised edition.
- "Gods." *The Yale Review*, Vol 83, no.4.
- "Razor." *Playboy*, October issue.
- "Sounds." *The New Yorker*, August 14 issue.
- "La Veneziana." *Playboy*, August issue.

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## A Reminiscence of Nabokov at Wellesley

by Naomi B. Pascal

In 1942 I was a sixteen-year-old freshman at Wellesley, a women's college about 30 miles outside Boston. The U.S. was at war; practically every student had a brother, a father, or a sweetheart in the armed services; and patriotism was very much in fashion. Wellesley girls turned in their food ration cards to the college, took turns waiting on table at our sit-down dinners, and cheerfully ate soybean loaf and other concoctions designed to camouflage shortages in meat, butter, and sugar.

I'm not sure if it was a student or a faculty member who first decided that it was incumbent upon Americans to learn the language of our new Soviet allies, but sometime that year the college agreed to offer a noncredit course in Russian and hired Vladimir Nabokov to come out from Cambridge two or three times a week to teach it. Nabokov was then an impoverished emigre with a precarious appointment as an entomologist at the Harvard zoological museum. Although he occasionally published pieces in the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New Yorker*, he was not generally well known as a writer in this country. He was known at Wellesley, however, and the year before I arrived had been invited to give some lectures on Russian literature. My own interest, as nearly as I can recall, was primarily in the opportunity to learn what then seemed an exotic language.

That first year Nabokov taught two separate classes, one for faculty and one for students. My recollection is that the student class was quite large initially, but shrank by about half when the attendees discovered how difficult it was to keep up with the lessons. In any case, when I went to sign up for the continuing class in fall of 1943 I found I was the only surviving student. Thus, with some trepidation, I joined the class composed of faculty--mostly language

teachers--including the rather austere woman with whom I was studying French.

My situation was particularly awkward because the Russian class followed immediately after my physical education class in tennis, for which I was required to wear the singularly unattractive Wellesley gym suit of those days--royal blue, coarse cotton shirt and bloomers. The tennis courts were in a far corner of the campus. Not only did I not have time to change, but even running as fast as I could I was invariably a few minutes late for Russian. Red-faced and sweaty in my unbecoming garb, I would try to sneak in unobserved, but invariably Mr. Nabokov (as we always called him) would stop in mid-sentence, acknowledge my entrance with a graceful bow, and inquire in courteous tones, "How was tennis today, Miss Brenner?"

As a teacher he was always kind and patient (despite our undoubtedly painful mutilations of his beloved Russian language), but we knew he could have a scathing tongue from his occasional digressions on the USSR, Sigmund Freud, and other objects of his scorn. He was fascinating both to watch and to listen to. In 1942-43 he was slim and elegant. Although smoking was not permitted in the classrooms at Wellesley, he always had a lighted cigarette in his hand, and since there were no ashtrays we used to watch in rapt anticipation as the ash grew until it dropped to the floor. In the summer of 1943 he took off for Utah to hunt for butterflies, and when he returned in the fall he had given up smoking and gained forty pounds. The change was almost as dramatic as the difference between the two jacket photographs on volumes one and two of Brian Boyd's superb biography. (I note that Boyd dates Nabokov's giving up smoking and his momentous weight gain to the summer of 1945, but I am telling what I remember. In case anyone wonders, by the way, I am *not* one of the girls in the photograph in Boyd captioned, "Nabokov with Russian language class at Wellesley, 1944." My class never met outdoors.)

Nabokov's voice—with its Cambridge-overlaid Russian accent—was musical and unforgettable. When

I heard it again on the tape "Lolita and Poems Read by Vladimir Nabokov" (SAC-1; Spoken Arts, Inc., Box 289, New Rochelle, NY 10801), especially in the poem "An Evening of Russian Poetry," I was instantly transported back to that class fifty years ago. He was sometimes very funny, as when he announced to us, "Today I have something very sad I must tell you about," and then proceeded to explain the aspects of the verb. (Boyd quotes this line as preceding an explanation of the instrumental case, but I think I am right that it referred to the aspects.) His language was always vivid, and I remember his description of the sound "shch" as "a butterfly struggling to get out from behind your teeth."

As for his teaching, I can't say that I became fluent in either written or spoken Russian, though we went through all the grammar exercises, and I have evidence that I was at one time able to compose simple sentences. Part of the problem was finding a good textbook. For a time we used *A New Russian Grammar*, by Anna H. Semeonoff (4th ed.; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1941), but we switched to a British publication called *Modern Russian Course*, by G. A. Birkett (2nd ed.; London: Methuen, 1942). Nabokov preferred the latter, though he made fun of its translation exercises, particularly their recurring references to a brother who played the organ. I still have my copy of Birkett, which Nabokov borrowed to use when his Russian courses later became a regular part of the Wellesley curriculum and books were still in short supply. Perhaps forgetting that it was not his own copy, he annotated it freely with lesson notes (e.g., "for Thursday, read from p. 87 to p. 90"), corrections, and written-in translations, but finally returned it with a treasured inscription: "N.B. Best regards from V. Nabokov." We also had a UK-published Russian reader, of which I remember only the opening sentence, translated as, "John and Mary Peters lived in London."

I did gain an abiding appreciation for the expressive subtleties of the Russian language. Nabokov sometimes read Russian poetry to us, particularly some of the works of Tyutchev, which he was then

translating. He was also already at work on his translation of *Eugene Onegin*, and he spoke sometimes of the difficulties of rendering in another language the writing of the supreme Russian poet.

Of course I was delighted to discover in Wellesley's bookstore the 1941 New Directions edition of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in the red homespun binding. Since then I have bought and read just about everything by Nabokov that has been published in English (and even added to my collection his Russian version of *Alice in Wonderland*).

## Second Nice Conference on Nabokov

Under the direction of Professor Maurice Couturier, the Second Nice Conference on Nabokov -- "Nabokov, at the Crossroads of Modernism and Postmodernism" -- was held June 22-24 at the Hotel Beau Rivage. It was sponsored by the Centre de Recherche sur les Ecritures de Langue Anglaise, The University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis, The American Cultural Services, and The British Council. Following below are abstracts of the papers presented and some remarks delivered on behalf of Dmitri Nabokov; the full conference proceedings will appear in Volume 12, No. 2 of *Cynos*, a publication of the University of Nice.

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### ABSTRACTS

**Brian Boyd, University of Auckland: "Words, Works and Worlds in Joyce and Nabokov Or Intertextuality, Intratextuality, Supratextuality, Infratextuality, Extratextuality and Autotextuality in Modernist and Prepostmodernist Narrative Discourse."**

With the openings of *Ulysses* and *Ada* as samples, I compare the way Joyce and Nabokov relate word and work and world. Although this involves first identifying a particular allusive source in *Ulysses*, I take *Ada's* intertexts and intratexts as read. I try to test terms like intertextuality and its offshoots, to assess the usefulness of the opposition between modernism and postmodernism, and to describe and distinguish two outstanding twentieth-century novelists. I consider especially the way both writers explore the relationship between time and freedom by, among other strategies, challenging a prior Greek text. But the initial similarity of aims and methods soon collapses under the irreducible difference even between two writers with so much in common.

**Laurent Milesi, University of Wales, Swansea: "Dead on Time? Nabokov's *Modo-Post* to the Letter."**

How do Nabokov's characters, directly or indirectly, *date* death? That is, what conception(s) of temporality and existence are at work in the mistimings of the Nabokovian protagonists who either mistake the dying patient of their search (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*), (do not) commit suicide and watch themselves more dead than alive (*The Eye*), or cannot prevent the mistaken murder of their *shade* (*Pale Fire*)—to name a few paradigmatic examples. The aim of this paper is to address the question whether Nabokov is a *postmodern* writer by looking at several manifestations of temporality in his works in the light of Lyotard's *modo-post* or future perfect, illustrative of the postmodern condition, and of the (inchoate) Lacanian theory of temporality, especially his redeployment of Freud's "deferred action" (*Nachträglichkeit*, *après-coup*). But an appointment or date also conjures up the *data littera* of its etymology, the letters given at the beginning of a letter, which Jacques Derrida has taken up with issues of temporality and existence (cf. *Donner le temps*), and this paper will thus also focus on these themes via the joint problematic of letters which, rather than reaching their "destiny" (cf. the end of Lacan's seminar on Poe's "Purloined Letter" and Sebastian's last letter "destined [*prednaznachalos*] to quite a different person", thus involving problems of transmission and translation), do not reach their destination (cf. Derrida's reply to Lacan) in order for the quest and the biofictional writing to take place. Starting from the literary antecedent of Poe (and the impact of his treatment of the double on Nabokov), I will therefore look at the (failed) transmission of (alphabetical and narrative letters in) Nabokov's writing as biography (*Sebastian Knight*), as criticism (*Pale Fire*), or as a testamentary *will have been* (*The Eye*).

