

THE NABOKOVIAN

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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

CONFERENCE NEWS

The Nabokov Society will hold two sessions at the MLA National Convention, December 27-30, in Toronto, Canada: (1) On 28 December, at 10:15 am in the Royal York Hotel, "Vladimir Nabokov: Varia " will be chaired by D. Barton Johnson, and (2) on 30 December, at 1:45 pm in the Toronto Convention Centre, "*Lolita* in Context" will be chaired by Ellen Pifer. The AATSEEL session, at the Marriott Eaton Centre at 7:00 pm on 28 December, will be chaired by Sunny Otake. A full report on all Society sessions and the annual business meeting will appear in the spring issue.

A Nabokov session not sponsored by the Society is also on the AATSEEL program. Entitled "Vladimir Nabokov and Intertextuality," it will be chaired by Nikita Nankov. Nabokov papers will also be read at the "Russian Emigre Literature" session at AATSEEL, and at the "Twentieth Century Italian Literature" session at MLA.

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At the annual American Comparative Literature Association Conference held in April 1997 in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico two papers on Nabokov were read at a seminar entitled "Exploring Fictional Worlds," chaired by Cary Henson: "Categorizing ADA: A Typology of Nabokov's Worlds," by Charles Nicol and "Faustian Reflections in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*," by Dominique Jullien.

At the annual meeting of the Northeast MLA (April 1997), Samuel Schuman read a paper, "Camera Obscura: Cinematic Techniques in the Novels of Vladimir Nabokov."

At the AAASS National Convention, November 19-21, in Seattle, Washington, a Nabokov Society session was chaired by D. Barton Johnson. Papers read: Galya Diment, "'Lolita' versus 'Lolita': Dorothy Parker's 1955 Story and Nabokov's Novel"; Eric Naiman, "Frenching the Text: A Filthy Look at Shakespeare's *Lolita*"; Thomas Seifrid, "The Death of the Addressee: Some Forms of Noncommunication in Nabokov's Works." At another session, Maxim Shrayner read "Erasing and 'Dragonizing': On Working with Drafts of Nabokov's Stories."

*

A call for papers on Nabokov's American oeuvre has been issued for a Nabokov Society panel at the annual American Literature Association Conference (San Diego, May 28-31, 1998). Contact Lynne Walker, Department of Slavic Languages, Box 353580, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-3580; email dlwalker@u.washington.edu

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Odds and Ends

— Nabokov centennial events are being planned for 1999 in St. Petersburg and Moscow, London and Cambridge, various cities in Germany, Paris, New York, and Montreux; detailed information, when firm and as received, will follow.

— The new *Lolita* film had its world premiere in Spain on September 21 at the San Sebastian International Film Festival, and its Italian premiere in Rome on September 25. Other premieres are scheduled in Germany on January 1, 1998, in France on January 14, and in Moscow in late January or early February. Reviews have been by and large complimentary; as expected, the would-be keepers of public morality registered their disapproba-

tion before and after the showings. There have been rumors regarding an American distribution deal, but no confirmation and no mention of an American premiere date.

— The Nabokov Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia is seeking donations for their collection. Their request: "Would scholars who have written about Nabokov (and about émigré Russian literature in general) please send copies of their work for the Museum library, and also any objects or mementoes from the émigré period that may be suitable for the Museum." Contact Vadim Stark, Director, Muzei Vladimira Nabokova, 47 Bolshaya Morskaya, 190000 Saint Petersburg).

— Alongside the déjà vu experience of a new *Lolita* scandal, there is, as well, the déjà vu of the *Eugene Onegin* translation hulabaloo. Douglas Hofstadter — who knows no Russian and was apparently once a professor of computer science specializing in artificial intelligence [enough said?] but is now a proclaimed expert in matters of translation — in a *New York Times Book Review* piece compared the merits of several translations of *Onegin* but not Nabokov's, which Hofstadter considered to be "catastrophic" and unworthy of consideration. The subsequent interchange between Hofstadter and more knowledgeable people has provided a minor echo of the invigorating Nabokov-Wilson extravaganza. Hofstadter is no Edmund Wilson and his views would warrant slight attention if not for the déjà vu frisson they afford.

— The International Nabokov Society now has a branch in Korea; another is being organized in Japan.

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Our thanks to Ms. Paula Courtney for her continuing, dedicated assistance in the preparation of this issue of *The Nabokovian*.

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 (573) 884-8456, or by e-mail at gragb@showme.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. • 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.]

LIFE AFTER BEHEADING: NABOKOV AND CHARLES NODIER

In his seminal book *Nabokov's Otherworld* Vladimir Alexandrov cites a phrase from Gumilev's "An African Hunt: From a Travel Diary" (1916) as a striking parallel to the finale of *Invitation to a Beheading*: "And at night I dreamed that for participating in some sort of Abyssinian palace revolt my head was chopped off, and that, bleeding profusely, I am applauding the executioner's skill and rejoicing in how simple, good, and completely painless it all is." The critic comments: "The reference to a dream, the method of execution, the devaluation of death, and the victim's implied transcendence all recall Cincinnatus's experiences, reactions, and behavior" (225).

