

THE NABOKOVIAN

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

Editor: Stephen Jan Parker
Assistant to the Editor: Jonathan Perkins

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

Subscriptions: individuals, \$15 per year; institutions, \$20 per year. For surface postage outside the USA add \$5. For airmail postage to Europe, add \$9; to other destinations, add \$11. Back issues: individuals, \$10; institutions, \$15; add \$4.50 for airmail.

Issues #1, 5, 7, 11, 14 are available only in photocopy; #17, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33 are out of print. Checks should be made payable to the Vladimir Nabokov Society.

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

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

THE NABOKOVIAN

Number 40

Spring 1998

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| News by Stephen Jan Parker | 3 |
| Two Poems by Vladimir Nabokov translations by Dmitri Nabokov | 8 |
| Annotations & Queries by Gennady Barabtarlo Contributors: Seiji Kurata, Sam Schuman, Andrew Wise, Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts, Gerard de Vries, Stephen Blackwell | 14 |
| A Letter to Edward C. Sampson by Vladimir Nabokov | 40 |
| A Dozen Notes to Nabokov's Short Stories by Maxim Shrayer | 42 |
| Annotations to <i>Ada</i> : Part I Chapter 11 by Brian Boyd | 64 |
| Abstracts from the Nabokov Society Session, 1997 MLA Convention: D. Barton Johnson, Cary Henson, Barbara Burkhardt, Gavriel Shapiro | 72 |

NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

Twenty years. Forty issues. *The Nabokovian* continues to serve its stated purpose — to report and stimulate Nabokov scholarship, and create a link between Nabokov scholars in the USA and abroad. Two decades of loyal readership has attested to our success. Two decades of collaborative effort and a regular stream of submissions has provided our rich content. This fortieth number is suitably illustrative: on the following pages we feature news, several previously unpublished items, and a wide-ranging array of engaging and fascinating annotations, notes, and abstracts from Nabokovians around the world.

*

Conference Activities

New England Slavic Conference, Tufts University, March 27, 1998: Panel, "Recent Studies of Nabokov," chaired by Dale Peterson. Papers by Brian Ewing, "Love, Art and the Otherworld in 'Spring in Fialta' and *The Gift*"; Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, "Folklore and Erotic Fantasy in 'A Nursery Tale'"; Maxim Shrayar, "The Jewish Theme in Nabokov's English Works."

British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies, Cambridge, England, April 5, 1998: Chair Peter Barta. Papers by Anat Ben-Amos, "The Estrangement of Exile: VN's Novel *Podvig*"; Stephen Blackwell, "Nabokov and Aikhenwald."

American Literature Association Conference, San Diego, May 28-30, 1998: Panel, "Rereading Nabokov: Representation, Revelation, and Politics," chaired by D. Lynne Walker. Papers: Marilyn Edelstein, "Ethics, Representation, and 'Reality': Reading and Filming *Lolita*"; Robert

Attenweiler, "My work is finished. My poet is dead.": Organization and Revelation in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*"; Simon Stow, "The Return of Charles Xavier Vseslav or Who are These Political Theorists, And Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About Nabokov?"

Midwest Modern Language Association Conference, St. Louis, November 5-7, 1998: Panel, "The Nabokov Effect." The panel will explore the rich legacy VN has left American literature.

MLA National Convention, San Francisco, December 1998: Panel, "Nabokov's Figures of Reading," chaired by Stephen Blackwell. Papers will explore aspects of the theme or practice of reading in VN's fiction.

*

Odds and Ends

— Since last reported, the *Lolita* film premiered in Germany, France, and Russia and was approved for uncut showing even in straightlaced Ireland. In the USA, though it received favorable reviews in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The NY Times* no distributor could be found. On May 6 Reuters announced that Showtime and the Sundance Channel had picked up the film for cable television, and that *Lolita* will be aired for the first time in August 1998. Showtime might subsequently distribute the movie in US theaters.

— The Nabokov manor at Rozhdestveno, fifty miles outside of St. Petersburg, which was severely damaged by fire several years ago, is now well on its way to full restoration. Authorities have also announced their intention to rebuild the Nabokov manor at Vyra, of which only the basement and foundations remain.

— Centenary events are being planned in the USA (Cornell University, Mercantile Library of New York, the New York Public Library), Russia (St. Petersburg, Mos-

cow), England (London, Cambridge), France (Paris), Germany (countrywide), Switzerland (Montreux, Lausanne),

*

International Vladimir Nabokov Society President's Report 1997

Due to the sparse turnout of IVNS Executive Committee members at the 1997 MLA/AATSEEL Conventions in Toronto, the Society's Business Meeting was conducted by e-mail in early January 1998.

1. Ellen Pifer was installed as President of the Society for 1998-1999. Galya Diment was elected to the office of Vice-President.

2. The following reports were submitted.

A. Secretary/Treasurer Steve Parker submitted the membership and financial reports, and the current status of *The Nabokovian*: At present there are 135 individual members/subscribers from the USA and 70 from abroad, as well as 72 institutional subscribers from the USA and 20 from abroad. Total income in 1996 was \$4,355; total expenditures were \$5,890 (\$1,000 of which went to purchase back issues of *Nabokov Studies*, as noted in last year's report). The Society balance at the end of the year was \$1,090.

B. Zoran Kuzmanovich, editor of *Nabokov Studies*, reported on the journal: At present there are 87 individual and 19 institutional subscribers. Another reminder to the membership to have their libraries purchase NS is in order. The publication continues to run at a deficit. About 200 subscriptions per year is the necessary minimum to keep the publication afloat.

C. Jeff Edmunds reported on the continued expansion of ZEMBLA, the Nabokov Web site: Since April 1996 the site has received well over 70,000 hits and has been very favorably reviewed. It is listed in Lycos's Top 5% of Web Sites, and Luckman Interactive awarded it four stars. 1997 has seen the addition of bibliographic

materials, illustrated book excerpts, photographs, critical essays, and the presentation of Tom Bolt's "Dark Ice," a 1001-line poem modelled after "Pale Fire."

D. Don Johnson spoke about NABOKV-L, the Nabokov Electronic Discussion Forum.

3. New Business:

A. Steve Parker raised the possible implications for the Society in the event of a split in meeting times/places of MLA and AATSEEL. It was agreed to hold off action until the situation becomes clearer.

B. Susan Sweeney proposed that the Society explore ways and means of promoting the teaching of Nabokov. Toward this end a committee was formed and charged with reporting to the President and the Board by June 30, 1998. The committee is chaired by Sam Schuman with Susan Sweeney and Jeff Edmunds as members. A "teaching VN" conference and the utilization of ZEMBLA are two possibilities to be explored.

C. Zoran Kuzmanovich raised the issue of the possible conversion of *Nabokov Studies* from print to digital format. After extended discussion, the consensus was that continued paper publication is preferable, although financial considerations will ultimately decide the matter. Here too, a committee was established to make recommendations to the Board by June 20, 1998. The Chair is John Burt Foster and Zoran Kuzmanovich and Jeff Edmunds are members.

Nabokovians:

1997 has been a busy year for the Society. I have not had time to gather any real statistics but an imposing number of VN papers were presented at MLA (9), AATSEEL (7), and AAASS (3). Doubtless, several others were presented at other meetings. I'm hoping to gather some stats on VN-related publications that I'll pass on to you when available.

At the risk of sounding rhetorical (which, as you know, is not my nature), I would like to remark two impending events of note. Gavriel Shapiro's Cornell Conference in September 1998 inaugurates a round of Nabokovian events connected with the Centenary. This will be followed by Jane Grayson's London/Cambridge shindig, and there will doubtless be a number of meetings in Petersburg and Western Europe. We shall, I imagine, be seeing a good deal of each other in the next two years.

The second event is one that also has a substantial effect upon all of our lives. The Vladimir Nabokov Society marks its 20th Anniversary in 1998. While there are several people to be thanked for the initiation and growth of the Society, Steve Parker and his *Nabokovian* have provided the impetus and continuing dedication that has made the Society a success. Speaking personally, I would probably not have been drawn into the Nabokovian world, had it not been for *The Nabokovian*. My thanks to Steve.

Ellen Pifer, who served valiantly as Vice President and Conference Coordinator, is now the new President of the Society, and Galya Diment, the new Vice President. My best wishes to both. And my thanks to all of you who have helped me and the Society in one way or another during the last two years.

D. Barton Johnson

*

Please note the new rates, listed on the inside cover of this issue, that go into effect for 1999 subscriptions/memberships. Escalating costs of printing and postage have made these modest increases necessary.

*

Our thanks to Mr. Jonathan Perkins for serving so ably as Assistant to the Editor for this issue, and to Ms. Paula Courtney for nearly two decades of irreplaceable assistance.

TWO POEMS

(1929)

I have no need, for my nocturnal travels,
of ships, I have no need of trains.
The moon's above the checkerboard-like garden.
The window's open. I'm all set.

And with habitual silence — like a tomcat,
at night over a fence — across
the border streamlet, passportless, my shadow
leaps to the other, Russian, bank.

Mysterious, invulnerable, weightless,
I glide across successive walls,
and at the moonlight, the dream rushing past him,
the border guard takes aim in vain.

I fly across the meadows, dance through forests —
and who will know that there exists
in this vast country but a single living,
a single happy citizen.

Along the lengthy quay the Neva shimmers.
All's still. A tardy passer-by
my shadow in a lonely square encounters
and curses his own fantasy.

Для странствия ночного мне не надо
ни кораблей, ни поездов.
Стоит луна над шашечницей сада.
Окно открыто. Я готов.

И прыгает с беззвучностью привычной,
как ночью кот через плетень,
на русский берег речки пограничной
моя беспаспортная тень.

Таинственно, легко, неуязвимо
ложусь на стены чередой,
и в лунный свет, и в сон, бегущий мимо,
напрасно метит часовой.

Лечу лугами, по лесу танцую —
и кто поймет, что есть один,
один живой на всю страну большую,
один счастливый гражданин.

Вот блеск Невы вдоль набережной длинной.
Все тихо. Поздний пешеход,
встречая тень среди площади пустынной,
воображение клянет.

Now I approach an unfamiliar building,
the place alone I recognize. . . .
There, in the darkened rooms, everything's altered,
and everything upsets my shade.

There, children sleep. Above the pillow's corner
I stoop, and they begin to dream
about the toys that, long ago, I played with,
about my ships, about my trains.

Vladimir Nabokov
Translated by Dmitri Nabokov

© Copyright 1998 by the estate of Vladimir Nabokov

Я подхожу к неведомому дому,
я только место узнаю. . .
Там, в темных комнатах, все по-другому
и все волнует тень мою.

Там дети спят. Над уголком подушки
я наклоняюсь, и тогда
им снятся прежние мои игрушки,
и корабли, и поезда.

(9 April 1967)

Forty-three years, forty-four years maybe,
had elapsed since I recalled you last:
then, with neither reason nor transition,
there you were, dream caller from the past.

I, to whom is, nowadays, repugnant
every detail of that bygone life,
felt that some insinuating, wilful
bawd had prearranged a tryst with you.

But, although the same guitar you fingered,
sang again "I was a newlywed. . . ,"
you weren't here to rend me with old anguish,
only to announce that you were dead.

Vladimir Nabokov

Translated by Dmitri Nabokov

© Copyright 1998 by the estate of Vladimir Nabokov

Сорок три или четыре года
ты уже не вспоминалась мне:
вдруг, без повода, без перехода,
посетила ты меня во сне.