**Christine Raguet-Bouvard, University of Bordeaux: "Riverrunning acrostically through 'The Vane Sisters' and 'A.L.P.,' or *genealogy on its head*."**

In 1951, while composing "The Vane Sisters," Vladimir Nabokov jotted down these few words on a notebook: "Instead of Alph—use this somewhere: where A/L/P, the sacred river ran (run)"

In *Finnegans Wake*, the flow of words carries the body of meaning on an everlasting circle/cycle, taking the reader in this jetsam of lettering, whatever course it runs. Interpreting the flow is perhaps not intended as the first concern of the book, what matters more is its rhythm and composition. Though he might have been interested in the process, Nabokov declared on several occasions that he detested *Finnegans Wake*, "a formless and dull mass of phony folklore, a cold pudding of a book, a persistent snore in the next room." Thus why did he want to link his story to Dublin river's? In "The Vane Sisters," Nabokov invites the reader to observe the narrator's attraction to the rhythmic falling of drops until these sounds shape into words, themselves shaping into verbal body and ending the story on an invitation to reread the dream-story from its beginning in order to make out its meaning along the flow of words "drip-dripping" from shadowy icicles.

First intended as a genealogical study of the story, this paper will seek to explain Anna Livia Plurabelle's textual presence in "The Vane Sisters."

**Maurice Couturier, University of Nice: "Censorship and the Authorial Figure in *Ulysses* and *Lolita*."**

These two great masterpieces of twentieth century literature have always challenged the critics and compelled them to develop highly sophisticated though fragmentary discourses—based on such methodological systems as psychoanalysis, philosophy, narratology, linguistics, and so forth—but still seem to keep their secret. Our difficulty to place them in terms of modernity or postmodernity derives

from their paradoxical structures, their over-determination, their poetic language, and also and perhaps above all from their sexual contents. The censors who passed judgment upon them all had to answer the same question: can poetic excellence redeem such sexually explicit and immoral books? They answered yes or no, depending more on their preferences or prejudices than on legal arguments, thereby acknowledging their incapacity to take only the text into consideration. The critics who, on the whole, have tended to overlook partly or totally the immoral element and to pay homage only to the poetic quality, have perhaps been similarly guilty of censoring the text. The unreadability of these two monumental works shows that the authors have totally managed to solipsize their readers. If one takes into account the two dimensions, the poetic and the sexual, one suddenly realizes that the text is the result of a paradoxical meshing of desires and gives rise, in the reader's mind, to that authorial figure mentioned by Michel Foucault in his 1969 essay "What is an Author?"

**Simon Karlinsky, University of California, Berkeley:  
"Nabokov and Certain Poets of Russian Modernism."**

In a 1973 article Vladimir Nabokov postulated a "great twentieth-century triad" within the Russian poetic tradition: Vladimir Mayakovsky, Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva, who, for him, were united by their common derivation from Andrei Bely. Such derivation can be accepted only with considerable reservations. But this idea points to a possible connection between these three poets and their younger contemporary Vladimir Nabokov. What all four have in common has been described in French as *un métaphorisme exacerbé* and *l'attention constante à la facture de la trame verbale*. This quality, perceptible in both the poetry and the prose of the three poets, is to be found only in Nabokov's fictional prose (in both Russian and English). As a

poet, he belongs to an entirely different school and tradition.

As a critic Nabokov had interesting and at times highly negative things to say about the three poets. He also wrote clever and, in Tsvetaeva's case, highly unfair parodies of their poetry. Yet, as a prose stylist, he clearly belongs to the same "verbalist" trend within the early twentieth-century Russian literature as do Mayakovsky, Pasternak and Tsvetaeva.

**Julian W. Connolly, University of Virginia:  
"Cincinnatus and *Différance*: Subversive Discourse in  
*Invitation to a Beheading*."**

Written in 1934, *Invitation to a Beheading* is a novel poised on the threshold between modernism and postmodernism. Among the features which encourage analysis of the novel in these terms are its focus on the powers and limitations of human consciousness, its inclusion of a high degree of indeterminacy and ambiguity, its manipulation of shifting fields of signification, and its gestures in the direction of metaliterary self-consciousness. Critics have approached the novel from a variety of angles, examining its treatment of the relationship between art and politics, its metaphysics, artistic patterning, and literary allusiveness.

This essay argues that a new perspective can be gained by looking at the novel in light of Jacques Derrida's writings on Western philosophy and the paradoxes of verbal representation. Cincinnatus's relationship to the society which imprisons him, and his role in the potential disruption of the order which attempts to suppress or appropriate his otherness, bear some affinity with what Derrida has called "*différance*." Further affinities can be discerned in Nabokov's handling of several key issues: the relationship between speech and writing, the inherent instability of expressive discourse, and the notion that death may be the only avenue available to the self by which to escape the oppressive order, even if the cost be self-dissolution. An investigation of the novel along



these lines is not meant to suggest that the work should be seen as an allegory or illustration of Derrida's views. Rather, Derrida's writings offer an incisive tool for revealing the ways in which Nabokov's novel—in both its metaliterary and metaphysical dimensions—points to some of the distinctive concerns articulated in postmodernist theory. It is hoped that this discussion will provide new insight into Nabokov's complex relationship to modernism and postmodernism.

**Galya Diment, University of Washington: "From Kafka's Castle to Axel's Castle: Nabokov versus Wilson as Critics of Modernism."**

"It is difficult to imagine a close friendship between two people with such different political and aesthetic views," John Kopper writes about Wilson and Nabokov in the recent *Companion to Nabokov* (Alexandrov, 57). Nabokov himself characterized his relationship with Wilson to Andrew Field as one where there was "hardly a moment when the tension between two highly dissimilar minds, attitudes and educations is slackened" (Boyd, 494). Given these stark differences between the two men, it should obviously not come as a surprise that Wilson and Nabokov differed, among other things, in their evaluation of European Modernism, in general, and individual modernist writers in particular. My paper will discuss and analyze those differences of opinions (as found in Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature* as well as *Strong Opinions*, and Wilson's *Axel's Castle*, as well as his diaries), will attempt to account for them, and will also evaluate Nabokov's and Wilson's individual contributions to our understanding of Modernism.

**Suzanne Fraysse, University of Paris VII: "Nabokov and Poe: The Philosophy of Composition."**

Given the importance of the allusions to Poe in *Lolita* one may wonder if they do not function among other things as an implicit acknowledgement of Poe's

literary theory. I propose to study the way such a text as Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" can account for Nabokov's writing strategies in *Lolita* and in particular can help define a relevant model of the writer-reader relationship in the novel. This model constantly challenges the author-reader relationship constructed by Humbert's manuscript and apparently gives the key to the Nabokovian game, or to put it bluntly to the way Nabokov wanted his novel to be read. From that viewpoint it is perhaps a quirk in literary history if the novel owed its commercial success to the more traditional author-reader relationship that emerges from Humbert's manuscript and that Nabokov's novel constantly undermines. However one may wonder if the interplay between those two vying reading models simply works as a means of setting up an implicit hierarchy between "good" readers and "bad" readers or if it does not ultimately serve to go beyond Poe's legacy and create a new (postmodernist?) reading practice in which the reader is always a loser and thus hopefully a willing rereader.

**John Burt Foster, Jr., George Mason University: "Parody, Pastiche and the Postmodern Turn: Nabokov/Jameson."**

This paper will re-examine Frederic Jameson's proposal (in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*) that a major shift in intertextual practices took place in the 1950s. In the place of parody, with its nuanced evaluations of past styles and conventions, which thus still function as valid benchmarks even when they are rejected or transformed, we get pastiche—in which this ingrained awareness of cultural history has vanished. As a result, Jameson argues, we get "a neutral practice of such mimicry" (17) which undertakes "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (18). This shift in intertextual practice, he further contends, correlates with the larger transition from modernism to postmodernism, which has devalued both memory

and history in what amounts to a massive detemporalization of experience.