The affinity is striking indeed but it is also probable that in this case Gumilev and Nabokov had a common French source—an episode of Charles Nodier's fantastic

tale "Smarra" (1821). In Part 4 of the tale (*L'épode*) its protagonist Lucius (cf. another neo-Roman Cincinnatus) has a nightmare in which he finds himself condemned to death and led to the scaffold. The streets of the town are teeming with joyful and jeering spectators: an old veteran taunts him; a nun exclaims: "How small he is!" (cf. the motive of Cincinnatus's small size); people give up their duties and rush to the square newly built for the occasion; "a little girl wearing a creased blue tunic, with haggard eyes revealing the folly and blond hair powdered to glitter, sings a song of his tortures." It seems to Lucius that "the towers, the streets, the whole city recede behind me like the port abandoned by an adventurous ship that attempts to try the destinies of the sea." Then Lucius describes the very moment of his own execution and his first sensations after the beheading:

All this show was centered on my person, another man who accompanied me, and a few boards set on several stakes, above which a carpenter had fixed crude seat and a rough-hewn wooden block that was about two feet higher than the seat. I climbed fourteen steps; I sat down; I cast my eye at the crowd; I wanted to recognize some friendly traits, to find some gleams of hope or sorrow in a cautious glance of shameful farewell; I saw only Myrthé waking up beside her harp and touching it with a smile; only Polémon, half-dazed by the vapors of his brew, raising his empty cup in the hand he has lost and filling it again. More serene now, I relinquished my head to the intensely keen and icy sword of the death officer. Never had a more penetrating shudder run between a man's vertebrae; it was as startling as the last kiss imprinted by fever on the neck of a moribund, as sharp as tempered steel, as consuming as molten lead. My only relief from this anguish came by way of a terrible commotion: my head had fallen off... it rolled down, bouncing on the hideous floor of the scaffold <...> it attached itself to a jutting

board by biting into it with those iron jaws that rage lends to agony. From there, I let my glance fall on the crowd that was now leaving, silent but satisfied. <...> I was very pleased to feel the growth of the dark wings of death that were slowing spreading below my mutilated neck. All the bats of dusk tenderly brushed against me, saying: "Take wing!..." and with an effort I started flapping those rags that could hardly keep me in the air. <...> Ten times I hit against the funeral walls by moving this almost inanimate membrane that tapped around me like the supple feet of a lizard rolling in sand by a spring; ten times I bounced back trying to penetrate the humid mist. How black and icy it was! how sad were the deserts of shadows! At last I reached the height of the tallest buildings and was gliding in circles around the solitary platform—the platform which my dying mouth had touched with a smile and a kiss of good-bye. All the spectators had disappeared; all the noises ceased; all the stars extinguished; all the lights faded. The air was immovable, the sky murky, dull and cold as a matte piece of metal. There remained nothing of what I had seen, of what I had imagined on earth, and my soul terrified by being alive <...> fled from a solitude more immense, a darkness more profound than the solitude and darkness of nothingness. But I could not find the refuge for which I sought. I rose like a night butterfly that has just shed its mysterious vests to display the useless luxury of its crimson, azure and gold attire. (Oeuvres de Charles Nodier. [Réimpression de l'édition de Paris, 1832-1837. 12 volumes] Vol. 3. Genève, 1968, 94-100 I have borrowed a small part of the translation from: Hilda Nelson. *Charles Nodier*. New York, 1972, 96)

The obvious contrasts in style and mood notwithstanding, Lucius's horrifying nightmare can be read as a

germ of *Invitation to a Beheading*. The whole cluster of important images and motifs elaborated by Nabokov is already there in embryo: the oneiric treatment of space; the histrionics of the execution; the blood-thirsty, indifferent, jubilant crowd; the protagonist's glimpse of the other world and his sudden tranquillity on the verge of the beheading; the encounter with the shadows of the dead friends (Myrthé and Polémon whom Lucius sees both before and after the execution are ghosts of "beings akin to him"); the moment of brutal death as a sudden leap to another dimension, a new stage in the metamorphosis that is likened to a butterfly's winged state (cf. also a similar image in "Christmas"). True, after death Lucius does not destroy the city left behind and is met by demons rather than congenial spirits but this dissimilarity results from the essential difference of two characters: Nodier's Romantic transgressor tormented by evil from within versus Nabokov's innocent poet persecuted for his "Gnostic turpitude."

As far as I know Nabokov never alluded to Nodier in his Russian writings though it is most probable that he had read him for his courses in French literature at Cambridge. In his introduction and commentary to *Eugene Onegin* he discusses Nodier only as "a French imitator of Byron" (1:34), the author of the "lurid but not quite negligible" (2:277) novel *Jean Sbogar* published in 1818 but does not mention his much more original and influential writings of the 1820's and 1830's. In this case the one-sided, truncated characterization might well be, to use Savely Senderovich's apt term, "the figure of concealment," as Nodier's later stories and philosophical essays explore the two interconnected subjects that lie at the very core of Nabokov's metaphysics—dreams and death. According to Nodier, a man endowed with poetic sensibility always exists in two parallel worlds (*double vie*)—a prosaic world of every day realities and that of the dreams:

that sweet state of mind where it isolates itself at will from all realities of life, where it can alienate

itself without any loss from the past, the present, and even from experience, to create a world of its own choice upon which it exercises with sovereign authority all the attributes of God's power. (Oeuvres de Charles Nodier. Vol. 11, 171. Quoted in Hilda Nelson's *Charles Nodier*, 79).

It is only in dreams and artistic insights, argues Nodier, that we catch dim glimpses of the other world beyond death because man in his rational state doesn't have adequate organs to comprehend the notion of eternity and is limited by the contingencies of creation, space and time. Yet the process of creation is not complete and man will eventually transform into a new species—the comprehensive being with three fully developed senses: memory, imagination and judgment. Individually, though, everyone will experience such a transformation at the final moment of life. In the famous gnome of Nodier, "there is almost no interval between the rational being and the comprehensive one; it is just death" (Oeuvres de Charles Nodier. Vol. 5, 384). The dream-like art then foreshadows the state of total comprehension that, in its turn, prepares man for the ultimate resurrection into eternity which Nodier ecstatically envisions as "the present for ever" where one unites with the soul of parents, friends, children, nature and God" (Ibid., 386-87). Though the format of a short note precludes any discussion of the intriguing affinities, any seasoned Nabokovian, I think, will immediately grasp at least some distant echoes of Nodier's aesthetic mysticism in Nabokov's metaphysics—especially, in Cincinnatus's reveries about the other world and in the maxims of the French sage Pierre Delalande in *The Gift* and the epigraph to *Invitation to a Beheading*.