Мне, которому претит сегодня
каждая подробность жизни той,
самовольно вкрадчивая сводня
встречу приготовила с тобой.

Но хотя, опять возьмись с гитарой,
ты опять "молодушкой была",
не терзать взялась ты мукой старой,
а лишь рассказать, что умерла.

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.]

ICICLES IN "THE VANE SISTERS"

In the last paragraph of "The Vane Sisters" the reader learns that Cynthia Vane has used the icicles to lead the protagonist to meet D. The "icicles" are therefore the key to solving the mystery of the story. Yet there has been no proposition advanced that would explain why Nabokov chose "icicles" in particular. My theory is that Nabokov settled on the word because it afforded him a punning possibility.

If we divide the word "icicles" in two, we realize that it consists of two French words, *ici* and *cles*. It sounds as if Nabokov were saying to the reader: "Here are the keys, if you please." The pun on "icicles" may be reinforced by the name of the road to which the icicles lead the protagonist. "Kelly Road" contains a "key" as the word icicles does, and the two ll's at the center may be taken

as the icicles' iconic representation.

That a pun is made on French words seems to be contextually appropriate because French plays an important role in the story. The protagonist is a teacher of French literature, and at one point he makes a fuss over some grammatical mistakes and a careless choice of words by Sybil Vane in her examination paper. In this episode Nabokov seems to be suggesting that the reader should also pay closer attention to Nabokov's own use of French in the story.

— Seiji Kurata, University of California, Berkeley

CURIOUS CONJUNCTIONS IN NABOKOV'S COLLECTED STORIES

Since we always suspect a web of sense lurking beneath any apparent Nabokovian "coincidence," I was struck by what seemed an accidental curiosity in the ordering of the works in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*. Dmitri Nabokov, as editor, affirms the chronological arrangement of the stories, and (given the eccentricities of publication and composition) this seems absolutely accurate.

What struck me was the way that often the conclusion of one story fit exactly into the opening of the next piece. I found this in about a dozen cases, in the 52 stories, a level of incidence which seems rather high to be random.

Without the burden of excessive documentation, let me cite just a few of the more obvious examples (in each case, of course, these are stories published contiguously):

1. "Russian Spoken Here" ends with a window "boarded up to perfection;" the next story, "Sounds," starts "It was necessary to shut the window."

2. The opening words of "Revenge" are "Ostend, the stone wharf, the gray strand. . . ." The previous story, "Seaport" concludes on an "ancient wharf."

3. At the end of "Beneficence" a streetcar clangs past. Immediately thereafter, at the beginning of "Details of a Sunset," "The last streetcar was disappearing. . . ."

4. The opening sentence of "A Dashing Fellow" begins "Our suitcase is carefully embellished with bright-colored stickers. . . ." The preceding story, "The Aurelian" has, in its last sentence, a "checkered suitcase."

I don't want to make too much of this: there is the danger of the overly zealous reader imitating the magic of the master, reaching into the top hat, and pulling out. . . the hatband. Still, these transitions seem, if not really remarkable, at least worth remarking.

— Sam Schuman, University of Minnesota, Morris

[I should think they are remarkable indeed. These links seem to correlate with the closed-circuit compositions of VN's novels, and somehow lend support to Brodsky's paradoxical view, recently published, that all of Nabokov's writing is, as it were, rhymed throughout, or even is "one big rhyme". Who knows whether VN did not, at one time, want to string consecutive stories together by this trick? And if it is coincidence, it is too uncanny to be shrugged off. GB]

A NOTE ON THE NAME "HUMBERT"

While conducting research on the life and political career of Aleksander Lednicki, I came across a reference to a famous scandal in France involving a scam artist by the name of Therese Humbert, whose exploits were front page news in Paris and London in 1902-3 (On the

Humbert affair, see Gilbert Guilleminault and Yvonne Singer-Lecocq, *La France des gogos: Trois siecles de scandales financiers*, Paris, Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1975; and T.P. O'Connor, *The Phantom Millions: The Story of the Great French Fraud*, Bristol, J.W. Arrowsmith, 1902). Even in Russia the name Humbert was associated with disgrace, according to the memoirs of Waclaw Lednicki (1891-1967). The son of the Polish lawyer and activist Aleksander Lednicki, Waclaw taught at numerous universities throughout Europe and the United States, and from 1944-62 he served as Professor of Slavic Studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

Waclaw Lednicki recalls that he had a Swiss governess by the name of Olga Humbert-Droz, who lived in the Lednicki household in Moscow for six years around the turn of the century. Lednicki writes that "at that time a sensational trial of some Humberts was taking place in Europe, and I remember that my father's foster-son, Ciunio Kontrym [who was a few years older than Waclaw], incessantly harassed her on this matter, asking about her familial connection with the heroes of the scandal. Of course I do not know what all the talk was about, but I remember the allusions" (W. Lednicki, *Pamietniki*, London, B. Swiderski, 1963-7, vol. 1, p. 37).

The elder Lednicki and VDN knew each other quite well, serving together on the Central Committee of the Kadet Party from its origins until 1916. During that period, Nabokov frequently attended meetings hosted by Lednicki concerning the Polish question. Both also served in the Provisional Government: Nabokov as Administrative Secretary and Lednicki as President of the Liquidation Commission, a body formed to oversee severing administrative and legal ties between Russia and Poland.

— Andrew K. Wise, Daemen College, New York

THE POLICE DEPARTMENT OF MY SOUL:
ALEKSANDR BLOK IN INVITATION TO A BEHEADING

Echoes of Aleksandr Blok's play *The Fairground Booth* in Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* (IB) — in particular, the removal of the scenery in the finale, jocular in the play and violent in the novel — were noted by A. Dolinin (1991). Blok's presence in the novel in fact goes far beyond echoes from his poetry and plays. The very figure of Cincinnatus C., his writing and his love, are to a large degree fashioned after A. Blok or rather a certain perception of him. There are in the novel reflections of Blok's poetry, too, but Cincinnatus's figure is drawn according to the image that arises from the poet's prose — articles, diaries, notebooks, letters — and also from the memoirs about him. Soon after Blok's death in 1921, these materials started being published. In 1922, remembrances by Blok's aunt M.A. Beketov, by his friend A. Belyi and others came out; in 1928, Blok's diaries; in 1930, notebooks; during the decade, letters, and so on. A figure of a poet, singular, childish, detached, tormented by the middlebrow life around him and by unrequited love for his own wife, began emerging from these materials. The figure was a *sui generis* mirror for a writer who acutely felt his own alienation among the literary brethren and incompatibility with the demands the émigré society made on him, while he had his own reckoning with life. A lyrical writer in essence and a novelist by talent and choice, Nabokov needed to express himself through protagonists markedly different from himself, which afforded him distance, the main advantage of a novelist. Blok the man was a very attractive subject, for very compelling reasons. In his previous incarnation as a poet Nabokov was under the strongest influence of Blok, which, however, got worn out by the time he turned to novel writing. Blok the man was a redeeming subject both in regard to Blok the poet and to Nabokov's own fears and idiosyncrasies. We are talking, of course, not about portrayal, but a very Nabokovian usage of essential image

and eloquent detail.

Cincinnatus C., sitting in his prison cell and listening to the sounds of digging, is of two minds as to what it means, whether the tunneling efforts are intended to deliver him from imprisonment or whether this activity belongs to a "creature, sniffing, wheezing, with flattened muzzle, and again digging in frenzy, like a hound tunneling his way to a badger" (140). We seem to find the key to this image in the poet Osip Mandelshtam's article "The Badger's Hole (A. Blok: 7 August 1921 — 7 August 1922)," published in the magazine *Rossia*, no. 1, 1922, and then in his book *On Poetry* in 1928. In it, Blok is compared to a badger in his hole. This is a singular image. Mandelshtam speaks of the badger's instinct to dig two tunnels from his hole. "Blok is a badger." The article is focused on the poet and his understanding of his time. Blok's own view was most formulaically set forth in his article "Time That Got out of Joint" ("Bezvremen'e," 1906). Here, the dominant image of time is a she-spider in whose body sits a human being "swallowed alive by her" (Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*: 5. 68); further, "the fat she-spider weaves the web of concupiscence" (70). In Nabokov's novel, the image is personified. The most prominent feature of Cincinnatus's wife Marthe is lasciviousness. Cincinnatus C. shares his cell with a spider, and the spider is constantly compared to Marthe: in his cell, Cincinnatus sees "the velvet spider, somehow resembling Marthe" (32); "Up above, where the sloping window recess began, the well-nourished black beastie had found points of support for a first-rate web with the same resourcefulness as Marthe displayed when she would find, in what seemed the most unsuitable corner, a place and a method of hanging out laundry to dry" (119), and so on. Marthe is the embodiment of the carnal, fleshly, material life shorn of spirituality; she is the incarnation of all that imprisons spirit. In a Notebook (no. 56), Blok wrote: "The scum behind the wall is perceptibly growing more insolent — plays exercises from dawn till dusk, turning my room into a torture chamber.

All lacking vitality go mad; all spiderlike, carnal, dirty turns vampirish (as that behind the wall)" (*Zapisnye knizhki*: 200). And the spider is an "official friend of the jailed" (13), as we learn early in the novel. Describing his spider, Blok turns to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: "She-spider, was growing on an unprecedented scale: *cozy interieur* became something like Dostoevsky's 'eternity', like a rural bath-hatch with spiders in the corners" (Blok 5.67). The images of life time as a prison run throughout Nabokov's entire *oeuvre*.

Blok's article "Time That Got out of Joint" ends with the image of quagmire roamed in circles by a horseman. He is lost, and above him, from the green sky, a huge Nocturnal Violet is looking down at him with the gaze of a Bride. This image is frightening for Blok. Simultaneously with the article, Blok wrote a narrative visionary poem "The Nocturnal Violet" in which he developed the same imagery. Both the poem and the article were preceded by a persistent dream taken down in Notebook 11 (*Zapisnye knizhki* 1930: 50-54). There is, in the poem, a low hatch (from Dostoevsky?), and a knight oblivious of time, and a ceaselessly spinning maiden (Spideress-Arachne?) named Nocturnal Violet who emanates an intoxicating and stupefying aroma. The nocturnal violet, as well as the forest violet (related only in name) and pansies (*viola tricolor*), brought up the stream of Nabokov's dreamlike prose — all of these are signs of Blok's presence. They signify the charms of concupiscence, odious to Blok. In IB, they appear in the prison cell of the executioner M'seur Pierre: "[H]alf a dozen velvety pansies looked out in various directions over the burnished rim of a porcelain mug bearing a German landscape" (161); Marthe's lover Victor was "perfumed with violet scent" (100); finally, Marthe in Russian is *Marfin'ka*, echoing the Russian word for violet *fialka* (see also "Spring in Fialta"). More precisely, *Marfin'ka* blends *fialka* and *martovskaia koshka*, 'March cat (cf. "yowl of a cat, to whose velvet silence you grow so accustomed that its nocturnal voice seems a demented, demonic thing" ["Tyrants Destroyed":

13] and "the velvety quiet of her dress" [IB: 20]).

Blok's article "On the Contemporary State of Russian Symbolism" (1910) offers a good deal of imagery concerning the state of the artist that can be read as a commentary to Nabokov and first of all to IB. Cincinnatus's very imprisonment has a parallel here: "Having descended from the high mountain, we should feel like a prisoner of the Reading prison" (5.435). Blok goes on to quote, from the Oscar Wilde ballad, a passage about the prisoner's looking "upon that little tent of blue which prisoners call the sky" — as did Cincinnatus who, after finding that only a glimpse of the sky could be caught from there, noticed an inscription in the wall's window tunnel: "You cannot see anything. I tried it too" (29).