How well does this theory account for Nabokov's own evolution as an intertextualist during the 1950s? Focusing on three scenes of violent death--the therapeutic murder of David Krug in *Bend Sinister*, Humbert Humbert's killing of Clare Quilty, and Jack Grey's mistaken retaliation against John Shade--I will argue for a mixed verdict. Although Jameson's theory allows us to see an increasing level of artifice in Nabokov's treatment of these scenes, it would be a mistake to associate him with any postmodern tendency toward detemporalization.

**Herbert Grabes, University of Giessen: "Modernism into Postmodernism: Nabokov's Exemplary Fictions."**

If one looks for literary works of art demonstrating the change from a modernist view of art and reality to a postmodern one, there is hardly a writer who provided better examples than Nabokov. Though concrete fictions through and through, his novels quite clearly imply philosophical positions with a much wider claim and thus are eminently suited for a discussion of the modernist versus postmodernist query. Thus *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* both affirms and parodies the modernist search for a "true" rendering of subjective reality, and *Bend Sinister* unmistakably demonstrates that the world of art is a better world. In *Lolita* the representation of "reality" becomes problematic both through subjective distortion and competing genre frames, and while this continues in *Pale Fire*, here the epistemological scepticism for the first time turns ontological in the equation of a "game of worlds" with a "game of words." In *Ada* we then have reached the "joyous affirmation of the free play of the world" in a clearly postmodern way (including the artistic upgrading of SF conventions), in *Transparent Things* the demonstration of the "constructedness" of narrated reality, and in *Look at the Harlequins!* a parody of the return to autobiographical writing that

inevitably becomes self-parody. If according to modernist assumptions a subjective distortion of "reality" is unavoidable, and in postmodern times the author (of one's life and one's "Life") is dead, what else can a writer do in the return to his own life but create a willfully absurd double of himself in the hope that the now authorized reader will zero out the distortion by another distortion and "author" a more likely double of the double presented?

**Jane Grayson, University of London: "Nabokov at the Crossroads of Modernism and Post-Modernism"**

This comparison of Nabokov and Georges Perec was conceived as a contribution to the debate of where Nabokov stands in 20th-century literary history, and whether he is more appropriately classified as a modernist or a post-modernist. The perspective offered by Perec's writing does not give an answer to this question, but it does draw attention to the watershed in Nabokov's work in the late 1930s.

Perec loved playing games with words and numbers and contriving intriguingly complex narrative strategies and it is this importance accorded to the ludic principle that first attracts comparison with Nabokov. But these games and strategies often served as more than brain-teasers; they posed philosophical problems and responded in Perec to deep emotional needs, the very severity of the constraint working to release inhibition. *La Disparition*, the novel he wrote without the letter "e", was conceived as a way out of writer's block, but it turned into far more than that. The oblique, often misleading form of narrative which Perec chose for his autobiography *W* was a way of coping with the difficulty of speaking about his parents and coming to terms with their loss.

A comparison of *W*, written when Perec was in his late 30s, with *Speak Memory* highlights the greater equilibrium and ease enjoyed by the older writer in treatment of the same theme of loss. It is in the 1930s, when Nabokov was of the age of Perec, rather than the

1960s and 70s, that closer connections are to be found. There Nabokov can be seen imposing upon himself some formidable narrative constraints when working through aesthetic and personal problems. Viewed through "Perec" eyes the formidable constraint posed by Nabokov's abandonment of Russian for English as his writing language assumes particular significance. After all, what is Perec's forgoing of one letter in comparison with the liberating constraint of the deprivation of an entire alphabet!

**Geoffrey Green, University of San Francisco: "Beyond Modernism and Postmodernism: Vladimir Nabokov's Fiction of Transcendent Perspective."**

The fiction of Vladimir Nabokov has confounded those literary critics who would place his writing conveniently in a descriptive container that would all-too-readily explain and enclose the multifarious possibilities and imaginative significance of his work. By education and training, he was a formalist; that is, he was accustomed to making informed public comments on his novels in terms of *explication de texte*. Thus, an examination of his own critical pronouncements would present him as a close reader. His statements of preference in authors, however, often reflected a taste for *pre-Modernist* writers of the decidedly Romanticist variety. To further confound things, Nabokov's novels may be viewed as being modernist (in terms of Nabokov's emphasis on authorial conceptualization and control and his concern on the accurate and correct reading of his work) and postmodernist (in terms of his generic innovation, his use of parody to usurp the conventions of traditional forms, his polyphonic use of dialogic voices within his fiction, and his playful conception of himself as an authorial fiction). I would maintain that the key to this conundrum lies in Nabokov's goal of transcending time and history. By conceiving of himself as a unique author who included within him Russian, French, English, German, and American influences and intellectual traditions, he was able to

reflect a multitude of perspective within his writing. Furthermore, his efforts to "circle back" and translate his earlier work in Russian into English as the later work of an American writer point toward a movement beyond postmodernism. In summary, he was free enough not to be a modernist reactive to social realism, or a postmodernist tethered to modernism, and thus was able to create genuinely new and uncanny fictions of the future.

**Ellen Pifer, University of Delaware: "Birds of a Different Feather: Nabokov and Kosinski in the Postwar Period."**

Although Nabokov and his family were direct victims of this century's worst social and political upheavals—ideological revolutions, global warfare and the Holocaust—his optimistic vision, and metaphysical "faith," remained uniquely intact for a postwar writer. The distinction between Nabokov and other postwar writers emerges with particular clarity when we compare his artistic vision to that of a younger emigre who also became an American writer, Jerzy Kosinski. Born a generation after Nabokov, Kosinski also arrived on America's shores by way of Europe and Russia; he too became a bestselling American novelist. But here the similarities end, making way for contrasts that, I believe, help to clarify Nabokov's unique position at the crossroads of modernism and postmodernism.

In a 1972 interview in *The Paris Review*, Kosinski overtly contrasts the "invisible" style of his writing to that of his admired predecessor, Nabokov, who draws the reader's attention to the "visible veil" of language drawn, like a semi-transparent screen, across the window that opens on his world. But while Nabokov's style is overtly playful, intrusive and self-reflexive, Kosinski's "invisible" language does not, as his statement appears to suggest, deliver the reader to the unambiguous realm of reality invoked by nineteenth-century practitioners of realism. Already in his first published novel, *The Painted Bird* (1965),

Kosinski's narrative may give the appearance— but yields none of the assurance—of objective, unmediated reality. When, moreover, one examines Kosinski's treatment of the novel's two central figures—the child and "the painted bird"—in the light of Nabokov's own handling of such images, Nabokov's greater ties to tradition become clear.

Kosinski's child-protagonist proves extremely resourceful, surviving brutal conditions that prove fatal to countless other victims; but he lacks the inner resources of the Wordsworthian child. To this divine spark Nabokov's Dolly Haze—still tender, trusting and essentially innocent despite her entrapment by Humbert—proves heir. Although Nabokov's allusive and involuted narrative style displays all the outward trappings of a postmodernist narrative, it is Kosinski's deceptively transparent language that discovers a postmodern universe sealed off from transcendence. Instead of "trailing clouds of glory," Kosinski's child's "body" (to recall Foucault's characteristic inversion of Judeo-Christian formulations) is fatally inscribed by the "technology"—imprisoned in the "soul"—of human culture (*Discipline and Punish*).

**Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, College of the Holy Cross:  
"The V-Shaped Paradigm: Nabokov and Pynchon."**

This paper surveys biographical and textual evidence of Pynchon's debt to Nabokov, and discusses the similarity in their narrative technique. I will use *Success*—an imaginary novel embedded in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (95-100)—as a model for my investigation, and for the similarity of Nabokov's and Pynchon's narratives. *Success*, "one of the most complicated researches that has ever been attempted by a writer," traces the mechanisms by which fate finally brings together two different individuals. Its narrative structure, as Nabokov's narrator describes it, is shaped roughly like the letter V, "with two lines which have finally tapered to the point of meeting" (96).