It is common property that Nabokov always went out of his way to hide, so to say, the "first causes" of his imagination and wanted the readers to appreciate only its final results on his own terms. Among these well-guarded and camouflaged caches, the sources of his metaphysical thinking are probably the most carefully

concealed secrets. Aroused by Nabokov's secretiveness, our intellectual curiosity makes us try to unearth his formative models but, devoid of factual proof, the most intelligent guesses are destined to remain no more than conjectures. Actually, none of the schools or names suggested by the critics as possible sources of Nabokov's metaphysics—the Gnostic philosophy (Davydov), Uspensky and Evreinov (Alexandrov), Schopenhauer (Toker), Florensky and Swedenborg (Barabtarlo)—has ever been mentioned by the writer. However, as Nabokov himself, through the figure of Pierre Delalande, connected his metaphysical ideas with the French tradition, it seems reasonable to surmise that some of his early influences could have been of the Gallic origins. I suppose we should trace them mostly in Nabokov's early reading, ignoring the absence of mention or misleading pronouncements of his later years. Thus, Nabokov's notebooks of 1919-20 show his keen interests in the metaphysical works of Maurice Maeterlinck which therefore deserve our closest attention as a possible source of his views in spite of the debunking allusions and puns in *Lolita*. Charles Nodier probably is a similar case and the echoes of his "Smarra" in *Invitation to a Beheading* might well serve as a clue indicating a deeper connection.

—Alexander Dolinin, University of Wisconsin at Madison

TIME AND WEB

As a long-standing student of Nabokov's artistic and philosophical modes, I notice with not dispassionate interest splashes of new admiration and attraction loose at the ephemeral discussion clubs, particularly the *Nabokov-List*, managed by Professor D. Barton Johnson. A recent fad is to mark with cheer every appearance of Nabokov's name in the world-wide press, no matter the connection, as if it were a great honor for his memory and not the other way round.

Yet the most curious things are seldom discussed. It should be of little wonder or interest that Nabokov is mentioned on occasion in this disposable periodical or that, to purposes often ranging from airing one's freshly painted erudition to unknown. It is much more organically and mysteriously apt when he is *not* mentioned in a piece that borrows from him, most likely unintentionally, a method or an instrument or even a specially phrased image. Is this a result of a deep reading that deposited a stock of artware in one's memory which can later automatically release a dose of the stored wealth when one writes things of one's own?

In one of this fall's *New Yorkers* there was a harshly humorous last-page piece by Bruce McCall which reproduces Nabokov's reversed binoculars trick in *Time and Ebb* the present—wistful and charming in VN's time and ebb, ugly and swinish in Mr. McCall's—is made fresh and strange by the approach from a great distance of the mid-21st century (apparently, 2024 in *TE*; 2050, in McCall). Of course, the misty poetry of detail is replaced by the jagged grotesque of bastardized language and morals, but the mechanism and thus the various possibilities it offers are remarkably similar—quite likely, without Mr. McCall's being aware of that. This is not plagiarism, but rather a legitimate use of "shareware" that some of Nabokov's patented devices have become. Another curious coincidence: the narrator of T&E pegs his memory on "randomly" chosen dates in (his) past: 1944 or 45 (tue author's present), "but seasons are utterly blurred when I pick out 1997 (McCall's present) or 2012".

Now, in a later *New Yorker*, I chanced upon this sentence in an essay entitled "Sinatra's Song" by John Lahr:

"In those days, from River Road, now called Sinatra Drive, you could see New York's crenellated skyline, rising like a *bar graph of profits*, and, if you walked to the dock's edge, the ass end of the Statue of Liberty." [my italics].

Except for its silly tail, which sits on Mr. Lahr's typically ill-shaven style much more naturally than the "crenellated" (Nabokov's pet word), the sentence is packed with Nabokov's references and even quotations. One remembers, for example, that in the selfsame *Time and Ebb* there is a Richard Sinatra, famous in projection, who "remained, while he lived, an anonymous 'ranger' dreaming under a Telluride pine or reading his prodigious verse to the squirrels of San Isabel Forest, whereas everybody knew another Sinatra, a minor writer, also of Oriental descent." (Lahr says that 1945 was the popular singer's peak year in terms of sales).

Later in the story there is a marvelous and haunting description of the New York skyscrapers seen from the Central Park in twilight, but Lahr's sentence has more to do with the following passage from Pnin:

"And at last, when the great statue arose from the morning haze where, ready to be ignited by the sun, pale, spellbound buildings stood like those mysterious rectangles of unequal height that you see in bar graph representations of compared percentages (natural resources, the frequency of mirages in different deserts)"...

Here again we see a characteristic change of mode and method of seeing and thinking, but the fact remains that Lahr takes his "profits" out of the very same vessel into which Nabokov's had put his natural resources and mirages.

—Robert Aldwinckle, Halifax, N.S., Canada

SAMUEL IZRAILEVICH: PNIN'S CHARACTER, NABOKOV'S FRIEND

The source used for the present note is a collection of twelve letters (1937-1976) from Nabokov to Samuil Rozov,

recently discovered in Israel. The originals, in Nabokov's hand, are preserved in Rozov's family. The correspondence has not been previously published, except for the three letters translated from Russian by Dmitri Nabokov in *Selected Letters: 1940-1977*. A copy of the letter dated September 4, 1937 (eight pages of this fascinating text are reminiscent of the style in *Speak, Memory*) was used by Brian Boyd in *The Russian Years*. Rozov made this copy for Andrew Field in 1970, after Nabokov asked him to send some material to his first biographer.