In this article, Blok also gives a most striking description of the artist's inner state. At certain moments he feels that he is "no longer alone; he is filled by a multitude of demons (also called 'doubles' — it is here, not in Dostoevsky, that we should look for the meaning of Nabokov's doubles!), who are transformed by his evil creative willpower into incessantly changing groups of conspirators. At any given moment he conceals, with the help of such plots, some part of his soul from himself" (5.429). "Every creator is a plotter," says Nabokov, and while comparing the novelist's art to that of a chess composer, adds: "and all the pieces impersonating his ideas on the board were here as conspirators and sorcerers" (*The Gift*, 184; a typical Nabokovian shift from Blok's mystical space to the artifacts of chess). "Deceit, to the point of diabolism, and originally, verging upon the grotesque were my notions of strategy," says Nabokov in *Speak Memory* (214). Indeed, the grotesque is a part of Blok's carnivalesque program. While playing with his demons, Blok's artist ends up creating a doll, and then his world turns into a fairground booth: "Thus it came true: my own magic world turned into arena of my personal actions, into my 'anatomic theater,' or *fairground booth*" (5.429). "[W]e are surrounded by dummies, and. . . you are a dummy yourself," wrote

Cincinnatus to Marthe (142; in Russian Nabokov uses one and the same word for *doll* and *dummy*: *kukla*). "I thank you, rag doll, coachman, painted swine," he addresses the prison director (57). "[L]ook, dummies, how afraid I am," (193). the whole world of IB is that of a fairground booth spectacle. The above quoted passage from Blok has a continuation: "... fairground booth, in which I myself play a role beside my magnificent dolls (*ecce homo!*)". Only Cincinnatus is different: "I am not ordinary — I am one the one among you who is alive" (52).

This article unambiguously testifies that Blok wrote *The Fairground Booth* as a lyrical expression, an explication of the poet's own plight. As Avril Pyman has noted with utter clarity: "So, laconically and irreproachably, Blok told the story of himself, Lyubov' and Belyi; of himself, Lyubov' and his doubles; of himself and his 'wonderful dolls'; of himself and Lyubov'" (*The Life of Aleksandr Blok*: 1, 235). As a lyrical poet Blok was projecting his own image both in his poetry and in his prose, but it also appears in his diaries and notebooks and in memoirs about him. Blok's projected image was different from his appearance. Blok was a tall, strong man, but his inner self, known also to his relatives and friends, was quite infantile and fragile. This accounts for the appearance of Cincinnatus C., who is portrayed as small and weak in stature like a child. Both Blok and Cincinnatus married at the age of twenty-two. He loved his wife Liubov (or Lyubov') Dmitrievna in his peculiar way all his life, while she was falling in love with others and leaving him for a lover. Not unlike Cincinnatus's wife Marthe she gave birth to a child from another man and yet she still lived with Blok. Marthe is distinguished by simplicity, which Cincinnatus characterizes with a culinary metaphor: "Her world. Her world consists of simple components, simply joined; I think that the simplest cook-book recipe is more complicated than the world that she bakes as she hums: every day for herself, for me, for everyone" (63). Blok wrote in his diary: "[A]nd I love to live, but don't know how, and when it's finally old age, and

there's so much and and so much, and behind all of these Liuba This is what is in [Liuba]. Grass is growing, a flower is growing and on the sand little [Liuba] is molding a loaf, intently spilling golden sand from a scoop" (*Dnevnik* 1917-21 [1928]: 46-47; in this edition available to Nabokov, the name Liuba, diminutive of Liubov, is mentioned only in the first instance and then quite transparently replaced by ellipses). The ugliness of Marthe's family has its parallel in the way Blok perceived the family of Liubov Dmitrievna, the Mendeleevs. However, we are talking not of any direct similarity between Marthe and Liubov Dmitrievna, but rather of the situation of a poet's life and love which Blok presented in *The Fairground Booth* as a farce and Nabokov presented as the tragedy of a living human being thrown into a puppet show. Nabokov gives a different turn to Blok's own vision of his life as a puppet show, which in spite of its irony has a tragic ring to it. The situation of IB unfolds at a remove from Blok. Blok's irony is directed at himself, while Nabokov's main protagonist is forced into the puppet show. Nabokov's novel is a passionate protestation against the condition of being forced into life that ends in death and therefore is but a round prison of time (cf. Nabokov's "painted time" and Blok's idea of "time that goes out of joint") within which one feels *au pied de l'échafaud*. As one is obsessed with the unfairness of being destined to die, all those around, who obey the rules of the play and compel one to comply with the scenario in which one is to die, appear to be puppets in the puppet show. One's love, his being a husband of a dummy, is only part of this situation. Nabokov's tragedy is different from Blok's farce, for Nabokov transforms Blok's motifs for his own purposes in the same manner as novelists normally would use and transform reality.

In the period between the two Russian Revolutions of 1917, Blok wrote in his diary: "*The Fairground Booth*, a work that came out of the entrails of the police department of my soul" (73). There is only one step from Blok's department of police to the prison which reflects the state

of Cincinnatus's mind. Blok expressed the suppressed in his soul in the form of *commedia del'arte*, but because the latter was in his eyes a world of falsities. In a letter to his mother of June 10, 1912, he wrote about a spectacle directed by V. Meyerhold (whom he detested in spite of the fact that he owed him the success of his *Fairground Booth*): The spectacle was preceded by two speeches — by Kulibin and by Meyerhold . . . whose meaning (as far as I could catch) was very odious to me (about people as puppets, about art as 'happiness') (*Pis'ma* [1932]: v. 2, p. 201). On March 22, 1913, Blok wrote in his diary: "In the evening, to get rid of spleen I went to Meyerhold. *Love to Three Oranges* by the script of Gozi made no impression: arid motliness. . ." (96; see also Blok's letter to Meyerhold of December 22, 1906). In the finale of *IB*, the description of the destruction of the puppet world includes such a detail: "an arid gloom fleeted." This finale can be seen as the demise of the *arid motliness* of the puppet world as seen through the eyes of Blok the man, *The Fairground Booth* being ambiguous.

Besides a multitude of detail that united *IB* and Blok's prose, the most striking similarity concerns the style of Cincinnatus's "jottings" and Blok's diaries and notebooks. Both present rough, stumbling, amorphous and preliminary attempts at expressing deep unspoken thoughts, at reaching for the ineffable. Sentences are incomplete, abrupt or convoluted, their completion lost in search of formulation that eludes. Ellipses and dashes mark emphatic breaks. Tropologically it is based on asyndetons and aposiopeses. Typologically it is what psychologists call inner speech. Blok was very much aware of the imperfections of his prose, and throughout his notebooks and diaries he reflects on his own style. "I write three times longer than needed: soggy" (*Zapisnye knihki* [1930]: March 17, 1908); "I begin this entry ashamed before myself of my inflexible language. . . I am soon 31" (*Dnevnik*: Oct. 17, 1911); "I write limply and turbidly like a newborn" (*Dnevnik*: Jan. 2, 1912). Cincinnatus, who is coincidentally thirty, observes: "but

I write obscurely and limply, like Pushkin's lyrical duelist" (92). The commentators have easily identified an obvious reference to Lensky in *Eugene Onegin* of whom it is said: "Thus did he write, 'obscurely' and 'limply'" (*Tak on pisal, temno i vialso*. — EO: 6. XXIII). As we have shown many times elsewhere, Nabokov's easily recognizable references often conceal less obvious, but more plausible ones. There is no similarity between Cincinnatus C. and Vladimir Lensky, but the image of Aleksandr A. Blok definitely lurks behind Nabokov's protagonist. Blok, by the way, was a "lyrical duelist": his letters reveal that he once challenged his friend A. Belyi to a duel and once accepted his challenge; these incidents, however, never went beyond paper.

One phrase in *IB* has a formulaic nature: "i vse meshalos', Marfin'ka, plakha, barkhat, — i kak eto budet, — chto? Kazn' ili svidanie? Vse slilos' okonchatel'no. . ." — "and everything was jumbled — Marthe, the executioner's block, her velvet — and how will it turn out... which will it be? A beheading or a tryst? Everything merged totally. . ." (66-67). The less perfect English rendering however reveals what must have been originally in the mind of the bilingual author: the deadly formula: MARTHE — executioner's BLOCK — her VELVET holds a homonym of the poet's name in the clutches of Cincinnatus's wife's name and her spider attribute. As soon as the tryst and death are indistinguishable, the image of Blok's *devushka s kosoi* 'a maiden with a braid/scythe' from his *Fairground Booth*, an ambiguous figure that at one moment seems to be beloved and at the other, the death, inevitably emerges in Russian cultural context. Blok's pun on *kosa*, both 'braid' and 'scythe' is akin to Nabokov's implied one: *block/Blok*, indeed, the most tormenting influence of his entire literary life.

—Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts, Ithaca, New York

THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF *THE GIFT*:
INSERTED OR CONCERTED?

Although *The Gift* has been discussed less than such novels as *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, a substantial measure of criticism has been written. Generally, the fourth chapter, containing the (allegedly denunciatory) biography of Chernyshevki, is regarded as an inserted one. However, the fact that *The Gift* is a novel is discordant with one of its parts being merely interposed. In his forward to *The Gift* Nabokov writes that "the last chapter combines all the preceding themes and adumbrates the book Fyodor dreams of writing some day: *The Gift*," (8; page references are to the first English editions). This suggests that the fourth chapter, through the life it contains, constitutes *The Gift's* design in the same way as the other, fictional chapters. The recurrences of incidents in the life of Chernyshevski in other chapters and the use of similar images in the fourth chapter as in the other parts, which emphasize their narrative equivalence, will be discussed here, together with some implications.

The most obvious concurrences (and the most difficult to interpret as well) are related to the names of Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevski: Fyodor's friends Alexander Yakovlevich and Alexandra Yakovlevna and their son Yasha. Another namesake is related to Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevski's wife, Olga Sokratovna, daughter of Sokrat Vasiliev (218): the journalist Georgiy Ivanovich Vasiliev, editor of *Gazeta*, the émigré newspaper in which Fyodor's poems get published so easily. The name is not their only connection. In their early courtship, Nikolay pays Olga a compliment by saying: "You should be living in Paris" (218), which is where Georgiy Ivanovich's daughter lived (65). Fyodor and Nikolay Chernyshevski share their birthday, July 12. N.G. Chernyshevski's dominating position in the novel is echoed in the way Alexandra Yakovlevna Chernyshevski governs Fyodor's life; it is she who suggests the theme of Yasha, her husband who proposes the biography of

Nikolay Gavrilovich; similarly, it is her initiative to establish a literary circle which brings Fyodor in contact with Koncheyev and it is thanks to her beneficial interference that Fyodor moves to an apartment where he will meet Zina.

Apart from the dates of birth Fyodor and N.G. Chernyshevski share, a number of identical conspicuous details about their lives are imparted to the reader. Both are quite poor, both smoke a particular brand of cigarettes (13, 217), both shave themselves "bloodily" (153, 218), both have holes in their shoes, as has been observed by Sergei Davydov ("*The Gift*: Nabokov's Aesthetic Exorcism of Chernyshevski", *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 1985, 366) (56, 215), both have clothes in need of mending (95, 215) and both have erotic fancies (97, 213).