*Success* provides a useful model for tracing the fateful conjunction of these two writers. Fate managed to bring both of them to Cornell University, where Nabokov taught Pynchon in one course (most likely "Masters of European Literature") between fall 1957 and spring 1959. They may not have had any substantial personal interaction, however; indeed, given Nabokov's teaching style, and the fact that he could not remember Pynchon, it is doubtful that they did. And yet Pynchon was Nabokov's student in more than the one course he took from him. V., the narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, seems to be Sebastian's ideal successor and biographer, in one sense, because he has read Sebastian's works so carefully and lovingly. The same could be said of Pynchon's relationship to Nabokov. Pynchon's first three novels offer ample evidence that he had carefully studied Nabokov's English fiction (especially *Lolita*). His first novel, V., in particular, reveals the pervasive influence of Nabokov's first English novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, in matters of plot, technique, characterization, style, and even wordplay (for example, the preponderance of V's).

*Success* provides a useful model, too, for tracing the relationship between these two texts, and between Nabokov's and Pynchon's work in general. *Success* also illustrates the most important lesson Pynchon learned from Nabokov: how to use narrative form to question the very nature of "reality." Accordingly, I will show how Pynchon's V. recapitulates the very same "detective theme"—in content, in generic parody, and in literary form—that Nabokov's narrator "V." traces in all of Sebastian's work. Like Nabokov, then, Pynchon transforms classic detective-story formulas into parodic, inverted, self-reflexive narrative structures. Both writers manipulate detective-story formulas in order to question narrative itself (especially in terms of history, reliability, and closure) as well as the nature of meaning and interpretation.

Ultimately, my reading of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and V. shows how Nabokov's and Pynchon's shared affinity for parody, epistemology,

self-reflexivity, and narrative experimentation locate these novels precisely where two other lines—modernism and postmodernism—also taper "to the point of meeting." Nabokov's and Pynchon's similar transformations of detective-story formulas, in particular, suggests that the "metaphysical detective story" may be an exemplary postmodernist text. Indeed, comparing their novels, in turn, to "metaphysical detective stories" by Borges, Alfau, Robbe-Grillet, Perec, Sciascia, Eco, and Auster (among others), should help us to clarify the distinct contributions that Nabokov and Pynchon have made to postmodernism.

**Pekka Tammi, University of Tampere: "Echoes. *Pale Fire* and *Foucault's Pendulum*. "**

There is not much evidence of Umberto Eco's having read Nabokov (aside from his spoof "Nonita", published in 1959). But the question of influence is of secondary importance. What seems like a more worthwhile topic—at least from the outset—is the considerable confluence of stylistic and structural tricks (e.g. "fatidic dates") and thematic concerns (coincidences, paranoia, unlimited semiosis, and so forth) in the works of these two authors. They also share some literary loves (Joyce), have a huge penchant for parody, and demonstrate formidable learning (plus a marked interest in popular culture, a grudging interest in Nabokov's case).

The paper proposes to pursue these comparisons in some detail. The main focus will be on *Pale Fire* and *Foucault's Pendulum*, though it seems profitable to digress on several other texts by these authors as well (both fictional and scholarly). In the end, resemblances may turn out to be just shadows of differences: Nabokov remains a hard-nosed Modernist no matter how close we look, whereas behind Eco's Postmodernist facade one may sometimes glimpse a traditionalist and (perhaps) even a weepy sentimentalist.

**Leona Toker, The Hebrew University: "The Fragmentation of Reality in Nabokov's Fiction."**

Nabokov's texts intimate that though the human mind seeks to assemble, stabilize, and complete fragments of reality, authentic creative life calls for the opposite activity as well. Nabokov explores possibilities of an active fragmentation of the reality given to individual experience. These possibilities involve constant resistance not only to external pressures but also to one's inner need for stability. Nabokov counters the valorization of the quest for a holistic Weltanschauung by turning the fragmentation of one's vision of the world into an active inner commitment.

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WHITE NIGHTS, FORTY DEGREES CELSIUS  
[SOME BRIEF REMARKS AS READ BY A KIND PROXY  
IN NICE, JUNE 1995]

A brand-new impression, no matter how vivid, cannot efface the palimpsest of a long-cherished image. The older remembrance, in my instance, is vicarious -- a refraction made indelible by my father's writings and my mother's narratives. One thinks, one wonders: how will Russia really be, and there are unphotographable things one simply cannot visualize. Yet, when I reached Rozhdestveno and the Orodezh River on a sweltering summer day, I somehow recognized the verdant, aromatic surroundings, and I imagined for an instant that the hiss of bicycle tires approaching on the still-unpaved lane was that of my father's Enfield.

When asked how I felt about the tragedy -- the interviewer's word -- of the Rozhdenstveno fire, I replied that, while there had been worse tragedies, what impressed me more than the destruction was that important archival materials had been courageously

rescued and that reconstruction had already begun in keeping with the unearthed original plans.

The charming family church was there, and the funeral chapel containing my forbears that had remained sealed and unscathed by history's calamities. And the young village priest, ready to put me through some liturgical paces, which I politely declined in favor of my video camera. Even an outdoor feast -- evoking ancient family photographs -- had been arranged in the grassy quadrangle of the museum at the old relay station made famous by Pushkin's story, with costumed musicians and a superb, thoroughly spoiled long-haired cat named Chernish.

They were so relieved, said the enthusiastic local mayor, that Serena and I had turned out to be *takie milie lyudi* -- "such nice people." It did feel like a return to a place where I had never been and to an eddy of time that had somehow slowed.

I had had vague general misgivings about the trip, and more specific ones en route when the hospitable crew of the Western jetliner ushered me forward and I noticed the pilot and co-pilot, with identical perplexed expressions, trying to identify a passing coastline not by an aeronautical chart but from the little map in the airline's inflight magazine.

But everything went well -- from the magnificent reception by cheerful, encyclopedic Vadim Stark to our laser-sharp driver Nikolay (whose previous job had in fact been that of laser physicist) to the lavishly restored, efficient Hotel Evropa, whose faucets continue to be inscribed in belle-époque French, and where nonreaders among the staff presumed that anyone with a Russian name inhabiting such a suite as mine must be a very big mafioso. A thin, miniskirted creature even said to Serena, in the corridor, "Working late aren't you, honey."

The pretext for the trip was the reinauguration of the restored Peterhof and its fountains. The invited guests were to be, presumably, foreign-based descendants of families that had frequented the Court balls of former days. The gilding was a bit overdone, perhaps, but it will mellow. The pomp was unlimited

-- concerts in several resplendent halls, outdoor ballets, bewigged footmen, costumed musicians playing in nooks of the gleaming rooms. The elderly exiles were charming, and endowed with astonishing endurance. The *son-et-lumière* was spectacular despite a touch of Disney.

Most of the invited guests came to the party by sea -- the Finnish Gulf -- and proceeded up the Palace steps. I came early, by land, melting from the heat, to rehearse, for I had to wear not only the familial hat but two artistic ones as well: that of little Nabokov cum *nabokoved*, and that of singer. In the latter capacity I had the honor of performing that evening with the great Arkhipova. In the former I appeared before an amazingly packed hall at the *Publichka*, as the Petersburg Public Library is known, with an impromptu song in mid-lecture in response to some urging. That's still Russia, I guess -- the immediacy of the love for music, animals, books.

History can be oddly helical. After decades of neglect *Petergof* reopened in all its slightly glitzy splendor, sponsored not by a tsar but by the Astrobank, a recently founded institution whose head, after having done much for the arts, died a somewhat hazy death. But his patronage did open the way for possible new legislation that would allow corporations Western-style tax deductions for their good deeds.

The Peterhof spectacle; the fast-forward tour of the city by car and boat; the aura of frenzied transition and the sidewalk portraitists for whom a general manager now negotiates; the appetizing, cheerful colors of the architecture after my grayish-granite expectations and the special Russian blue that my father loved; my pleasant meeting with Mayor Sobchak and my appointment to the Restoration Commission; the unforgettable visits to the country and to the town house at 47 Bol'shaya Morskaya; the possible symbolic return of properties with, perhaps, a bed for me in some cranny -- this was all in a sense subordinate to the main cause: the restoration of order

in publishing Nabokov. I am grateful for the northeast nudge both to Vadim Stark and to Serena.