There is the following passage in *Pnin* (4: 8): "In reviewing his Russian friends throughout Europe and the United States Timofey Pahlch could easily count at least sixty dear people whom he had intimately "known since say, 1920, and whom he never called anything but Vadim Vadimych, Ivan Hristoforovich, or Samuil Izrailevich as the case may be, and who called him by his name and patronymic with the same effusive sympathy." Gene Barabtarlo, commenting on these lines in his *A Guide to Nabokov's PNIN* (1989), presents evidence that "Vadim Vadimych" is a reference to Nabokov himself. He did not, however, comment on the other two figures. The present note is intended to show the most plausible prototype of Izrailevich, this seldom mentioned character, even more phantasmal than the mysterious Vadim Vadimych.

Samuil Rozov (1900-1976), Nabokov's friend and Tennishev classmate, lived in Israel and maintained correspondence with Nabokov for forty years, up until his death. Thanks to the discovered correspondence between the two, there is now an opportunity to reconstruct their very special friendship. Placed in *Pnin* alongside such names as Samuil Lvovich Shpolyanski, Samuil Izrailevich seems to be simply another fictitious Jewish character, yet he is not. What, then, is he doing in Nabokov's novel, and why did the fastidious author decide to insert him here?

Samuil's father, Israel (Izrail) Rozov, was an active figure in the Zionist movement in St. Petersburg at the

beginning of the century. He played a key role in the establishment of the Russian-language Jewish newspaper *Rassvet* ("The Daybreak"), where Khodasevich's translations of H. N. Bialik's poetry appeared in the early 1920s. The family lived in a large house on Kamenoostrovsky Street in downtown St. Petersburg before the Bolshevik revolution. A representative of the British oil company Shell in Russia, Samuil's father was strongly inclined towards English culture, a trait which he passed on to his son. In the same way Nabokov inherited an Anglophile disposition from his family. Of course, the choice of Tennishev school for a young Jew from a wealthy St. Petersburg family was not accidental. It was here that the boys' paths crossed.

Samuil Rozov, or *Mulya* (as Nabokov called his friend fondly), was invited on several occasions to dine with the Nabokovs. Just as Nabokov's St. Petersburg home was the meeting place for some of the best men among the Russian intelligentsia, so Rozov's house generously opened its doors to local Jewish society. Vladimir Jabotinsky, the well-known Zionist ideologue and Russian writer, made numerous visits.

After he emigrated to Britain in 1917, Rozov studied at the University of London for his engineering degree. There is a famous story about his "lending" Nabokov his Tennishev diploma in order to assist the latter in entering Cambridge (VN to Rozov, September 4, 1937, Boyd, *The Russian Years*, p. 166n). In 1924, the Rozovs moved to Palestine.

Rozov's first known letter to Nabokov is dated 1937. In reply, Nabokov writes: "I should like to know more about you; you wrote too little. I am only about three hours away from you, — I mean, by airplane." In 1945, Nabokov notes in a similar vein, "I cannot tell you how I regret that there is constantly a bluish wall of space between us; as for time, I feel that we have achieved a great victory over it, and enjoy the harmony which connects us and which neither time nor seas can destroy." Nabokov says he is happy that Rozov lives in

Palestine, and not in Europe. He writes that his brother Sergey and Ilya Fondaminsky, editor of *Sovremennye Zapiski*, died in concentration camps, adding that all Germany would have to be "reduced to ashes several times over in order to quench my hatred of it, whenever I think of those who perished in Poland." In February 1946, Nabokov tried to meet Rozov's father in New York but when he arrived at the Savoy Hotel, Israel Rozov had already left.

A reunion became possible only in the 1960s. In one of his letters from that period, Nabokov concludes with these words: "I embrace you, my dear, and want to see you *very* much—in the eternal flourishing of our immutable youth!" Nabokov and Rozov finally saw each other in Zermat in 1962, recognizing one another at once, as if 40 years had not passed. In 1967, after the Six-Day War, Nabokov writes, "I have been with you with all my soul, deeply and anxiously, in the course of the latest events, and I triumph now, saluting the marvelous victory of Israel". In the 1970s, Nabokov regularly informs his friend about his newly published or planned books, which Rozov received directly from the publishers at Nabokov's request. Nabokov's query about Rozov's health at the end of his last letter, written in early 1976, strikes an odd note, for it reached Israel after its addressee had been dead for several weeks.

Rozov's family and friends remember him as an exceptionally kind-hearted and generous person. Nabokov's words from his last letter, "we are heartily enjoying your sunny grapefruits," means that even after his death Rozov managed to bring delight to others in a most literal sense. That *post mortem* exchange is emblematic in the overall context of their unique relationship, which Nabokov himself twice characterized as "a complete victory over time".

As it turns out, Rozov—and here we return to our starting point—already had received another life as a literary character. Combining the memory of the Jews perished in the Holocaust and those who did not, Nabokov

sets up in *Prin* a complicated antinomic structure. Nabokov's insertion of his friend's name into the novel is a significant act, more than merely an expression of respect and love to an old friend, but rather a semi-fictitious documentary marker of the epoch.

—Yuri Zavyalov-Leving, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

SWEDISH ECHOES IN *PALE FIRE*

Since first buying my UK Corgi paperback edition of *Pale Fire* in 1965 I have found myself returning repeatedly to reflect and marvel over its riches, and (as an Anglo-Swede) have increasingly come to note the resonances of Swedish history, life and letters that seem to echo from its recesses. A strangely foreshadowed recent meeting with Priscilla Meyer, author of *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden*, prompts me at her urging to collate some of these reverberations. Her article in *Russian Literature*, February 15th 1997, on the Danes in *Pale Fire*, covers similar ground, and during our conversation she suggested to me several of the starting points for the following comments.