Less peripheral are the similarities between Chernyshevski and Fyodor's father, Konstantin Kirillovich Godunov-Cherdyntsev. The most dramatic parts of their lives were spent near the borders of China (103, 269). Chernyshevski's exile lasted from July 1864 to February 1883 (269, 277) somewhat more than eighteen years, precisely the same number of years as Godunov-Cherdyntsev's expeditions (103). Both were spontaneously visited by their wives, but in both cases these visits, lacking success, turned into mere calls of very short duration, although it took them several months to reach their husbands (104, 270). Both men were, as Leona Toker has noted (*Nabokov, The Mystery of Literary Structures*, 1989, 169) endowed with "something" closely related to a genuine "mystery" (113, 251).

Apart from the recurrence of biographical details, a number of similar images can be observed. Some are related to "house-building", "metaliterary metaphors describing the very process of writing a text" as Alexander Dolinin remarks (*The Gift. The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, 1995, 156). Indeed, everywhere in the novel the process of building or restoring houses or edifices is referred to, while sites are regarded on the basis of their worthiness for building construction. Houses

and buildings are seen in scaffolding (15, 65, 141, 207, 267) and "vacant lots" as well as "terrestrial vacancy" are discovered (52, 157, 312). The metaphorical meaning is explained in passages such as: "to leave the paragraph in that condition, i.e., its construction hanging over a precipice with a boarded window and a crumbling porch, was a physical impossibility" (197). Rooms and apartments have comparable connotations: "my exertions over the book, and all those little storms of thought, those cares of the pen — and now I am completely empty, clean, and ready to receive new lodgers" (330). To enter these lodgings "keys" are required, leading to another metaphor, "the dominant motif" of *The Gift* as has been pointed out by Donald Barton Johnson (*Worlds in Regression*, 1985, 95): this motif has three thematic dimensions related to Fyodor's exile, art, and love (*ibid.*, 95-105). These building-related images are to be found in chapter four in the same measure as in the others, as is clear for "churches". N.G. Chernyshevski is recorded as living near the "St. Isaac's" church (207) as well as "near the church of St. Vladimir" (255) while "later his Astrakhan addresses were also defined by their proximity to this or that holy building". The same holds for Fyodor, whose rooms in 7 Tannenber Street and 15 Agamemnonstrasse are quite close to a church (57, 63, 169). Rudolf grew up near "a cathedral-like sideboard" (48) and Vasiliev's room has a window which commands a "building, with repairs going on so high in the sky that it seemed as though they might as well do something about the ragged rent in the grey cloud bank" (65). Churches, buildings designed for contemplating the hereafter, thus direct to two of Nabokov's most important themes: art and the afterlife. This composite is also presented in the cairn Tamerlane had built by his warriors, as only those who did not return from the campaign, unable to reclaim their stone, actually made the memorial (195). The churchtower clocks (169, 258) measure and chain the transience of our earthly lives as do watches. So Zhaksybay, a fellow traveler of Fyodor's father, whose "silver watch chain is

gleaming on his chest" (124) dies within a few months (129). And Chernyshevski, who is seen playing "ceaselessly with his watch chain", is running out of his "free time" (253). Other important themes concern the pattern of the triangle enclosed in a circle, discussed by Leona Toker (153-5) and the "rolled-up" carpets and bundle related to Fyodor's father, N.G. Chernyshevski and Alexander Chernyshevski's family, mentioned by Vladimir Alexandrov (*Nabokov's Otherworld*, 1991, 134).

Other themes which link the characters are derived from literature, especially from Pushkin. "The Egyptian Nights" (with its three kamikaze lovers) and its mediator Charski are mentioned in connection with Fyodor (72, 305), Fyodor's grandfather (101), Zina (175, 344) and N.G. Chernyshevski (245); "The Prophet" with Fyodor (130), Fyodor's father (144) and, as the poem fits him like a glove, N.G. Chernyshevski in whose life the "Prophet"'s eagle perches (274); and of course *Boris Godunov* is discussed in various instances. Guy de Maupassant's novels and stories turn up in the biographical sketches of Fyodor's father (103), N.G. Ch., (263) and Fyodor (299).

The fact that all of these themes are allotted to all of the chapters in *the Gift* shows that chapter four is not isolated from the others. On the contrary, as the data related to Chernyshevski's life are historically fixed, the duplication and recreation of them in other chapters prove that the fourth chapter is rather a preceding part of the novel than a superimposed one. It is thus equalized with the purely fictional chapters, which invites a comparison between chapter four and the others, as well as among the lives described in them, especially between Chernyshevski and Fyodor's father.

David Rampton noted that "most of the novel's critics agree that Chernyshevski's biography, for all its irreverence, gives us the real human being instead of the public cliché the man so quickly became" (*Vladimir Nabokov, A Critical Study of the Novels*, 1984, 65). This irreverence, however, is not the result of the plain facts which are presented, but rather aspersions added to them, such as

"contemptible fellow" (213), "sad, all of this, very sad" (231), "a sick outlet in his correspondence" (259), "petty, falsely funny misfortunes" (283). It seems, as Leona Toker says, that "with repeated reading one senses that Fyodor is treating his ideological adversary with suppressed admiration". If Nabokov's main objective had been to deride utilitarianism, the English founder of this school, Jeremy Bentham, would have presented a more rewarding subject (he opined that their "quality of pleasure being equal, push-pin is as good as poetry"). Furthermore, Chernyshevski was contumaciously immune to criticism of his artistic work as he stated that he had "not a trace of artistic talent" (E. Lampert, *Sons Against Fathers*, O.U.P., 1965, 223). So, it is not likely that ridiculing the utilitarian and engagé attitude that Chernyshevski had to literary works, was the only reason for Nabokov to pay him so much attention.

Looking at the facts, one can most wholeheartedly agree with the view that Chernyshevski and other radicals were "real heroes in their struggle with the government order of things" (194) and with the observation "that the man was as straight and firm as the trunk of an oak" (207). Apart from the fact that these appreciations apply quite precisely to Nabokov's father, it seems that Nabokov must have admired Chernyshevski in several respects. The fact that Chernyshevski "smiled" at his execution (266) must have caused the same response as the smiling of the brave Gumilev during his trial (*Lectures on Literature*, 376). And was Chernyshevski not an "intellectual . . . who combined the deepest human decency of which man is capable with an almost ridiculous inability to put his ideals and principles into action; a man devoted to moral beauty, the welfare of the universe, but unable in his private life to do anything useful. . . . sinking lower and lower in the mud of a humdrum existence, unhappy in love, hopelessly inefficient in every thing — a good man who cannot make good" (*Lectures on Russian Literature*, 253) as Nabokov says of Chekhov's heroes. Fyodor "was so amazed and tickled by the fact that an

author with such a mental and verbal style was considered to have influenced the literary destiny of Russia" (187) but looking at the quotation from *Lectures on Russian Literature* it seems comprehensible that "Russia did not produce during the twenty years of banishment a single genuine writer (until Chekhov)" (241). And the fact that Chernyshevski "reprinted exactly a third" of the text of a hostile criticism in *The Contemporary* "(i.e., as much as was allowed by law) and broke it off in the middle of a word" (235) must have been, I think, greatly admired by Nabokov.

The same discrepancy between facts and the assessment of them, but contrariwise, can be found in the biographical sketch by Fyodor of his father. Fyodor's love for his father is presented as very profound and sincere and only rivaled by his love for Zina. The frequently noted resemblances of the relationship between Fyodor and his father and between Nabokov and his father concern the great affection and esteem both sons have for their respective parent. But one can hardly recognize in Fyodor's father the warm and loving personality from *Speak, Memory*, and one is tempted to mention the beautiful passage with which Brian Boyd opens his biography (R.Y., 7) as an example *par excellence* to illustrate this. The main source of Fyodor's love for his father seems to be, according to his own sketch, "the sweetness of his lessons" (108) which Fyodor dwells upon. But it is difficult to see how such lessons can generate more than the affection one feels for a popular biology teacher. Frequently we see Fyodor suffer from a sense of being neglected by his father: he wonders what his father thinks about during his travels: "a recent catch? About my mother, about us" (117). At the final return of his father, Fyodor's first view of him is when he is looking at his watch (125) which is apparently of more importance to him than taking notice of his son. Despite his promise he declines to take Fyodor with him on his next journey (129). Highly uncaring is his treatment of his wife whom he abandoned during their honeymoon

trip for a whole day to pursue a butterfly hunt, leaving her to panic (104). One has only to recall the passage in *Speak, Memory* (127), when Nabokov leaves his friend in the morning and the sense of guilt overwhelming him, to know how strongly Nabokov would have disapproved of such behavior. And it is a telling fact that during the incident his wife is reading De Maupassant's *Une Vie*, a novel about an enchanting fiancé who turns into a brutish husband. And most difficult to understand is his final trip, leaving his family behind in great distress in the middle of a war.

Some situations have been similar for Chernyshevski and Fyodor's father. Chernyshevski seems to have surpassed Fyodor's father in the adoration they received as tutors, given that he was as an "extremely popular teacher" (221). In contrast to Fyodor, Chernyshevski's son, Misha, had no reason to speculate where his father's thoughts were wandering, because he was sent so many flowers "that he acquired that way 'a small herbarium of Vilyuisk flora'" (274), while the letters from Fyodor's father were always "brief" (132). When they were visited by their wives Fyodor's father welcomed his wife with the enunciation: "You go home", while the reunion of the Chernyshevskis, as little a success as that of Fyodor's parents, was at least "celebrated" (270).

In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov mentions that his father was "eloquently against capital punishment" and was taken prisoner because of a "revolutionary manifesto" (175/6) and he emphasizes his "inherent humanity" (192). In *The Gift* we read that Fyodor "admired the way Chernyshevski, an enemy of capital punishment, made deadly fun of Zhukovski's proposal to ritualize executions" (194). Revolutionary writings were also in Chernyshevski's case the cause of his imprisonment. Although their social position differed greatly, and Nabokov's father relied on statesmanship and legal reform rather than resistance and opposition as did Chernyshevski, both struggled for social improvement. This interest is definitely incompatible with Fyodor's

father's "haughty contempt for Man" (112). Nabokov's father did not share the asperity of Fyodor's father, and contrary to Fyodor's parents, Nabokov's parents had, according to Brian Boyd, a "splendidly happy marriage" (R.Y., 32).

The name "Fyodor Godunov" is borrowed from Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, Fyodor being the Czar's son. It is this drama which was the last subject Nabokov talked over with his father the night before the latter was assassinated (Brian Boyd, R.Y., 192). Monika Greenleaf ("Fathers, Sons and Imposters: Pushkin's Trace in *The Gift*", *Slavic Review*, 1994) has shown how important Nabokov's father's role is in *The Gift*. In his "Foreword" Nabokov denies any relationship between the novel and his personal life: "I am not, and never was, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, my father is not the explorer of Central Asia..." (7). At the same time, as Brian Boyd has pointed out, Fyodor and Nabokov have much in common (R.Y., 463). "And yet," he writes, "Nabokov had no intention of presenting us with a sheaf of snapshots of himself as a young man. To protect his privacy, he changed in Fyodor everything that his first audience was most likely to know about Vladimir Sirin" (463). Monika Greenleaf argues that the same recreation was needed for Fyodor's father: "Nabokov's act of mourning first of all involves the destruction of the public image of his father" (15), which seems to have included not only his career but his character as well.