History, as it spirals, can also accelerate amazingly. This was the moment to go -- and, perhaps with some trepidation after all the horror stories, my parents would have waited eagerly to debrief me, and teach me still more. It was the time to go because people one can count on had come into focus -- Stark, who will be sub-agent for a new, authoritative Nabokov series; Dolinin, who will be editor-in-chief of those Ardis-based texts; faithful Shikhovtsev, whom I had hoped to meet on this trip but could not find.

Crusty stalwarts of academic conservatism endure from other days. Serena Vitale found them girded for battle when she presented her brilliant and revolutionary book about the events surrounding Pushkin in his final months. It was even suggested we had forged the unpublished letters obtained from the D'Anthès family archive in Paris.

It is a pity, too, that Russians have no biographical and critical sources other than venomous Zinaïdas, benighted Struves, the still-smouldering remains of Andrew Field, and Mr. Nosik, whose crimes are more against the Russian language than against Nabokov. It is a pity that the publishers who got rich on megapiracy balk at the economics of the superb Boyd biography, which is almost fully translated and ready to dispel the rot.

These have been busy months. Between checking typescript and proofs of the new sixty-five-story Knopf anthology I journeyed to the Stockholm opera for the triumphant opening, conducted by Rostropovich, of Shchedrin's *Lolita*. I had to miss the premiere of Tage Nielsen's operatic version of *Laughter in the Dark*. A hundred other projects toil and bubble. But it was cosy to be surrounded by a language one had always spoken at home. It was good to see that a unique cultural tradition had resurfaced after gurgling and glinting underground, thanks to courageous individuals, through Russia's darkest days. Now that Saint Vlad Ilich has joined Jolly Joe in the hall of infamy, it is interesting to recall how right and how outnumbered

Nabokov was in the pinkish forties; how, at Wellesley, for instance, he was asked to avoid disparaging references to the Bolsheviks. And it is curious how long, how far and wide, the wool continued to be pulled.

For some years Manomakh's hat kept bumping against the Petersburg gate. Now that I have made it through I shall be back on a Russian-Christmas visit, to see how things are going, and shall traverse Rozhdestveno with sleigh and troika, straight out of some fifth-rate novel like *Dr. Zhivago*.

Dmitri Nabokov. Montreux, June 1995  
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## 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](mailto: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 NABOKOV—ENGLISH LEXICON

In a 1971 interview VN drew attention to the disappointing fact that Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1970) did not include his own coinages or reapplications, like "iridule", "racemosa", "scud" and "tilt" (*Strong Opinions* 178-79; cf. 79, 133). As far as these words are concerned, the situation has not changed. Worthy of mention is Carl R. Profffer's adoption of "racemosa" in his translation of Sokolov's *Shkola dlia durakov* (*A School for Fools*, N.Y.: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1988, p. 178). I might as well add right away that Michael H. Heim borrowed "matitudinal" from *Lolita* (Putnam 1958, p. 163) in order to render "utrennikh" in his translation of *Palisandriia* (p. 94, *Astrophobia*, Grove Weidenfeld, 1989, p. 119). On the other hand, Webster's Third International Dictionary (1986) does cite VN's use of

two words: "consociative", and "sinistrally", both from *Speak, Memory*. However, "nymphet" still carries, unreferentially and unreverently, that definition for which its formulator should have his knuckles rapped (SO 133).

Much more interesting (and rewarding) is the 4 volume Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary (1972-1985; now already incorporated in the recent OED in 20 vols.). In 1988, during a relatively short but intense period, I perused this Supplement and noted down all the citations from VN's oeuvre that I could find. Seven years have not succeeded in helping me shake off the feeling that it is incumbent upon me to present the following word list to Nabokov's readers, and, by doing so, let them decide on the merit of my findings. Their foremost aim is to show to what extent VN's coinages, usages and reapplications have found lexicographical acceptance. Besides being perforce a selection from VN's reputedly rich lexicon, the list will, I hope, prove helpful to readers who wish to consult the OED so as to dispel the haze that envelops an intuitive understanding of this or that Nabokovian word.

Alphabetically arranged are VN's novels and the words contained therein, under which VN is cited by the OED.

### BEND SINISTER

Heliocentrically, paletoted, popeyed, praedormital (has a striking number of variants in VN's writings)

### THE DEFENSE

Concentratedly, ouf, perpetuum mobile, tearlet

### DETAILS OF A SUNSET

Viatic



## THE GIFT

Berliner, borshch, camouflage, catocalid, concertina, corner house, days, dialectical, ephedra, geometrid, gnoseological, hair style, hollow-chested, hope, ingress, irretention, Kalmuk, kiosk, knightmove, lavatory, leatherjacket, limitrophe, mujik, order, phalanstery, pierid, piroshki, pockmarked, prematutinal, pretersensuous, routinary, Satyrid, sausage, scolopendrine, sigla, shapka, striggle, unfunnily, unoriginally, versificatory, violinic, wax, wings

## GLORY

Lingonberry

## INVITATION TO A BEHEADING

Carceral, chump, Eros, French, literally, megaphone, nictate, pedagoguette, relieve, rifle, shorty

## LOLITA

Nymphet, nympholepsy, olisbos (oddly absent from the French translation), wrecker

## LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS

Rearview, saurian, scriptorially, scumble, spoonerize, suffragettish, viatic

## NABOKOV ' S DOZEN

Humanoid, Pavlovian, sorry-go-round, Ur-Hitlerism

## PALE FIRE

Ankle, burp, goon, houghmagandy, knuckle-dust, marrowsky, nictitation, noctambulator, preterist, ripple-warped, tabloid, virilia

## PNIN

Carrell, Chekovian, karakul, oxfords, parolee, pedestal, polkadotted, psychodramatics, rhymsterette, rooming house, Russianism, sandpapery, skiagrapher, Troskiite, vagitus, vernalization, white, zwieback

## POEMS AND PROBLEMS (NEW YORKER 23 May 1970, 44)

Offenseful

## THE REAL LIFE OF SEBASTIAN KNIGHT

Hors concours, kurort, sexophone

## SPEAK, MEMORY

Appraisive, biscuit, cuffed, foxtrot, geminate, Hyde, lepidopterological, lepidopterology, nécessaire, omnivarious, pathological, person, Ponderosa, pseudopods, retiare, sleeping beauties, sphagnum, tabanid, torte, uliginose, unpin, vesperal, Westinghousian, zakuska

## TYRANTS DESTROYED

Persian Lilies

First of all, "viatic" occurs already in *Lolita*, as does "nictate". Most of us know that "sexcapades" was coined by Quilty (p. 300); but the OED quotes from F. Raphael's *Darling* (1965)! If memory serves, this is not the only instance where VN has been passed over in silence. Rare words used by VN are, of course, to be found in this dictionary. For example, the noble word "unenubilable" (*Pale Fire* 288) which has been mistreated in translations: in the French edition it is imbecilely translated as "inoublable" (=unforgettable), Gallimard 1965, p. 250! In the prize-winning Dutch translation it is rendered by its poetical antonym "onbezwalkt" (=unclouded), Amsterdam

1972, p. 257. It must be conceded, however, that this rendition by Peter Verstegen still remains the best Dutch one, stylistically and as far as the Foreword, Commentary and Index are concerned. Another word from this novel has fared better, namely, "versipel" (p. 68; so touchingly reapplied by Mr Barabtarlo in his masterly study of *The Enchanter*, "Those who favor Fire", p. 108, *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 24, 1991), the obsolete adjectival form of which is included in the OED ("versipellous"); "protéiforme" (p. 60) and "metamorfon" (p. 58) in the French and Dutch versions respectively; although I would recommend the retention of this evocative word in any Indo-European translation.

In this connection I would like to comment on a few words, the occurrence in English dictionaries of which is unlikely. The first one is "concupital", used only once in *Ada*, p. 417. In his "*Ada, traité de l'échange poétique*" (*Delta* 17, 1983, p. 116), M. Couturier cleverly defines it as a portmanteau of "concupine" and "conjugal". Actually, "concupital" means "pertaining to coition", and is derived from the Latin "concupitus", the adjectival form of which ("concupitalis") has been attested only once in the writings of Q. Septimius Florens Tertullianus (c. 160-220 A.D.).