An immediate Swedish link is provided by the figure of Professor Oscar Nattochdag, whose role requires investigations, as he seems the only character uncritically approved of by Charles Kinbote. "The Head of the Department to which I belonged as Prof. Nattochdag—'Netochka' as we called the dear man." He is omitted from the maze-like index, but mentioned in Kinbote's Foreword, and in the notes to lines 376-377, 579 627, and 894. Apparently unmarried, his only discernable trait is a kind of limpness of personality.

He is a "great" man: "that distinguished Zemblan scholar Oscar Nattochdag." Is he another Zembian expatriate, or does Wordsmith College boast an improbable Department of Zemblan Studies, consisting solely of

Professors Nattochdag and Kinbote? "Good Netochka" has a "gentle voice" and nobly but feebly tries to smother Mr (or Professor) Pardon's jocular disparagement of absent Judge Goldsworth, as well as to deflect the attention of a visiting German lecturer (with a Swedish wife) from the "unheard of" resemblance of Kinbote to Charles the Beloved. Kinbote sees Nattochdag "every day in his office", and at dinner with the Shades: "good old Nattochdag (whom I continued to see every day)". Is Nattochdag another alter ego?

Natt och Dag is an unequivocally Swedish name. True, an apparently Danish noblewoman, Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag (a Danished version of the name), "a maiden lady of great wealth, the last of the old illustrious race which carried arms two-parted in black and white, and whose name meant 'Night and Day'", features in the fourth of Isak Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales*. The same tale also contains a character known as "Timon of Assens". Later on, however, in the sixth tale, we meet a Waldemar Nat-og-Dag, who is Swedish. (Waldemar is incidentally the Scandinavian original of the now characteristically Slavic or Russian name, Vladimir; the Swedish, in the person of the Viking, Rurik the Rus, having bequeathed their tribal name to the land of Russia). Waldemar Nat-og-Dag explains his two-parted coat of arms as signifying life everlasting (the white half), and death (the black half).

It must be virtually certain that Vladimir Nabokov had read the tales of Baroness Blixen (Dinesen's married name), and was attracted to the character of Waldemar Nat-og-Dag. However, since he spells his fictive Professor's name Nattochdag, correctly, he might also have delved more deeply into its provenance and perhaps appreciated its uniquely Swedish identity. If he had consulted the *Adelskalendar*, the Swedish Almanac of Nobility, he would have discovered that the house of Natt och Dag claims one of its country's most ancient lineages, established in central Sweden as early as 1280.

The bilingual (English/Danish) Karen Blixen's ac-

count of the Nat-og-Dag coat of arms allows the reader to suppose that the shield might be "party per pale, sable and argent", that is, divided vertically. A vertical line could possibly be thought of as a sheet of glass, against which a waxwing deluded "by the false azure in the windowpane" might crash, leaving its dead body on the sable side, with its mirror-image flying on into life everlasting on the other.

The true tinctures of the Natt Och Dag coat of arms are not black and white (or silver) however, but "or and azure", i.e., gold (or yellow) and blue, "party per fess"; and a fess is a *horizontal* bar. The gold and the blue can be thought of as meeting at a distant horizon, "where the blue of the night meets the gold of the day", or, perhaps, as representing a golden sunset over an azure sea. One of the "three heraldic creatures" in the "armorial bearings of the Zemblan King, Charles the Beloved", (note to lines 1-4), was a "merman azure, crined or", i.e., a blue merman with gold hair. This may be merely coincidental: in a hall of mirrors it is possible to see too much.

From 1471 to 1520 the two-parted blue and yellow/gold coat of arms was prominent in Swedish history, as it was borne by the Sture dynasty of Regents and Lords Protector, the last of whom, Sten Sture the Younger (Natt och Dag), died of his wounds in 1520, resisting the Danish King Kristian II, known in Sweden as the Tyrant. After the massacre of the Stockholm Bloodbath in the same year, in which 72 Swedish noblemen (including at least three of my own ancestors) were parted from their heads on the axeman's block, the arbalest of resistance was taken up by a relative of the Stures, Gustav Vasa, whose colours were also blue and yellow. (*Vasa*, or *vase*, means "sheaf", the charge depicted on Gustav's shield). Within two years Gustav had routed Kristian, was crowned King of Sweden in 1523, and went on to found the remarkable dynasty of Vasa kings. It is likely that the Swedish national flag, a yellow cross on a blue ground, remembers the arms of Natt och Dag.

Nabokov would also have noted, in studying the *Adelskalendar*, that the senior branch of the Natt och Dag family is today said to be domiciled in North America, although no further details of this branch are provided. He might then have referred to a Swedish Dictionary of National Biography, *Svenska Män och Kvinnor*, where (if he did) he could hardly have helped being drawn to the potted biography of a certain (Jakob) Otto Natt och Dag, 1794-1865, whose brooding portrait lours out from the page with dramatic intensity. A longer article on this man's career, by V. Söderberg, can be found in *Historisk Tidskrift* 1910, under the rubric "A Patriotic State Traitor".

The entry in *Svenska Män och Kvinnor* can be briefly summarized. Otto Natt Och Dag was an officer in Sweden's élite infantry regiment, the Svea Life Guard, and served in the Norwegian campaign of 1814. He acquired an "ecstatic" sense of patriotism, based on a passing vogue of semi-hysterical enthusiasm for Sweden's "Gothic" prehistory, and expressed *inter alia* by him in a vituperative criticism of the malign influence of French taste and manners on the morals of the Swedish people. "Poor and proud" he isolated himself from his fellow officers, and dedicated himself, in his own words, to "study and solitude".

In 1810 the last Swedish king of Vasa ancestry, Charles XIII, old and foolish but also childless, had been prevailed upon to accept a French commoner, Jean Bernadotte, Napoleon's most brilliant Marshal, as Crown Prince of Sweden and heir-apparent. Bernadotte, as Charles XIV, acceded to the throne in 1818, and the present King of Sweden, Charles XVI, is his sixth generation direct descendant. Charles is the Swedish royal name *par préférence*, although the first seven or so monarchs of this name, Karl or Carl in Swedish, are vanishingly obscure.