She also directs our attention to the passage in *Speak, Memory* where *Boris Godunov* is discussed (36) and Nabokov remembers his "visual torment of not being able to read over Pimen's shoulder." It is this image which Nabokov also uses in *The Gift* to illustrate the biographer's inability to find the truth about someone's life, "concealed by her own shoulder from our eyes" (203), this being the eighth line of the sonnet the halves of which adorn the beginning and end of chapter four. The closing stanzas respond to Chernyshevski's fine line, "if life's hour appear to you bitter ..." (283), or rather oppugning it by

questioning whether "another might have been less bitter?", and they suggest that in the end Chernyshevski's "high deed" might prevail (285). And even when able to look over someone's shoulder (in this case, Zina's stepfather's), Fyodor was misled by the facts and induced to take the wrong decision and not to take the room in the apartment where Zina lived (344). Thus, it is not a "historical truth" in which Fyodor is interested, but a "deeper truth... for which he alone was responsible and which he alone could find" (196).

A clue for this kind of truth might be found in the overall pattern in which the characters of *The Gift* are subsumed, and which focuses on several themes. Love between father and son is obviously an important theme; A.Y. Chernyshevski's love for his son Yasha, Fyodor's love for his father and the fully reciprocated love between N.G. Chernyshevski and his son, Misha, who, being "a good son," took care of a "monumental edition of his father's work" (281). Their lives also concentrate on other themes recurring in Nabokov's works, the loss of a child, creative achievement and exile being the main events in the biographical sketches presented of A. Y. Chernyshevski, Fyodor's father and N.G. Chernyshevski respectively. In chapter five, which "combines all the preceding themes," a fine illustration of this combination is given. In his dream Fyodor is running to meet his father while bearing a "rolled-up laprobe" (334). This laprobe which he "brought all the way from Russia" and which was stolen in the Grunewald woods, is a clear reference to his childhood memories, the subject of chapter one. As has been mentioned above, this "rolled-up" conceit is also employed in relation to Fyodor's father, the Chernyshevskis and N.G. Chernyshevski.

The association between characters is made plain at one point, concerning Fyodor and the Chernyshevskis. At the end of a stretched sentence, imparting how Fyodor leaves the mentally-ailing Chernyshevski whom he has visited in his ward, having witnessed the state of mind in which the poor man communicated with his dead son —

a scene foreshadowing the meeting Fyodor had with his father in a dream, Frau Stoboy attending them in a white hospital overall (both fathers particularly well-shaven) — and joins Chernyshevski's doubly-afflicted wife, Fyodor's grief is compared with that of the Chernyshevskis and it is noted how only much later did he "understand the full refinement of the corollary and all the irreproachable compositional balance with which these collateral sounds had been included in his own life" (93; 335). It is hard to establish what the word "sounds" refers to. But the word "collateral" points to a common descent, and indeed the biographical facts of Chernyshevski, Godunov-Cherdyntsev-père and N.G. Chernyshevski are, as we have seen, in many respects similar, such as birthdates, family names, fatherland and destinies in life. They seem to ameliorate the understanding of Fyodor's life as the principal episodes in their lives are essential to Fyodor as well. "Thus," writes Nabokov, "I use a different method to study each of the three individuals, which affects both their substance and their coloration, until, at the last minute, the rays of a sun that is my own and yet is incomprehensible to me, strikes them and equalizes them in the same burst of light" (47). We will return to this irradiating message after discussing some parallels with *Pale Fire*, to which Simon Karlinsky has paid attention ("Vladimir Nabokov's Novel *Dar* as a Work of Literary Criticism: A Structural Analysis", *Slavic and East European Journal*, 1963). He mentions that *Pale Fire* is "the one among Nabokov's later novels that has the closest ties with *Dar*." "The similarities include the use of literary commentary and research as a subject for fiction: the profusion of verse and its importance in both novels: and, oddest of all, the occasional echoes of (Chernyshevski's) patterns of thought in the mentality of the Communist-inspired assassin Gradus." Indeed one can mark the similarity in the themes of both novels: the sorrows of exile and the dangers these entail for the artist (N.G. Chernyshevski, Gradus), the suffering caused by the loss of a child (A.Y. Chernyshevski, Shade) and creative

ambition (Godunov-Cherdyntsev-pere, Kinbote in his avidity to have Zembla incorporated in Shade's art). Furthermore, the coincidences in the endings of both novels are most striking: the setting sun, the window reflecting its rays, the wheelbarrow, the drunk leaning against a lamppost, the meeting of the protagonists with their descending companions (Zina, Shade) whom they have invited for supper (*The Gift*, 334, 340; *Pale Fire* lines 985-990). The ray of sunlight catching the triumvirate in one beam, merging them, is materialized in *Pale Fire* (Gerard de Vries, "Wheels in the Low Sun", *The Nabokovian*, 1993). It seems that the themes discussed in both novels—exile, love and art—are so critical that they warrant amplification in different characters, who ought to be united, as the themes belong together, characters, whose union is realized "under a very low sun, when there is evidence of the author's familiar leaning toward congruity, toward links" (275, 6).

— Gerard de Vries, *The Netherlands*

THREE NOTES ON *THE GIFT*:
A MUTATION, AN INTERTEXT, AND A PUZZLE
SOLVED

1. A Mutation

There is one especially intriguing change from the original in the English translation of *The Gift* that is not included in Jane Grayson's compendium, *Nabokov Translated*. It occurs in Chapter Two, at the very end of Fyodor's efforts to write a biography of his lepidopterist father. In the original (all three versions: *Sovremennye zapiski*, Chekhov House, and Ardis), the semi-biography is followed by a first-person reflection on the process of composition. The translation looks like this:

About mid-way down the paragraph, Fyodor begins to address a feminine "ty"; gradually it becomes clear that

this is a letter and the "ty" is Fyodor's mother, whose letter in response occupies the next paragraph.

In the English version, a set of quotation marks has sprouted at either end of Fyodor's paragraph/letter, while the word "mother" has irrupted ceremoniously in its second phrase. The effect of the additions is to clarify the nature of the specific text represented by Fyodor's paragraph: it is his letter to his mother, not part of the biography, not part of his lone mental reflections upon that biography.

In the original, the ambiguity of the text, combined with its apparent metamorphosis before our eyes (at least during a first reading) fits neatly into the novel's extended pattern of invisibly shifting narrators and text-sources. Like the false review and the dialogue with Koncheev, the perceived status of the text as first read is undermined as one reads further on; the magic carpet is pulled out from under the reader's feet.

Hence, the main effect of the change in the English is to reduce by one the number of traps set in the text for the "unwary" reader; perhaps Nabokov felt that, given the obscurity of Russian émigré life to anglophone readers, he should lighten the burden of the text just a little? Perhaps he noticed an oversight, a misprint from the past, or maybe even misread his own intent from those years? Of course, the fact that the 1975 Ardis corrected edition, the last version published during Nabokov's life, contains the original form, suggests that this was a change intended solely for the Anglo-American audience. In my view, the change slightly detracts from the book's artistry, but in such a minute way as to be, perhaps, negligible.

2. An Intertext.

In his tremendously erudite and insightful reading of *The Gift*, Alexander Dolinin offers two source texts for some of the intonations expressed in Fyodor's poem, "*Blagodariu tebia, otchizna.*" I would like to add a third

likely precursor, this time again provided by Pushkin. While Dolinin's emphasis falls on the word "*blagodariu*," I point instead to the word "*otchizna*" and its previous incarnation in Pushkin's elegy, "*Dlia beregov otchizny dal'noi*." This opening line is thoroughly echoed in the first two lines of Fyodor's poem: "*za zluuu dal' blagodariu*." "*Dlia beregov*" and "*blagodariu*" are nearly anagrams, and the poems' meter is the same. "*Otchizna*" and "*dal*" appear in both poems. Pushkin's 1830 poem, addressed to the departed Amalia Riznich who had later died, captures fundamentally the issue of separation, albeit from an inverted perspective: the poet's beloved leaves her exile (*izgnan'e*) to return to her homeland; the result for him is separation from her, with the expectation of a reunion. She dies, however, and the poet is left with only his isolation from her and the inspiration that her remembered image provides. It is in precisely this sense that Fyodor thanks the "*zlaia dal*," since his separation from Russia has evolved into something of an inspiration.

3. A Puzzle Solved.

The passage in chapter 5 of *The Gift* where Fyodor is lying on his back in the Grunewald watching a group of nuns walk by is notorious for the puzzle it sets for the reader: "... fingers sought a stalk of grass (but the latter, merely swaying, remained to gleam in the sun . . . where had this happened before — what had straightened up and started to sway? . . .)" (*The Gift* [New York: Vintage, 1991], 344). Vladimir Alexandrov has connected this swaying grass to the swaying traffic light that attends the composition of "*Blagodariu, tebia*." Alexander Dolinin connects it to the swaying trees reflected in the mirrored dresser being moved into Fyodor's new building in the novel's opening pages and to the trees swaying like algae when viewed from Fyodor's upside-down perspective. What is lacking in both these solutions is the element, underscored by Fyodor, of straightening up. It turns out that the real, or at least the primary, connection waiting

to be made is much more precise than the two discussed above. After watching his father depart on what was to become his last expedition, Fyodor wanders in the fields among the butterflies: "An already rather bedraggled but still powerful Swallowtail, minus one spur and flapping its panoply, descended on a camomile, took off as if backing from it, and the flower it left straightened up and started to sway." The correspondence is more exact in the translation; in the original, the phrase "straightened up" [*vypriamilsia*] is only in the earlier scene. We may suppose that the link was tightened in response to the original's failure to provoke the right solution among Nabokov's acquaintances, or again, perhaps, a desire to make the novel "easier" in English. At any rate, this correspondence makes more sense, as it links Fyodor's epiphanic afternoon with the nuns specifically to his last sighting of his father, and to his father's beloved butterflies; that very night, Konstantin Kirillovich will return, in Fyodor's dream, to authorize his son's biography of him.

— Stephen Blackwell, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

A LETTER TO EDWARD C. SAMPSON

15 September, 1997

The Nabokovian
The University of Kansas

Dear Sirs:

I enclose a copy of a letter that Vladimir Nabokov wrote to me in 1949 when I was considering studying under him at Cornell for my Ph.D. (I came to Cornell, but ending up getting my degree in American Literature under Harold Thompson). The letter should be published; I never got around to sending it earlier for publication in the collection of Nabokov's letters that came out a few years ago.

I am, incidentally, the graduate student who has been mentioned in a number of articles — the one to whom Nabokov said "Poor Leonov" when I, audaciously defending Dostoevsky against Nabokov's arguments, said that Dostoevsky had been an influential writer in Russia. To Nabokov's question "What author did he influence?" I had offered Leonov.

Sincerely,

Edward C. Sampson

16 June 1949

Mr. Edward C. Sampson
Hofstra College
Hempstead, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Sampson,

If you intend to take my course of Russian Literature in Russian, you should be able to read Russian writers in the vernacular.

Now in regard to the field in which you would like to continue, my feeling is that Dostoyevsky is not one of the great Russian writers and has been badly misinterpreted and strangely magnified by most Russian and foreign critics. Unless you contemplate a piece of spirited destructive criticism of the mountains of pompous nonsense that in this country and elsewhere have risen around Dostoyevsky, I would question the wisdom of your continuing your studies in the Dostoyevskian field under my uncomfortable guidance. And there is so much virgin soil — why don't you explore the possibilities of such themes as the ideas of liberalism and democracy in pre-Revolutionary Russian literature or Chekhov's humor in relation to Anglo-American laughter or "Pushkin and John Wilson (and other English and American writers)" or a critical tornado through Garnett's ignoble translations of Russian novels?