From *Ada* also comes "assbaa" (p. 457), which is the Arabic "asba" (standard transliteration), meaning "finger" and is also a linear measure, approximately one and a half inch. Needless to say, I have by no means exhausted my subject.

--Mr. Abdellah Bouazza, The Netherlands

IVAN KARAMAZOV AND LESLIE CARON:

A NOTE AND A HALF ON *LOLITA*

The identification of the following two allusions in *Lolita* (1955)--one of apparent significance to an understanding of the novel as a whole--coming more than forty years years after its initial publication, should not be seen as a triumph over what is sometimes considered Vladimir Nabokov's love of the obscure. Rather, the first stands as an example of the complexities of literary parody, especially across linguistic boundaries, while the second is evidence of the ephemerality of popular culture. When writing the novel, Nabokov probably considered both of these among the more obvious of his references: one to a central scene in a famous Russian novel, the other to the catchy refrain of a popular American song. Intertextually and extra-textually, these two passages remind us of Nabokov's playfulness, as well as of his erudition.

1

One of the few critically unannotated lines in the first chapter of *Lolita* is the odd yet significant remark, "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" (11). For many pages, this is the only indication that Humbert Humbert has committed a murder; in his Foreword, John Ray, Jr., mentions only that the "crime may be looked up by the inquisitive in the daily papers for September-October 1952" (6), without specifying its nature. The remark itself refers back to the previous line, in which Humbert sets his alleged liaison with Annabel Leigh "about as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer" (11); adding to the confusion of the phrasing here is the fact that the reader, at this point, knows neither the year of Lolita's birth, nor Humbert's age that summer in the "princedom by the sea" (11). Convoluting in both form and content, the sentence can

hardly be intended to serve as the paradigm for a "fancy prose style." Rather, the phrase is an ironic reversal of the more reasonable sentiment that "you can't expect eloquence from a murderer"—a claim made by Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* (Bk. 12, Ch. 5).

This allusion to Dostoevsky's fiction at the beginning of *Lolita* operates on several levels. For one, it anticipates Humbert's appeal to the "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury" in the next sentence, since Ivan's comment on a murderer's eloquence is made during his brother Dmitri's trial. In *The Annotated Lolita* (1991), Alfred Appel suggests that in addressing an imagined jury, Humbert "summarizes the judicial proclivities of those literal-minded and moralistic readers" (334, n. 9/9). However, without the connection to *The Brothers Karamazov*—in which several of the characters address their remarks to the "gentlemen of the jury"—the passage has remained something of an anomaly because, as John Ray reveals in his Foreword, Humbert never faces a jury, dying as he does "a few days before his trial was scheduled to start" (5).

Later, contemplating "all the casual caresses" he as "her mother's husband would be able to lavish on his Lolita," Humbert again associates a trial with the Russian novelist, exclaiming: "Suddenly, gentlemen of the jury, I felt a Dostoevskian grin dawning" (72). These references suggest that Carl R. Proffer is missing something, in his *Keys to Lolita*, when he wonders why "there are so few allusions to Russian literature" in Nabokov's novel (20). Katherine Tiernan O'Connor has explored "*Lolita's* more intricate intertextualities with Dostoevskij—specifically, with *Crime and Punishment* (and, to a lesser degree, *The Devils*)" ("Rereading *Lolita*" 66); but for all the parallels she invokes between those texts, O'Connor produces no direct quotations or paraphrases. It does seem likely that Nabokov had Dostoevsky's work generally in mind, but perhaps foremost of these was *The Brothers Karamazov*. Not coincidentally, while *Lolita* was gestating in his imagination, Nabokov agreed to translate *Karamazov* for Viking Press, a project

abandoned after he was hospitalized in April, 1950, for "an excruciating attack of intercostal neuralgia" (Boyd, *American Years* 146); though Nabokov did not begin to work seriously on *Lolita* for another year, he had already mentioned writing "a short novel about a man who liked little girls—and it's going to be called *The Kingdom by the Sea*," in a letter to Edmund Wilson dated April 7, 1947 (*Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 188). Proffer himself identifies another paraphrase from *Karamazov*, Humbert's "everything was allowed" (270), which derives from Ivan's oft-repeated amoral imperative, "everything is allowed." As Proffer notes (134, n. 25), Nabokov also quoted this line in *Pale Fire* (11. 641-2). Humbert's paraphrase, too, contains an implicit reversal of Dostoevsky's original on multiple levels. Most directly, the proposition that "everything is allowed" helps turn Smerdyakov into a murderer, while in *Lolita* it only occurs, in Humbert's imagination, as a consequence of his having become a murderer, "after the killing was over and nothing mattered any more" (270). On another level, as Vladimir E. Alexandrov has noted, Humbert "stops short of rejecting God or His world because of the unjustifiable suffering of an innocent child. In this he differs from Ivan . . . whose concern with comparable issues inevitably comes to mind in connection with *Lolita*" (*Nabokov's Otherworld* 184). And there are other connections between these two masterpieces by Russian-born writers. Like *Lolita* and several of Dostoevsky's other fictions, *Karamazov* tells the tale of a murder and employs the narrative device of the double, a technique with which Dostoevsky began experimenting in his 1846 novel, *The Double*—the one thing by Dostoevsky that Nabokov himself termed "a perfect work of art" (*Lectures on Russian Literature* 104). As in *Lolita*, much of *Karamazov* is devoted to the rivalry between two similar men (in this case, father and son) for a younger female, and confusion, more than mystery, surrounds the murder in both works. Dostoevsky's novel, for example, involves three different murderers: Dmitri, the lover, who is convicted of the crime, though he murdered no one;

Smerdyakov, the supposed illegitimate son who murders Fyodor Karamazov but is never arrested; and Ivan, who, consciously or not, has incited the murder, and is called "the murderer" in Dostoevsky's notes (*The Notebooks for The Brothers Karamazov* 31).

For all Nabokov-the-critic's disparagement of Dostoevsky's fiction, Nabokov-the-writer found in it much that was useful. In his 1964 *Playboy* interview, for example, Nabokov charged that Dostoevsky "was a prophet, a claptrap journalist and a slapdash comedian. I admit that some of his scenes, some of his tremendous, farcical rows are extraordinarily amusing. But his sensitive murderers and soulful prostitutes are not to be endured for one moment—by this reader anyway" (*Strong Opinions* 42). But *Lolita* seems intrinsically bound up with Dostoevsky in Nabokov's mind. Proffer (3), Appel (*Annotated Lolita* xxxvi), and Andrew Field (*Nabokov: His LiJe in Art* 325) all quote the long passage from the third chapter of *The Gift*, where one of Nabokov's characters describes an unwritten novel in which "an old dog—but still in his prime, fiery, thirsting for happiness—gets to know a widow, and she has a daughter, still quite a little girl—you know what I mean" (198). If that passage is, indeed, a precursor of *Lolita*, then we should not be surprised that Humbert's *Confessions of a White Widowed Male* turns out to be, as the passage from *The Gift* concludes, "a kind of Dostoevskian tragedy" (199).

11/2

When Charlotte Haze first shows Humbert Humbert around her home, at the beginning of *Lolita*, she ends the tour with two final introductions. "'That was my Lo,' she said, 'and these are my lilies'" (42). Were Humbert the bemused student of popular American culture that Nabokov was, he might have replied with the refrain of a song from the popular 1953 film *Lili*, sung by its young star, Leslie Caron: "Hi-Lili, Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo." This associative allusion introduces yet another parallel to Nabokov's tale of a nymphet and her mature lover. For Humbert, who is

touring the Haze house in 1947, the song is an anachronism; but Nabokov himself was writing *Lolita* when the movie appeared and almost certainly was familiar with it. Further, the position of the passage at the end of a chapter makes more likely the possibility that it was a relatively late addition.

Nabokov's fascination with (though not necessarily love for) Hollywood and its films is clear, from Humbert's first secretive abuse of Lolita—"nothing prevented me from repeating a performance that affected her as little as if she were a photographic image rippling upon a screen and I a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark" (64)—to Humbert's final struggle with Quilty, which will remind "elderly readers" of "the obligatory scene in the Westerns of their childhood" (301). Such cinematic references and influences in Nabokov's work, which have been studied at length in Alfred Appel's *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, are among the more difficult sources to identify, as Appel himself explains: "*Lolita's* most important literary allusions, to Poe and *Carmen*, can be recognized by a reasonably well-educated reader, but the meaning of more commonplace materials may be lost, since one generation's popular culture is another's esoterica" (210). Not surprisingly, then, Appel himself misses this movie-based joke that Nabokov thought was so obvious he could leave out the punch-line.