Before the accession of Bernadotte, however, Otto Natt och Dag had been given regal permission, in 1815, to go abroad. He travelled to Berlin, and tendered his

resignation from the Swedish army. From Berlin he followed up this move in 1816 with a publication containing "unheard of" foul abuse of the Crown Prince. In Sweden he was tried for sedition, and condemned to forfeit honour, property and life.

By 1819 Otto had decamped to New Orleans. In time he came to settle in Cincinnati, where he adopted the name Frederic Franks. He founded a Museum of Natural History, and gave public lectures on scientific topics. By 1830 his animosity towards Bernadotte had evaporated, to be replaced by feelings of goodwill, and he took a lively interest in the progress of his native land. In 1835 he was granted amnesty to travel to Sweden, although, presumably, not pardoned. In fact he never returned, but remained in the USA, where he married. It is possible that he has descendants living there now under the name of Franks, and that his is the unrecorded "senior branch" mentioned in the *Adelskalendar*, a supposition which could be verified, or otherwise, by the *Riddarhus* in Stockholm.

The points of contact between this true story and the shape-shifting characters of *Pale Fire*, as well as the now well-documented life of its protean author, seem worth examining.

Both the real Lieutenant Jakob Otto Natt och Dag and the fictional Waldemar Nat-og-Dag may reasonably be assumed to be in some sense kin to Nabokov's Professor Oscar Nattochdag. Why Oscar? In Sweden there have been two Bernadotte dynasty kings named Oscar; Oscar I, reigned 1844-1859, and Oscar II, reigned 1872-1907. In Dinesen's sixth *Gothic Tale* a Swedish Baron Guildenstern is sent abroad by a Prince Oscar, an event precisely dated to 1844, suggesting that the Prince referred to is about to become King Oscar I. (Guildenstern is the Anglicized or *Hamlet* version of an aristocratic family name known in Denmark since 1310 and in Sweden since before 1450).

The year before Oscar I's demise, in 1858, the three major Scandinavian cities, Copenhagen, Christiania (Oslo)

and Stockholm, and later, Berlin, were visited by a prominent Dublin surgeon, William Wilde, and his wife Jane. A younger son of the Swedish king, also named Oscar (who twenty years later became Oscar II), was subsequently strongly rumoured in Dublin to have been the natural father of Jane Wilde's celebrated son. This would have made Oscar Wilde the half-brother of Gustav V, King of Sweden, who reigned 1907-1950. Since the infant Wilde had been born in 1854, however, it seems more likely that his name had been suggested by a legendary 3rd century Gaelic hero, Oscar, son of Oisín (or Ossian), the subject of a poem composed in Dublin in the early 1850s. The matter is discussed in *The Wildes of Merrion Square*, by Patrick Byrne, published London and New York, 1953.

Oscar Wilde is said by Frank Harris to have disconcerted an official at the New York Customs House with the remark "I have nothing to declare except my genius", which, but for its arrogance, might have been uttered either by the destitute Nabokov, or, perhaps, the equally bereft Otto Natt och Dag. Otto's brief exile in Berlin parallels Nabokov's longer years (1922-37) in the same city.

The name Otto appear twice in different forms in *Pale Fire*; in the note to line 71, indexed under "Otar, Count, heterosexual man of fashion and Zemblan patriot" and (note to line 238) as Ohthere, the historical "old sea-captain" (there are other scattered hints that Nabokov had been reading Longfellow), transformed in Kinbote's account of Shade's "offensive anecdote" to a "Northern bard", whose relevance is fully discussed by Priscilla Meyer in *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden*. Oddly enough, the rare English version, Otho, was the name of Oscar Wilde's brother-in-law, Otho Holland Lloyd. Ohthere is another of the many characters, real and imaginary, who typify the westward drift examined in Nabokov's oeuvre.

Another parallel between Nabokov and Otto Natt och Dag is provided by Otto's later New World academic

pursuits in natural history, and, as Priscilla pointed out, it might be rewarding to find out if his Cincinnati museum ever contained an exhibition of lepidoptera. She remarks in *Sailor* (p. 176) that "Throughout *Pale Fire*, Nabokov creates pairings that establish a mirroring relationship between the Eastern and Western hemispheres." The pairing here is between the duplicated real-life experiences of these two displaced aristocrats.

The discarded first name of Otto Natt och Dag was Jakob, which sets up a range of other, more heraldically sinister (as night to day, or black to white), *Doppelgänger* connotations; and also suggests, which may anyway be implicit throughout the texture of *Pale Fire* (since he is merely a figment of Kinbote's tortured imagination), that Jakob Gradus is only yet another veiled alter ego, or slouching id. If we look up "*Gradus, Jakob*," in Kinbote's riddling index, we are guided, via the note to line 596 ("his name in a variant"), to the note to line 627, where we discover an account of an "Old Believer" who "migrated ... to Seattle and begot a son who eventually changed his name to Blue and married ...". This note ends with the mention of "that distinguished Zemblan scholar Oscar Nattochdag".

It is worth noting, but scarcely worth analyzing, a few other fleeting fancied links with matters Swedish, such as the homosexuality and eccentricities of tennis-playing King Gustav V, pre-deceased by his grandson and heir at one remove in a (commercial) air disaster; the similarity of some of the Zemblan place-names to Swedish towns (Odevalla - Uddevalla) and natural features; and the refracted resemblance of Swedish to the Zemblan language, which is no doubt an idiosyncratic amalgam of at least half a dozen Germanic and Slavic tongues. It is a curious fact, particularly in the context of Priscilla Meyer's perception of *Pale Fire* as "Nabokov's exploration of the history, literature, natural evolution, and language of the North over the last thousand years," that this evolution (which I would like to extend back a further thousand years) can arguably be said to have had its misty begin-

nings in central Sweden. In Old Norse sources even Russia itself is on occasion referred to as Greater Sweden.