I am going west for the summer but I can always be reached through the university or, from around the 20th of July you can write me direct to Battle Mountain Ranch, Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Sincerely yours,

[signed V. Nabokov]

A DOZEN NOTES TO NABOKOV'S SHORT STORIES*

by Maxim D. Shrayer

1. The Metamorphosis in One Uninterpreted Dream.

The question of Vladimir Nabokov's literary debt to Franz Kafka is a puzzling one, clouded as it is by Nabokov's own obfuscatory remarks denying genetic ties with the German-Jewish modernist from Prague (Nabokov's principal statements on Kafka are found in *Lectures on Literature*, 249-93; *Strong Opinions*, 57; 151-2; Foreword, *Invitation to a Beheading*, 6). Between 1923 and 1937, Nabokov made six trips to Prague: in December-January 1923, July 1924, August 1925, May 1930, April 1932, and May 1937 (see Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 196; 220-21; 232; 235; 243; 271; 354; 378-9). While he apparently was less fond of Prague than most of its visitors, the westernmost capital of Slavdom—which was also the academic capital of Russia Abroad between the two world wars—did leave a mark in Nabokov's life and art. Prague was the place where Nabokov visited his family (Nabokov's mother died in Prague in 1939 and is buried there at Olo(̃,s)ánske Ho(̃,r)bitovy; the family of Vladimir Petkeviov(̃,c), grandson of Nabokov's sister Olga, still lives in Prague). There he met Marina Tsvetaeva and gave poetry readings.

Franz Kafka left Prague in July 1923 to stay at Müritz; in August 1923 he went to Berlin, and, after a brief visit to Prague, returned to Schelesen. In September of 1923 Kafka settled with Dora Dymant in Berlin-Steglitz. In March 1924 Kafka traveled to Prague for the last time, and he left Prague in April 1924 for a sanatorium in the Wienerwald, where he died in June 1924. If Nabokov had indeed known of Kafka prior to the French translations of

the late 1920s and 1930s—and contrary to his own refutations—Prague would have been a rather likely place for Nabokov to experience Kafka's presence in the air of culture.

In the short story "Mest" (Revenge, 1924)—originally published in the Berlin newspaper *Russkoe èkho*—a stereotypically British university professor devises a scheme of punishing his innocent wife for her spectral infidelity. Might the anti-Freudian (or Freudian?) overtones of the professor's conversation with his doomed young wife have overshadowed Nabokov's allusion to Kafka's most famous work? Consider these excerpts from the professor's remarks about his trip to the continent in light of *The Metamorphosis* (1915):

You know something [...] you and your friends are playing with fire. There can be really terrifying occurrences. One Viennese doctor told me about some incredible metamorphoses [o neveroiatnykh perevoploshcheniakh] the other day. Some woman [...] when the doctor undressed her [...] was stunned at the sight of her body; it was entirely covered with a reddish sheen, was soft and slimy to the touch, and upon closer examination, he realized that this plump, taut cadaver consisted entirely of narrow, circular bands of skin, as if it were all bound evenly and tightly by invisible strings [...]. And, as the doctor watched, the corpse gradually began to unwind like a huge ball of yarn....Her body was a thin, endless worm [eë telo bylo tonkim, beskonechno dlinnym chervëm], which was disentangling itself and crawling, slithering out through the crack under the door while, on the bed, there remained a naked, white, still humid skeleton. Yet this woman had a husband, who had once kissed her—kissed that worm (*The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* 71; hereafter *Stories*).

Consider also the following information: *Die Verwandlung* (The Metamorphosis) first appeared in German in the

Berlin journal *Die weissen Blätter*, 10-12 (1915). The first German book edition came out in Leipzig in November 1915; a second edition was published by the same house, Kurt Wolff Verlag, in 1917. While the first Czech translation appeared in book edition in 1929, the first Russian translation did not appear until 1964 (see F. Kafka, *Promoena*, Stará Risoena Morave, 1929; "Rasskazy," tr. S. Apt, *Inostrannaia literatura*, 1 [1964]: 134-81).

A critic's judgment about a literary influence largely depends on the notion of literary dynamics to which one adheres. If one regards the Prague of the 1920s as a cultural palimpsest, where German and Czech letters were mixing and mingling with Russian émigré ones, and where a direct textual contact was not a prerequisite for a literary impact, Kafka's trace in Nabokov's "Revenge" would seem plausible. I therefore concur with John Burt Foster Jr., who recently asked "[whether Nabokov's] conviction that he once saw Kafka on a Berlin streetcar in 1923 [...could] actually mask some very early, unavowed and fleeting, yet still decisive contact with his writings."

2. Of Canine Angels and Latter-Day Dragons.

During the exceptionally prolific year 1924, Nabokov, like an alchemist, mixed elements of Judeo-Christian mythopoeitics with the supernatural, pagan, and fairy-tale elements. "Udar kryla" (Wingstroke, 1924), Nabokov's fourth short fiction, culminates in a long sequence with an angel taking part. The scene follows a conversation between the psychologically tormented protagonist, an Englishman named Kern, and a homosexual philosopher of death and dying, an Italian by the name of Monfiori. The conversation is set in an Alpine lodge in Switzerland, and the story seems to have been informed by Nabokov's vacation in the Swiss Alps in 1922 in the company of his Cambridge classmate, the half-Italian Bobby de Calry (Boyd, *The Russian Years*, 188). Prior to his encounter with the angel, Kern rejects the Biblical God by calling him "gazoobraznoe pozvonochnoe" (gaseous vertebrate),

following Monfiori's suggestion that "there is God, after all" (*Stories*, 36; ms. VN Berg). After his conversation with Monfiori (in whom he confides his decision to die), Kern returns to his room. He is disturbed by barking which emanates from behind the wall. There, in the room next door, lives Isabel, a stunning young Englishwoman and an object of Kern's desire (her image anticipates that of Iris in *Look at the Harlequins!*). When Kern storms into Isabel's room, he discovers a furry doglike angel who has apparently been making love to her. Kern struggles with the angelic beast and violently overpowers him. Towards the end of the story, Isabel, a fine athlete—whom Kern characterizes as "letuchaia" (literally: airy with all the subtleties of this word's connotations)—jumps in a skiing competition only to die in midflight. The angel's revenge "crucifie[s Isabel] in midair (*Stories*, 42; "raspiataia v vozdukhe" in the Russian).

In the case of "Drakon" (The Dragon), which, like "Wingstroke," never appeared during the writer's life, Nabokov parodied the medieval topos of dragon-slaying in the setting of a modern industrial society. In this modern fairy-tale, a dragon wakes up hungry in his cave and comes to a big city where two major tobacco companies are at war. One of them uses the dragon to advertise its cigarettes. The other tobacco company literalizes the dragon-slaying metaphor by building a giant knight whose armor is pasted over with the ads of its products. Terrified, the poor dragon flees to die in his cave (*Stories*, 130; ms. VN Berg).

Why were "Wingstroke" and "The Dragon" never published at the time of their completion? Nabokov probably found both stories too artistically schematic, too revealing of their various sources in myth and folklore, and therefore unoriginal. Toward the end of 1924, Nabokov's search for unparalleled metaphysical themes and plots began to lead him away from traditional religious and mythological topoi.

3. Entering the Otherspace.

"Venetsianka" ("La Veneziana," 1924) deserves special attention by the students of Nabokov's early works because it employs elements of the fantastical in order to explore the connections among desire, painting, and the otherworld as sources of artistic inspiration and expression. The longest among the early stories and only recently published in the original, "La Veneziana," like its coevals "The Potato Elf" and "Revenge," is set in England. The main triangle of desire entails one McGore, an old art dealer and an adviser to a rich art collector known as the Colonel, McGore's young wife Maureen, and the Colonel's son Frank. McGore has located a rare fifteenth-century Italian canvas and sold it to the Colonel. The presumed author of the painting, Sebastiano Luciani, called Sebastiano del Piombo (1485-1547), was a major Renaissance painter of the Venetian School, and Nabokov might have seen del Piombo's famous canvas, *Ritratto Femminile* ("Dorotea"), in Berlin (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin-Dahlem; the painting appears on the cover of the French edition of Nabokov's early stories to which "La Veneziana" gave its title; see *La Vénitienne et autres nouvelles*, Paris, 1990). The landscape vista in the background of del Piombo's portrait symbolizes an alluring *otherspace*, that is a space with a dissimilar set of parameters.

While Maureen and Frank are in the midst of a tempestuous affair in the story, Frank's college roommate, one Simpson, also feels an irresistible attraction to Maureen. More so, after looking at the Colonel's new painting, Simpson notices an uncanny resemblance between Maureen and the woman on the canvas. To add to Simpson's fascination, McGore shares a "secret": years of dealing with paintings have taught him that through an act of concentrated will one can enter the space of a given painting and explore it from within. Simpson is equally drawn to Maureen and the Venetian woman in the painting. At night, literalizing McGore's supernatural metaphor, Simpson walks into the space of the portrait

where the beautiful Maureen/La Veneziana offers him a lemon. Simpson "grows" into the canvas, becomes part of its painted space. The story's fantastical spring has now almost unwound itself.

"La Veneziana" embodies several key elements to become central to Nabokov's poetics. Afloat in the story's enchanting and elegant syntax, and never fully synthesized and harmonized, these elements call for scrutiny. One should start paying increasing attention to Nabokov's concern with the problem of entering a space whose parameters differ from the regular space enveloping a character. In addition, Nabokov constructs this otherspace to host visually perfect images. In the case of La Veneziana's portrait, the pictorial space of the canvas becomes charged with the features of the stunning and sensuous Maureen. Frank endows his creation with extraordinary perfection to further his love for the original and thereby not repeat Pygmalion's tragic mistake. In contrast to Frank, his friend Simpson falls in love with an image of idealized feminine beauty which appears to him even better than the possessor of this beauty in flesh and blood. Simpson succumbs to the magnetism of the otherworldly pictorial space, which gleams through an opening in his mundane reality. In his consciousness, the image of beauty wins over beauty itself. To put it differently, when Simpson reads the text of the otherspace within the story by gazing deeply at the portrait, he is compelled to become part of that text. During the act of reading, the reader who follows Simpson in his lunatic exploration thus experiences a textual simulacrum of the pictorial space which Simpson transgresses in the story. What we have then is a story, a verbal text, which frames another text—the pictorial text of the otherspace rendered by a linguistic medium—and thereby foregrounds a specific model of its reading.

D. Barton Johnson has drawn attention to Nabokov's remark from a 1967 interview: "I think that what I would welcome at the close of a book of mine is a sensation of its world receding in the distance and stopping some-

where there, suspended afar like a picture in a picture: *The Artist's Studio* by Van Bock" (*Strong Opinions*, 72-3). Johnson saw in Nabokov's formulation, based on a painting by a fictitious Flemish artist, a model of his "aesthetic cosmology." The real pictorial subtext behind Nabokov's alleged painting is Jan Van Eyck's *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride* (aka *Wedding Portrait*; The National Gallery, London). Johnson concluded that "the two paintings, [...], one imaginary and one real, constitute a concise paradigm of Nabokov's art: *ut pictura poesis*." Nabokov's lifelong interest in painting might in part be explained by the parallels he saw between the acts of reading a literary text and a pictorial text. In his Cornell lectures, Nabokov discussed this subject:

When we read a book for the first time the very process of laboriously moving our eyes from left to right, line after line, page after page, this complicated physical work upon the book, the very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and artistic appreciation. When we look at a painting we do not have to move our eyes in a special way even if, as in a book, the picture contains elements of depth and development. The element of time does not really enter in a first contact with a painting (*Lectures on Literature*, 3).