The script of *Lili*, based on a story by Paul Gallico, features a sixteen-year-old orphan who runs away to the circus and falls in love there with an older man, the magician. *Lili* is thus considerably younger in the film than in the published version of Gallico's fiction, which appeared a year later, in 1954; there, *Lili's* original is named "Marelle Guizec, but her nickname was Mouche" and, though consistently described as "a young girl," Mouche is "only twenty-two" (*Love of Seven Dolls* 12). By many accounts, Caron played the part even younger than sixteen: Bosley Crowther, film critic for the *New York Times*, for example, praised Caron for "her childish manner" and "her patent air of naive credence" (7). Crowther must not have had in

mind the dream-sequence of dueling evening gowns, where a suddenly sophisticated Caron and Zsa Zsa Gabor (in the Charlotte Haze-like role of Rosalie, the magician's possessive secret wife) dance in red-sequined competition for the man's attention. Nabokov would certainly have noted the "pubescent" qualities as well as the vamp-like transformation of Caron's character after she is enveloped in the magician's cape.

There are other coincidences connecting not only the alveolar *Lili* and *Lolita*, but "Lilith" as well, the name of Eve's opposite, negative female principle in Jewish tradition, and the title of a 1928 poem by Nabokov in which a man dies, then has sex with a child and, just before orgasm, finds himself alone in hell. Early in the novel, Humbert uses the third person to discuss this aspect of his own psyche: "Humbert was perfectly capable of intercourse with Eve, but it was Lilith he longed for" (22). As in Nabokov's novel, there is a rivalry in *Lili* between two suitors: the magician, played by Jean Pierre Aumont, and Lili's subsequent love, a disabled dancer turned puppeteer, played by Mel Ferrer. Those vocations may have seemed especially familiar to Nabokov, who often assumed the roles of spell-caster and puppet-master in creating his fictions, and also used such characterizations within them. Indeed, Nabokov himself traced his interest in the theme of *Lolita* for Andrew Field back to an unpublished 1939 story called "The Magician"—since translated by Dmitri Nabokov and published as *The Enchanter* (1986) concerning a girl of twelve and her too loving, ultimately suicidal stepfather (328-9).

--D. Mesher, San José State University

## ANNOTATIONS TO ADA

### 5. Part 1 Chapter 5

by Brian Boyd

#### Forenote:

Van begins in Part 1 Chapter 5 the account of his first, 1884, summer with Ada at Ardis, which will occupy the narrative until Part 1 Chapter 25. The chapter is the first devoted to a single scene; indeed, the afternoon that unfurls here begins the first prolonged scene in the novel. This new rhythm of expansiveness will last for the duration of *Ada's* two sojourns at Ardis.

In this first chapter of Ardis the First, Van and his maker need to establish both the atmosphere of Ardis and the newness of Ardis and Ada for Van. The "sunflecks and lacy shadows" that skim over Van's legs on the way from the station and lend "a green twinkle to the brass button deprived of its twin on the back of the coachman's coat" (34.18-35.07) prepare us for Ardis's green-golden world of luminous and wayward detail. Van's assumption that Lucette "must be 'Ardelia,' the eldest of the two little cousins he was supposed to get acquainted with" (36.24-25) establishes how vague is his notion of either. But just as Van's and Ada's love will at the same time feel breathtakingly unprecedented and a triumphant part of the age-old saga of love, Van's sense of the novelty of Ardis is strangely heightened by the surprise of old associations in a place so new to him: the aquarelle image of Ardis he suddenly recollects from his father's bedroom, Bouteillan and the farmannikin they both recall, his old governess Mlle Larivière.

The whole chapter combines anticipation and retrospection--not to mention retrospected anticipations and anticipated retrospections--in ways so varied they continue to catch our imaginations off guard. The aquarelle Van recalls shows an architect's projection two hundred years ago of what Ardis would look like; the trees have since grown in a way that

fore and aft that permit Nabokov to formulate *Ada's* most puzzling paradox, as he simultaneously demonstrates destiny's design and dismisses the Ardis of time.

## Nabokov in Cyberspace

by Suellen Stringer-Hye

Tracking Nabokov on the Internet is not easy; its shifting contours bury his footprints as quickly as they are revealed. Snippets of conversation, Nabokovian locutions, and games exist alongside more traditional academic resources such as syllabi and concordances. One can never be sure that an address on the World Wide Web will not be relocated or no longer extant. Those presented here capture only a glimpse of Nabokov in cyberspace as found on October 31, 1995.

### Signature Files

Signature files are often quotations from a favorite author and work as a kind of literary bumper sticker to encapsulate some essential wisdom that the writer wishes to communicate. Nabokov quotations are frequent candidates and selection is surprisingly unconventional. They are listed here in no particular order:

From rec.arts. movies:

"You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style"

From rec. humor

"My loathings are simple: stupidity, oppression, crime, cruelty, soft music"--Vladimir Nabokov

From rec. sport. golf

"I am a slave of images. We speak of one thing being like some other thing when what we are

really craving to do is to describe something that is like nothing on earth."

From bit. listserv.pagemakr

"Genius is an African who dreams of snow."

This signature file on rec.arts.comics.xbooks prompted another member of the newsgroup to ask

"I just gotta ask. Where did this come from? I know, i(sic) know it says Vladimir Nabokov Pale Fire but you gotta admit that ain't very helpful."

"For other needs than sleep Charles Xavier had installed in the middle of the Persian rug--covered floor a so-called patifolia, that is, a huge, oval, luxuriously flounced, swansdown pillow the size of a triple bed"--Vladimir Nabokov\_Pale Fire\_

And a frequent poster to rec. music.gdead in a two day period changed his signature file three times:

05/16/95

"Yes, that's real tact for you,' said the director in a low voice and his inflamed froglike eyes grew damp." Vladimir Nabokov

05/17/95

"I am trying to describe these things not to relive them in my present boundless misery, but to sort out the portions of hell and the portion of heaven in that strange, awful, maddening world." Vladimir Nabokov

05/17/95

"Involuntarily yielding to the temptation of logical development, involuntarily (be careful, Cincinnatus!)forging into a chain all the things that were quite harmless as long as they

remained unlinked, he inspired the meaningless with meaning and the lifeless with life."

rec.sport.baseball

"Red Sox Beat Yanks 5-4/On Chapman's Homer"  
-- Vladimir Nabokov *Pale Fire*

ny.wanted

Sander  
Cloud9

```
\\ - Which arrow flies forever?  
_-\^^^\\\ - The one which hit the target.  
//\ \//\ \  
// \ \// \ \ V. Nabokov, "Lugin's Defence"  
//_ _ _ _ \V/_ _ _ _ \\  
'-----V-----'
```

misc.invest.stocks

"The hereafter for all we know may be an eternal state of excruciating insanity" - V. I. Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins*

Related to signature files are quotations associated with World Wide Web home pages:

<http://sasun4.epfl.ch/PF.html>

"On ne saurait, dans un pays libre, exiger d'un écrivain qu'il se préoccupe du tracé exact de la frontière qui sépare le sensible du sensuel" - Nabokov.

<http://www.peoplebank.co.uk/people/alex/russian.html>

"The car is not exactly a Royce, but it rolls." from "Look at the Harlequins" by Vladimir Nabokov

A picture of the home page's creator is captioned with the words "camera obscura" and features a page of "Limeriki po-russki," one of which is featured below:

There was a young lady of Russia  
Who screamed so that no one could hush her,  
Her scream was extreme,  
No one heard such a scream  
As was screamed by this lady of Russia.

Isterichnaya dama iz Krakowa  
Oret ot pozhatiya vsyakogo,  
Oret napered  
I vse vremya oret,  
No oret ne vseгда odinakovo.  
-- predpolozhitel'no V.V. Nabokov

<http://www.midcoast.com/~treehaus>

"I realized that everything in the world was an interplay of identical particles: the trees, the water, you. All was unified, equivalent, divine."  
Nabokov, SOUNDS <1923>  
physics imitates fiction

#### JPGS

A JPG is a graphics format for displaying image files . Below you will find a listing of Nabokov images currently accessible on the internet.