Mary McCarthy described *Pale Fire* as a chess problem. It may be a problem without solution. Peering into the bottomless depths of *Pale Fire*, and the recession into infinity of the interconnected historical and literary images that self-reflect through its pages, can induce a sensation resembling nothing so much as the vertigo that assails the devotee pondering the mental abyss that is the game of chess, the paradigm of Nabokov's artistry. I am indebted to Professor Meyer's most stimulating and enjoyable study of *Pale Fire* for placing so much of this artistry within my grasp.

—Charles Harrison Wallace, London

BURGESS AND THE BUTTERFLY

It is widely known that lepidoptera is an inextricable part of Nabokov's literary, scientific, and apolaustic life; to such an extent, in fact, that whenever a butterfly flutters across this line or that page of some writer my initial reaction is the feeling that the butterfly has been "set loose in an alien zone, at the wrong altitude, among an unfamiliar flora" (SPEAK, MEMORY 251). Of course, the occurrence of butterflies in any writer's fiction may serve some purpose, but that is not my concern here. Rather, I am interested in those cases where butterflies flutter in a typically Nabokovian manner and context. A striking instance of such meta-nabokovian lepidopterography is to be found in a novel by the late Anthony Burgess. Before revealing the relevant passage, some preliminary remarks seem appropriate.

Burgess admired VN, and the latter's sporadic comments on the former were favorable. One is especially charmed by VN enjoying THE MALAYAN TRILOGY (Boyd II, 491; cf. Burgess, YOU'VE HAD YOUR TIME, 188,

London 1990). I do not claim to have read all of AB's vast oeuvre, but, at this stage, it is safe to state that AB mentions VN (only) twice in his fiction: see THE ENDERBY TRILOGY, pp. 361 ("Outside Mr. Enderby") and 466 ("Clockwork Testament"), Penguin edition. In AB's magnum opus EARTHLY POWERS (the Hutchinson and Penguin editions share the same pagination, 1980, 1981, respectively) the narrator, Toomey, looks across the bay at Alcatraz and has a visitation of the kind he would invent for his novels but which his editors considered naively symbolic and sentimental: "A butterfly rested a moment on my right hand and, though the air was most enough, sipped at my sweat [...] The wings, shuddering minimally in the spring breeze from the sea, were decorated with the Greek phi. I was being told that everything was all right, there was no death and so on." (EP 285). The first thing that comes to mind is PALE FIRE: the butterfly alighting on Shade's sleeve a few minutes before his violent death, p. 290 (commentary to ll.993-995). That butterflies sip human sweat we already know from THE GIFT (Vintage 1991, p. 332). In SPEAK, MEMORY, VN writes, "A bumblebee has entered the room and bumps against the ceiling. Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die," (p. 77). We read in ADA, "a dead and dry hummingbird moth lay on the window ledges of the lavatory. Thank goodness, symbols did not exist either in dreams or in the life in between," (510). However, some hundred pages before, on his way to a duel, Van spots a butterfly, "and with utter certainty Van knew that he had only a few minutes to live" (310).

—Abdellah Bouazza, The Netherlands.

"SIGNS AND SYMBOLS" AS SYMBOLS AND SIGNS

by Vladimir Mylnikov

Nabokov's short story "Signs and Symbols" can be read as a paradigm of the writer's poetics. Extremely laconic, the piece is marked by an incredible depth of meanings, as well as a striking delicacy regarding human feelings and emotions. These two aspects marvelously complement one another. The story is extraordinarily lyrical, tender, and poetic — characteristics all the more impressive given the relative absence of rich metaphors and verbal interplay. The story's voice is appropriately calm, meditative, and in a somewhat minor key in accord with its subject matter and theme. But having read (or, better, reread) it, one senses that death does not exist in terms of objective reality: "Death is but a matter of style," the style in which destiny lays out human lives.

The major theme of the story is man's fate and the modalities of its realization. The theme is developed at different levels: biographical, subtextual, textual, and semantic. The levels interweave to achieve perfect balance and harmony. The biographical level is based upon a tragic event, the death of Nabokov's father on March 28th, 1922. The level of literary allusion is connected with Pushkin's tale, "The Queen of Spades." The story's characters and plot constitute the textual level, while the semantic level is the summation of all these levels.

The key is the story's title "Signs and Symbols" These concepts help the reader understand what is going on. At the same time, the ontological status of the "signs," as well as the "symbols," depends entirely upon our own perspective. Any event can be viewed as either a symbol or a sign, but the difference between the two is important. If the symbol, as a phenomenon, is connected to a person's perception, then the sign deals mostly with the message that destiny is sending us. Destiny speaks to us

in the language of signs but we often understand the messages by "translating" them into the language of symbols. But this does not mean that we cannot "read" them correctly. Generally, a single fact can be read as a sign or a symbol because its reality is encoded into signals which can represent the sign or, vice-versa, the symbol. It is the directional vector (to or from the viewer) that creates these phenomena. The problem with human perception is that we often mix or substitute signs for symbols and vice-versa. Real understanding of phenomenological reality, or even a step toward it, can be achieved only when we try to perceive the meaning of the sign without restricting ourselves to the superficial significance of the symbol. It does not, of course, mean that genuine comprehension of the sign automatically entails the correct solution. The sign is only an instrument, a tool, that helps us to decipher the message and to perceive its meaning through an interpretation. In its turn, the interpretation depends upon our aim and intentions.