An experience very similar to what Nabokov described in his lecture takes place during the act of reading "La Veneziana."

4. Bachman Defictionalized.

In March of 1925, following the publication of "Bachman" in the Berlin Russian newspaper *Rul'* (The Rudder), Nabokov received a peculiar request from one Dr. Bernhard Hirschberg of Frankfurt a/M. Taking Nabokov's short story to be a memoiristic essay or

obituary, Hirschberg asked for the permission to translate it into German to be published in "one of the local newspapers." Written in stilted Russian, in one instance bordering on being ungrammatical, the letter to Nabokov follows in a literal English translation:

Dr. med. Bernard Hirscheberg
Frankfurt a/M
Körnerwiese 13

8 March 1928

Dear Sir!

Having read your interesting article "Bachman," published in *The Rudder*, I would like to translate it and print in one of the local newspapers. As far as I know, the German press has published virtually nothing about the late Bachman.

If you do not have anything against the request to translate your article, please let me know at your earliest convenience.

I remain sincerely yours,

Dr. med. Bernard Hirschberg

(March 8, 1925, letter in Vladimir Nabokov Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, container 8, folder 13).

One day Nabokov's reply might turn up in a German's archive—attached to a time-yellowed translation of "Bachman" and clipped from a culture section of a regional German newspaper.

5. Locating Darwin's Fiction.

The book proved to be remarkable. The pieces were not really short stories—no, they were rather more

like tractates, twenty tractates of equal length. The first was called "Corkscrews," and contained a thousand interesting things about corkscrews, their history, beauty, and virtues. Another was on parrots, a third on playing cards, a fourth on infernal machines, a fifth on reflections in water. And there was one on trains, and in it Martin found everything he loved [...]. If Martin had even thought of becoming a writer and been tormented by a writer's covetousness [...] perhaps these dissertations on minutiae that were deeply familiar to him might have aroused in him a pang of envy and the desire to write of the same things still better (*Glory*, 60).

Might this description of Darwin's fiction lead one back to Nabokov's own "Putevoditel' po Berlinu" (A Guide to Berlin, 1925), a sequence of five eccentric vignettes with the titles: "The Pipes," "The Streetcar," "Work," "Eden," and "The Pub"? Martin's account of Darwin's fiction does not only illustrate the structure of Nabokov's piece, but also the very "sense of literary creation" as Nabokov's narrating protagonist, a Russian émigré, describes it to his literary (and drinking) companion:

[...]to portray ordinary objects as they will be reflected in the kindly mirrors of future times; to find in the objects around us the fragrant tenderness that only posterity will discern and appreciate in the far-off times when every trifle of our plain everyday life will become exquisite and festive in its own right: the times when a man who might put on the most ordinary jacket of today will be dressed up for an elegant masquerade (*Stories*, 157).

Additionally, the kind of literary form which Nabokov adopted in "A Guide to Berlin" left a trace in the Russian émigré literary milieu. For instance, a sequence of short vignettes entitled "Putevye zametki" (Travel Notes) appeared in the Parisian newspaper *Zveno* (The Link) on

February 9, 1925. It was signed "Cave" [in Latin alphabet], which was probably the pseudonym of the émigré littérateur Leonid Kavetskii. The piece consisted of five vignettes with a Prologue and Epilogue; their titles resemble Nabokov's: "The Streetcar," "The Bus," "The Metro," "The Taxi," "The Fiacres."

6. Émigré Revenge in a Tobacco Store and a Barber Shop.

Set in the same milieu of the Russian Berlin, both "Govoriat po-russki" (Russian spoken here, 1923) and "Britva" (Razor, 1926) are stories of émigré revenge against agents of the Soviet secret police. The narrative tone of "Russian Spoken Here" recalls a number of Chekhov's stories in which the first-person narrator discloses a protagonist's secret and speaks to the reader as if he were a dear and trusted friend (cf. "Agafia," 1886; "Moi razgovor s pochmeisterom" [My Conversation with the Postmaster, 1886]; "Son" [A Dream, 1885]). The ending, too, is open à la Chekhov and invites the reader to project expectations beyond the story's physical closure. And yet something stopped Nabokov from publishing "Russian Spoken Here," something which probably had to do with the story's too overtly feuilletonistic political thrust as well as its unseamless narrative mode.

Some three years later, having already authored several short masterpieces ("Christmas"; "The Return of Chorb"), Nabokov revisited the subject of his earlier story, and the result was qualitatively better. It bears mention that the ending of "Razor," while still technically an open one, now enacted a different scenario of revenge. In "Russian Spoken Here," the revenge is achieved through the agent's arrest and captivity by the émigré family that owns the tobacco shop. By their account, the agent is to remain a prisoner so long as the Bolsheviks continue to rule Russia. The irony of such a revenge is that it is ultimately unclear who is the captor and who the captive. In contrast to "Revenge," the White army officer turned barber punishes his former tormentor not by a torture of

captivity, but rather by a torture of memory. Having literally kept his enemy a razor's edge away from death, Ivanov then releases his clean-shaven and shocked client. Such an act of revenge subtextualizes Pushkin's emblematic story "Vystrel" (The Shot, 1831) from *The Tales of I.P. Belkin*. Compare the following excerpts from the two endings:

Pushkin's:

"I will not," replied Silvio. "I'm satisfied [ia dovolen]. I've seen your confusion, your dismay; I forced you to fire at me, that will suffice [s menia dovol'no]. You will remember me. I leave you to your conscience."

And now Nabokov's:

Ivanov gave the man's face a quick wipe and spat some talcum on him from a pneumatic dispenser. "That will do for you," he said. "I'm satisfied. You may leave" (*Stories*, 182).

7. Nabokov's Unfinished Bildungsroman.

A striking feature of Nabokov's early 1930s is that many of his stories represent beginnings of larger projects, some of which never developed beyond their early stages. Might one regard "Obida" (A Bad Day, 1931) and "Lebeda" (Orache, 1932) as fragments of a projected Bildungsroman? Both feature the same hero, a boy named Putya Shishkov who suffers from being unable to reconcile his rich emotional life with the indifferent or threatening façades of the public world. In fact, in the collection *Sogliadatai* (The Eye, 1938), "Orache" follows "A Bad Day" and they literally form a textual continuum. Additionally, both were published in the Paris daily *Poslednie novosti* (The Latest News) in the early 1930s. The young Putya Shishkov in the twin stories seeks an escape into a world of his own—free of pretense and conventions—in which the colors and shapes of people

and objects would change according to his imagination. Critics have noted the obvious biographical subtext for the events narrated in "Orache": V. D. Nabokov's 1911 duel with the publisher Mikhail Suvorin. In addition, both stories about Putya Shishkov's childhood, especially "Orache," contain intertextual parallels with the childhood chapters of Nabokov's autobiographies. It is not unlikely that Nabokov planned to write a semiautobiographical novel—a novel akin to Ivan Bunin's *Zhizn' Arsen'eva* (The Life of Arsen'ev), whose portions were being serialized in *The Latest News* in the late 1920s and whose first four parts were published in *Sovremennye zapiski* (Contemporary Annals) in 1928-29 (the complete edition came out in New York in 1952). Nabokov's dedication of "A Bad Day" to Bunin, with whose Bildungsroman it shared its intonation, setting, and focus on mapping narrative space, was hardly a gratuitous gesture.

Did Nabokov indeed contemplate composing another émigré Bildungsroman, whose protagonist, unlike Martin of *Glory*, would be an artist? If so, his last Russian short story "Vasili Shishkov" (1939), seems to belong genetically with "A Bad Day" and "Orache." After all, Nabokov's enigmatic valediction depicts a disappearance of a grown-up Putya Shishkov after he has failed to publish *A Survey of Pain and Vulgarity*.

8. A Parody of Bunin's Lesser Story.

Nabokov, who is known to have devised dazzling pastiches of many of his literary colleagues, conjured up a parodic evocation of Bunin's melodramatic novella *Syn* (The Son, 1916). In *The Son*, which Nabokov was not likely to have valued as highly as Bunin's other works, a woman falls in love with a young man half her age. For a while, she tries to block the growing attraction, or, rather, to channel it into maternal feelings for a young man (her own children are female). At one point in the story, her young lover kneels before her in the garden and

presses himself against her lap: "And looking at his hair, his white thin neck, she thought with pain and delight": "Oh, yes, yes, I could have had a son just like that!" (Ivan Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow, 1965-67, 4: 333). In Nabokov's "Kartofel'nyi Èl'f" (The Potato Elf, 1924)—one of the longest stories of the early period—we find a *mise en scène* whose structure parodies the one in Bunin's *The Son*. Fred Dobson, a circus dwarf, sits at the feet of Nora Shock, the wife of his colleague, and narrates his life. As Nora beholds this little boy-man, his "black jacket, inclined face, fleshy little nose, tawny hair, and that middle parting reaching the back of his head vaguely moved Nora's heart" (in Bunin's *The Son*, the young man also appears miserable and lonely): "As she looked at him through her lashes she tried to imagine that it was not an adult dwarf sitting there, but her non-existing little son in the act of telling her how his schoolmates bullied him" (*Stories*, 234).

9. Don Aminado Fictionalized.

Nabokov's feuilletonistic story "Zaniatoi chelovek" (A Busy Man, 1931) features Graf It (Grafitski in the English), a subdued émigré littérateur who ekes out a living by composing versified political and social satire:

So here he is— a thirty-two-year-old, smallish, but broad-shouldered man, with protruding transparent ears, half-actor, half-literatus, author of topical jingles [iumoristicheskie stishki] in the émigré papers over a not very witty pen name (unpleasantly reminding one of the "Caran d'Ache" adopted by an immortal cartoonist [bessmertnogo Karan d-Asha]) (*Stories*, 286)

The name of Nabokov's character might have been modeled not only after the famous cartoonist Emmanuel Poiré (1858-1909), but also after Nabokov's senior contemporary and fellow-exile, the satirical poet and feuilletonist Don-Aminado. Don-Aminado was the pseudonym of

Aminad Petrovich Shpolianskii (1888-1957). The pen name Graf It reflects the split pun of Poiré's *nom de plume*, based as both are on writing objects: cf. the Russian *karandash* (pencil, from the Turkic *karadao*(~,s)) and the Russian *grafit* (grafite). In both pseudonyms—the one of the historical Frenchman and the one of the fictional Russian émigré—the same structural principle is at work. The second word presumably tells of the origins of its bearer: the French cartoonist playfully hailing from a place called "Ache" (*l'ache* in French means "wild celery"); the Russian from a place called "It." However, unlike Poiré's *nom de plume*, the first word of the name Graf It is also meaningful: *graf* means "count" in Russian, which makes Nabokov's character the Count of It. The Spanish or Italian pseudonym of A.P. Shpolianskii, Don-Aminado possesses a kindred structure to that of Graf It, the first word in both names referring sardonically to the nobility of its émigré bearer.

In Don-Aminado's remarkable book of summing-up, *Poezd na tret'em puti* (The Train on a Third Track, 1954), a weighty sentence about Nabokov follows a list of the leading authors of *Contemporary Annals*: "Strastnye spory vyzvalo poiavlenie mologodo pisatel'ia VI. Sirina" (The appearance of the young writer VI. Sirin stirred passionate debate; Don-Aminado, *Poezd na tret'em puti*, New York, 1954, 303). In Nabokov's fourth English-language novel, *Pnin* (1957), the last name Shpolianski is given to a liberal Russian-Jewish politician, whose wife approaches Pnin at a party and triggers a series of spasmodic recollections of Mira Belochkin's martyrdom and death in a Nazi concentration camp.