At the home page of a professor of Computer Science in his "Gallery of Heroes", a photograph of Nabokov by J.M. Schkemmer, taken in Montreux is available for viewing:

<http://www.cs.princeton.edu/~ken/nabokov.jpg>

Located at:

<http://www.wellesley.edu/Russian/scans/naboko v3.jpg>

a 40 K GIF image (i.e. a picture) of Nabokov and his Wellesley students, ca. 1945 is the header for the Wellesley College Russia Department whose byline reads:

Wellesley's Russian Department was founded in the 1940s by famed author and critic Vladimir Nabokov. Since that time, the Department has dedicated itself to excellence in literary scholarship and undergraduate teaching

#### Puzzles and Games

Nabokov is renowned for the delight he took in both constructing and playing puzzles and games. From the newsgroups rec.puzzles and rec.arts books here are three which feature Nabokoviana as a part of the query or the solution.

#### rec.puzzles

I can think of three people whose first names are the same as their last names - can you think of any more?

Answers are below.

1. He shot Robert Kennedy.
2. He loved Lolita.
3. Bob Newhart played him in Catch-22.

#### Answers

1. Sirhan Sirhan
2. Humbert Humbert
3. Major Major

#### rec.books

I'm trying to solve a puzzle. I need the name of an American author, first name has 8 letters, last name has 7 letters.

Here's a contentious solution:



Vladimir Nabokov

And this unidentified but amusing response to what was dubbed the "Random House \$10,000 Trivia Challenge." Did Random House sponsor it? It's hard to tell in the random universe of the internet.

To whom was Vladimir Nabokov referring when he said "I think he's crude. I think he's medieval and I don't want an elderly gentleman with an umbrella inflicting his dreams on me"?

Winston Churchill.

A little literary linkage a la Nabokov? is the entreaty at this web site:

<http://totally.hotwired.com/staff/cate/gloating/gloat.page.html>

Featuring the excerpt below from *Bend Sinister*,

He remembered other imbeciles he and she had studied, a study conducted with a kind of gloating enthusiastic disgust. Men who got drunk on beer in sloppy bars, the process of thought satisfactorily replaced by swine-toned radio music. Murderers. The respect a business magnate evokes in his home town. Literary critics praising the books of friends or partisans. Flaubertian farceurs. Fraternities, mystic orders. People who are amused by trained animals. The members of reading clubs. All those who ARE because they do NOT think, thus refuting Cartesianism. The thrifty peasant. The booming politician. Her relatives—her dreadful humorless family.

many words are highlighted creating hypertext links to related WWW sites.

Clicking on BOOMING POLITICIAN connects the reader with a Newt Gingrich web site, on BUSINESS MAGNATE a site for William H. Gates. Some links are

conventional, others inspired. In general, *Linkage a la Nabokov* is a charming tribute, composed by a fan, to Nabokov's work.

The Gates connection to Nabokov is not finished. In an article originally published in August 28, 1995 Forbes magazine entitled *The Coming Software Shift*, George Gilder proposes a formula that would create a new computer mogul:

So, Open the Envelope. Let's Find a New Bill Gates. Start by adding 100 pounds of extra heft, half a foot of height and two further years of schooling, then make him \$12.9 billion hungrier. Give him a gargantuan appetite for pizza and Oreos, Bach, newsprint, algorithms, ideas, John Barth, Nabokov, images, Unix code, bandwidth. Give him a nearly unspellable Scandinavian name--Marc Andreessen.

Courses on Nabokov

Several Syllabi for courses on Nabokov are available on the WWW. Priscilla Meyer's course RUSS263 *Nabokov and Cultural Synthesis* "... traces the development of Nabokov's art from its origins in Russian literature by close readings of the motifs which spiral outward through his (principally English-language) novels." It can be found at:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/course/CC/RUSS/RUSS263F.html>

Jack Lynch, famed originator of one of the most extensive and useful literary resources on the WWW, *Literary Research Tools on the Net*, teaches a course at the University of Pennsylvania entitled "From Epic to Hypertext". The course is a survey of fictional and non-fictional narrative techniques differing from the novel. Presented chronologically, examples include epic, myth, fablieu, short story, folk ballad, biography, chronicle, and slave narrative. Selections

from works such as *The Odyssey* and the *Canterbury Tales* and authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, and Sherlock Holmes comprise the reading list. The final course selection before "...looking into the future of narrative including hypertext..." is Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. The course description, the requirements, and the grading policy are available at:

<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jlynch/Courses/9/syllabus.html>

Evidence of Nabokov's influence on pedagogy can be found at this site:

<http://uxl.cso.uiuc.edu/~chandler/Jekyll.html>

A diagram of the Jekyll/Hyde house differing from Nabokov's drawing found in *Lectures on Literature* appears with a critique of Nabokov's analysis of the Robert Louis Stevenson story:

Notice that Jekyll's 'part' of 'the house' is altogether separate from Hyde's 'part' - the old dissecting-room/operating theater and the upstairs laboratory. It's not altogether a trivial matter. Vladimir Nabokov [*Lectures on Literature*, (1980)] quite plausibly takes the structure of 'the house' to reflect the metaphysical/psychological relationship between Jekyll and Hyde. In Nabokov's diagram of the set-up, the house is one L-shaped unit.

Nabokov's conception of the set-up disregards the description of the journey from Jekyll's domain through the yard to the theater. [Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Penguin edition, p. 68]

As I see it, Nabokov is right in thinking Jekyll is a composite that includes Hyde as a part; but I reject Nabokov's view as to the good and evil here. Dr. Jekyll is a morally bad person. There is no more or less purely good Jekyll residue drifting around.

The story is, among other things, a study of Jekyll's 'moral turpitude,' ..."

As a part of the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (CETH) established at Rutgers in 1991, in order to disseminate electronic humanities texts, the following is a potentially valuable resource tool available to Nabokov scholars on the net. (if you can translate the technospeak)

<http://www.princeton.edu/~gjmurphy/sgml/index.html>

Eugene Onegin, by A. Pushkin.

The first 12 stanzas of Pushkin's narrative poem, each of which is linked to the corresponding stanza of Nabokov's English translation. The versions, stored as separate document instances, are linked via the TEI extended pointer syntax. A `xptr` tag (with no closing tag) is set just inside the opening of every line group. A `doc` attribute points at the target document; a `from` attribute uses the location term `id` to locate the matching line group (the one with matching ID) in the target document. Nabokov's notes appear at the end of his translation. The portions of text to which a note pertains are enclosed by `xref` tags, which point in the same manner as do the `xptr`.

#### Words

Like a nosy neighbor listening to gossip on a party line, it is possible to tune in to various conversations where the subject of discussion is Nabokov. The exchange below appeared in September and early October of 1995.

newsgroups: rec.arts.sf.written

As the "original poster" in question, I take humbrage at the above.

What is "humbrage"? Is this word another example of the differences in spelling between the US and the UK? I have always spelt it umbrage, meaning resentment. I believe its roots are in the latin for shade <umbra>

There is no such word as "humbrage." However, once a new word's been created (however inadvertently), it would be a pity to just let it go undefined, especially when a previous poster has noticed it and asked "what's 'humbrage'?".

To take humbrage" means "to regard in a lascivious manner." As in Humbert Humbert drooling over the 12-year-old Lolita. It actually, if somewhat confusingly, denotes approbation.

#### Non-Literary Nabokov

Christopher Majka, co-founder of the usenet group sci.bio.entymology.misc and developer of web sites relating to such diverse subjects as juggling, law and birds, has posted on one of his web sites, *Electronic Resources on Lepidoptera* located at:

<http://www.cfn.cs.dal.ca/~aa051/lepidoptera.htm>

1

the article published in *The New Brunswick Naturalist* entitled "Monarchs, Viceroys and Queens: Whos the real pretender to the throne?" Beginning the article with a quote from Nabokov and ending with a line from Sirin he discusses current changes in the science of mimicry leaving, "...the final words to V.Sirin, that great lepidopterist and literary thaumaturge who himself copied life as assiduously as it mimicked him:

'I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception.'-- V. Sirin; Speak, Mnemosyne"

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by Stephen Jan Parker

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