The telephone is one of "Signs and Symbols"'s most important thematic focal points. Its function and roles highlight the story's central theme — Destiny. It integrates all of the tale's levels. The phone can be read as a metaphor that combines two realities — Space and Time. It is the instrument of their connection. The phone, as a personage in the narrative, delivers a message that, in a sense, determines the story's textual meaning. It creates the atmosphere of mystery and suspense. It is not out of place, I think, to point out that the telephone has an analogous functional and ontological status in *Pale Fire* where its role is still broader, including such themes as television and electricity which are also connected with the theme of destiny and death.

The third and last phone call is indeed ominous since the developing pattern bodes ill for the old couple: their unsuccessful visit to the hospital, the old man's negligence over his keys, his insomnia and foreboding of death, as well as still other small intimations. Brian

Boyd's question "Is it the sanitarium this time, calling to say their son has succeeded in killing himself," is reasonable, if perhaps rhetorical. We can, I think, provide an answer but only if we will rely on semantic rather than textual reality: in other words, we must read the phone call as a sign and not as a symbol. On the textual level there is no answer, but on the level of the sign, there is. It is not the hospital calling.

Telephone calls and telephones in general hold, as we know, great significance for Nabokov. First, because of the grim news that he and his mother received on the 28th of March, 1922. (This is perhaps why Nabokov disliked phone calls in general.) That day was, according to Nabokov himself, the most tragic in his life. Another parallel between biography and story is that the events take place in spring time. The young man in "Signs and Symbols" is, like Nabokov at the time of his father's death, twenty two. (I disagree with Boyd's who thinks he is a year younger. These parallels are, of course, conventionalities and do not imply exact verbal or even textual compliance. In other words, it is incorrect to read signs as symbols by equating them. It is wrong first of all because it equates the present and the past and, in the case at hand, incorrectly substitutes present for past.

Pale Fire provides a similar thematic and compositional theme: the "death" of John Shades' twenty-two-year-old daughter, Hazel; the spring setting (March), and, finally, a telephone call. These all correspond to the facts of "Signs and Symbols." Thus from a biographical point of view, it is tempting to assume that the final telephone call WAS from the sanitarium. But first, a question: How did Nabokov respond to his father's death? Did he actually believe he was dead? No. His father's death does not exist in his poetical reality and probably not in his mental life. Perhaps the best answer is in Nabokov's poem "Easter" which was dedicated to his father's death. Just after the event, Nabokov wrote: "But if all the brooks sing anew of miracle,...then you are in that song, you are in that gleam, you are alive." This view is found through-

out Nabokov's life and works. It is even proleptic: Vera Nabokov was to die at Easter tide. Nabokov's genius transformed the fatal event into a different reality. On that fatal day, Destiny sent Vladimir and his mother a message, but Nabokov recreated the symbol as a sign.

"Signs and Symbols" is a story, a text, and the decipherment of the final phone call should not be carried out as it was on the biographical level. It is wrong to read past as present because we need not observe the established ordering of real or textual realities. This is why I would argue that the phone call does not come from the hospital.

The card theme provides another clue that Nabokov drew the story's events from those of March 28th. Nabokov's diary records that on that evening, he was reading a small volume of Blok's poetry while his mother was laying out a game of patience. "Signs and Symbols" also has its card scene. Just before the first phone call, the young man's mother picks up three cards that have fallen from the sofa to the floor. They are the knave of hearts, the nine and ace of spades. The literary illusion is unmistakable. The three cards and their sequence is identical with those given to Pushkin's Chekalinsky by the old Countess, "the Queen of Spades." Chekalinsky wins, but Hermann who has forced the secret from the Countess and caused her death, loses when the spade ace on which he has staked all of his winnings is replaced by the fateful queen of spades. Herman goes mad. Nabokov's "Signs and Symbols" shares the three themes of Pushkin's "Queen of Spades": cards, madness, and destiny. The same elements occur in Nabokov's story, but the role of cause and effect is quite different. The problem is to read the elements correctly, to avoid confusing sign with symbols. In Nabokov's view, it is clear that Herman went mad because he took a sign as a symbol. He wanted to "unlock" the real world with the wrong key. He simplified reality by reducing it to a secret code. In Nabokov's story the boy's madness, called "referential mania" by psychiatrist Herman (!) Brink, offers the

reverse point of view. The young man, or more accurately, his mind, is in the external world and he wants only to flee from it. Suicide is his way out. We can assume he is finally successful, but, again, there is no textual proof. The story's semantic level tends to point to a different conclusion.

Death for Nabokov was a mask over reality, a false sign. The human mind can not fully decipher this code without creating new terms for realities. There is presumably only one power that can do so — Destiny. But Destiny sends us only signs which we tend to convert (and often mis-convert) into symbols. Herman's madness is caused by his need to get in touch with the outerworld and he ultimately finds atonement. His obsession causes the death of the Countess and this is yet another cause of his madness. The textual terms in "Signs and Symbols" apply to the other interpretation of his madness. His "referential mania" may be understood as a form of genius, reading reality as signs without confusing them with symbols. But Nabokov's character lacks creativity and even, to some extent, personality. He lives in a totally different reality. Hence "Clouds in the staring sky transmit to one another, by means of slow SIGNS (my emphasis — VM), incredibly detailed information regarding him. His inmost thoughts are discussed at nightfall, in manual alphabet, by darkly gesticulating trees. Pebbles or stains or sun flecks form patterns representing in some awful way messages, which he must intercept. Everything is a cipher and of everything he is the theme."

John Shade creates a similar poetic expression of existence in his poem "Pale Fire." Canto Two opens:

There was a time in my demented youth
When somehow I suspected that the truth
About survival after death was known
to every human being: I alone
Knew nothing, and a great conspiracy
Of books and people hid the truth from me.

There was the day when I began to doubt
Man's sanity: How could he live without
Knowing for sure what dawn, what death, what doom
Awaited consciousness beyond the tomb?

Finally I would like to point out that here again we find three thematically connected themes — death, doom, and consciousness. They are framed by the sign that is the symbol in question.