10. A Rehearsal of *Speak, Memory*.

Nabokov's autobiography is exceptional in its insistence upon what he called "tainye temy v iavnoi sud'be" (secret themes in a wide-awake fate) in the preface to the Russian version. When the same motif receives a lifelong treatment, in letters, short stories, and autobiography, it

blurs beyond distinction the conventional boundary between the fictional nature of art and the biographical shape of life. In "Vstrecha" (The Reunion, 1931), the protagonist tries to recall the name of a poodle which belonged to a little girl he used to know as a child:

Somewhere in his memory there was a hint of motion, as if something very small had awakened and begun to stir. [...] Everything vanished, but, at an instant his brain ceased straining, the thing stirred again, more perceptibly this time, and like a mouse emerging from a crack when the room is quiet, the live corpuscle of a word.... "Give me your paw, Joker." Joker! How simple it was. Joker.... (*Stories*, 311).

Almost twenty years later, Nabokov wrote Chapter Seven of his autobiography which he first published as a short story, entitled "Colette," in *The New Yorker* in 1948, and later included in *Nabokov's Dozen* (1958) under a different title, "First Love." At the end of the chapter, Nabokov describes the anatomy of one miraculous recollection:

And now a delightful thing happens. The process of recreating that penholder and the microcosm in its eyelet stimulates my memory to a last effort. I try to recall the name of Colette's dog [Collete is the name of a French girl he met on the beach in Biarritz]—and triumphantly, along those remote beaches, over the glossy evening sands of the past, where each footprint slowly fills up with sunset water, here it comes, here it comes, echoing and vibrating: Floss, Floss, Floss! (*Speak, Memory*, 152/ *Stories*, 610).

11. Olga, Sonia, and Other Russian Beauties.

The short story "Krasavitsa" (A Russian Beauty, 1934) reveals a possible connection to Nabokov's sister Olga: "Olga, of whom we are about to speak, was born in the year 1900 [Olga was born in 1903], in a wealthy

carefree family of nobles. A pale little girl in a white sailor suit [v beloï matroske], with a side parting in her chestnut hair and such merry eyes that everyone kissed her there, she was deemed a beauty since childhood" (*Stories*, 385). This description echoes Olga's appearance on a published 1918 photograph of Nabokov with his four brothers and sisters, as well as on other family pictures. In addition to the sailor suit, one is especially struck by Olga's "enchanted" expression of her closed lips" (see Ellendea Proffer, *Vladimir Nabokov: A Pictorial Biography*, Ann Arbor, 1991, 31). The reader is also told that "a supply of memories [...] comprised her sole dowry when she left Russia in the spring of 1919 (*Stories*, 385). Details of Olga's physique, character, and biography make their way to the story, as in the following passage which describes the émigré Berlin in the 1920s:

In Berlin, Olga gradually acquired a large group of friends, all of them young Russians. A certain jaunty tone was established. "Let's go to the cinemonkey," or "That was a heely deely German Diele, dance hall." [...] At the Zotovs', in their overheated rooms, she languidly danced the fox-trot to the sound of the gramophone, shifting the elongated calf of her leg not without grace and holding away from her the cigarette she had just finished smoking [...] The word "boor," by the way, was used by Olga on any and every occasion. "Such boors," she would sing out in chest tones, languidly and affectionately. "What a boor..." (*Stories*, 387-7).

While features of the historical Olga may or may not shimmer behind the façade of the fictional one, the latter also bears resemblance to Nabokov's earlier female character, Sonia Zilanov of *Glory*. Many parallels tie "A Russian Beauty" to the Berlin episodes in the novel. Consider this description:

Evenings of a quite a different nature followed—a

multitude of guests, dancing to records, dancing in a nearby café, the murk of the corner cinema. [...] Definite labels and features were found for the Russian substance scattered about Berlin, for all those elements of expiration which so excited Martin, be it merely a snatch of routine conversation amid the shoving sidewalk crowd, a chameleon word (such as that russified plural with its wandering accent: dóllary, dolláry, dollará), or a squabbling couple's recitative, caught in passing ("And I'm telling you—" for female voice; "Oh, have it your way—" for the male voice) [...] (*Glory*, 139).

In fact, the story of the precocious Sonia, following her break-up with Darwin and her move to Berlin, seems to be retold and brought to a closure in "A Russian Beauty," where the heroine is eventually undone as she dies in childbirth. What a lot for Martin's beloved after his own disappearance to Zoorland!

12. The Mistaken Candidate.

In his vividly written memoir, *Bagazh* (1975), the composer Nicolas Nabokov (1903-78) reminisced about the atmosphere in the house of Vladimir Nabokov's parents in Berlin. He sketched a characteristic portrait of the young writer, a portrait not spared tounge-in-cheek irony:

Or else cousin Vladimir would invent a writer or a poet, a king or a general, and ask questions about his nonexistent life. The victims would get upset (especially cousin Olga) and call the teaser names. But these games always stopped short of cruelty [...] Of my two cousins, Vladimir and Sergei, in those Berlin years I was closer to Sergei. Sergei loved music and Vladimir did not. Rarely have I seen two brothers as different as Volodya and Sergei. The older one, the writer and poet, was lean, dark, handsome, a sports-

man, with a face resembling his mother's. [...] Volodya always did everything with *une superbe sans égal*, and I was a bit scared if his awesome store of information. [...] Cousin Vladimir always led a carefully circumscribed life. Though by no means a recluse, he was uninterested in our homey games, our music-making, our amusements. He had his own hobbies [...] (*Bagazh: Memoirs of a Russian Cosmopolitan*, New York, 1975, 109; 110-11).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Nabokov periodically saw his cousin Nicolas, his wife Natalie (Natal'ia), and their son Ivan. Natalie Nabokov (née Shakhovskaia) was a sister of the littérateur Zinaida Shakhovskaia, one of Nabokov's most frequent correspondents during the prewar years. References to Nicolas Nabokov and his then family occur in Nabokov's letters to Shakhovskaia (see, for instance, 22 November 1932, letter in Zinaida Shakhovskaia (Shakhovskoy) Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, hereafter ZSh; 25 July 1933, letter in ZSh; 19 February 1936, postcard in ZSh; 13 December 1939, postcard in ZSh; 18 February 1938, letter in ZSh.)

In April 1936, Nabokov mentioned to Zinaida Shakhovskaia that he had finished the short story "Spring in Fialta": "Ia zdorovo porabotal ètot mesiat i tol'ko-chto otoslal sдобnyi rasskaz Sov. Zapiskam, "Vesna v Fial'te", tres païen [written in French], vam ne ponravitsia" (I've worked hard this months and have just sent off a rich story to *Contemporary Annals*, something very pagan, you won't like it; stamped 30 April 1936, postcard in ZSh). A few months later, and following the publication of the story in Paris, Nabokov sent Shakhovskaia an alarmed postcard from Berlin:

Dorogaia Zinochka,
Ia vstrevozhnen duratskoi spletnei, kotoraiia doshla do menia — budto ia v "Vesne v Fial'te" vyvel Niku i Natashu. Po sushchestvu èto, razumeetsia,

sovershenno nelepo (vy to khorosho znaete, chto ia chisteishei iskry vydumshchik i nikogo ne suiu v svoi veshchi), no mne protivno, chto èto mogut razdut'—potomu ochen' proshu vas, esli spletnia doйдit do vas, oprovergat' eë moim-zhe vozmushcheniem. Dobro-by v Ferdinande moëm vzdumali iskat' avtora, a tak vot vovse bessmyslenno, darom, chto nikakogo, konechno, skhodstva lichnogo s N-ami net.

[...] Ia vozmushchën i rasstroen.

Tseluiu vashu ruchku,

Vash, V.

(Dear Zinochka [diminutive of Zinaida]:

I am distressed by a foolish gossip, which has reached me: that supposedly in "Spring in Fialta" I rendered Nicolas and Natalie [the Russian uses their diminutive names, Nika and Natasha]. In essence, this is, naturally, sheer nonsense (you of all people know well, that I am a pure writer of fiction and insert no one into my works), but I find it repulsive that this rumor might be inflated, and would very much appreciate it if you could deny it with words of my own indignation when the gossip reaches you. I suppose I would understand it if they opted to look for the author in my Ferdinand, whereas this is totally senseless, never mind the fact that, of course, there is no resemblance with [the Nabokovs?; this abbreviated last name is problematic because the correct instrumental plural of Nabokovy would be Nabokovym].

[...] I am angry and upset.

I kiss your hand.

Yours, V.

(Stamped 1936, postcard in ZSh. In a letter sent from Menton in 1937, Nabokov mentions that "Spring in Fialta" has been translated by Denis Roche; see 12 November 1937, letter in ZSh).

Nabokov's categorical denial of the validity of the émigré gossip could be of interest to those studying the deceptively mirroring relationship between Nabokov's art and life, a relationship where design often poses as chance. I do not believe that one should always expect

perfect clarity in a hasty postcard to a friend—probably written in exasperation and dashed off the same afternoon. Still, I find two circumstances about the postcard intriguing. First, Nabokov is willing to concede that a reader might seek a resemblance between himself and Ferdinand, the French-Hungarian belletrist in the story. (Critics, including Charles Nicol, have pointed out some connections between the fictional writer Ferdinand and his creator Nabokov). Second, Nabokov never explains why Vasen'ka (Victor in the English version) would be a more unlikely candidate for an exposé of Nicolas Nabokov than Ferdinand for a self-parody of his author. To recall the story, Vasen'ka is a married Russian expatriate—working in the entertainment business—who is involved in an ephemeral love affair with Ferdinand's Russian wife Nina.

A future biographer of Nicolas Nabokov might consider checking the text of "Spring in Fialta" for possible links with the émigré composer and his then wife (they were divorced in 1938; for Nabokov's comments about the divorce, see 18 February 1938, letter in ZSh). Nicolas Nabokov provides an account of his postwar relationship with Vladimir and Véra Nabokov, and an historian of Russian émigré culture may also pick up this curious bit of quasiliterary information:

Our warm familiar friendship continued unchanged. Every time I visit cousins Vladimir and Vera [sic] at their Montreux Palace retreat, *je gourmande*, their sharp, brittle, a bit abrasive, and at times boisterously hilarious wit, their all-pervasive sense of humor, his mannerisms and his "strong opinions," his biases, his loves and hates, and his bottomless, punctiliously precise memory...and all of it bathed in grand, lordly, but amiably unostentatious hospitality" (*Bagazh*, 113).

As a student of Nabokov, I increasingly ask myself the kinds of questions that the Russian For-

malists were the first to pose in the 1920s. When does literary gossip gain the status of a literary fact? Should one further investigate the role of Nicolas Nabokov as a possible source of Nabokov's arguably finest short story? By denying it vehemently in his postcard and speculating about a more plausible scenario for émigré gossip, Nabokov seems to answer the theoretical question in synch with Boris Tomashevskii, who wrote in 1923 that "only [a writer's] biographical legend should be important to the literary historian in attempting to reconstruct the psychological milieu surrounding a work of literature." Reading Nabokov's fiesty denial of there being any substance to the émigré gossip about Nicolas Nabokov and "Spring in Fialta," I also wonder if he would have agreed with Tomashevskii's dictum: "What the literary historian really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself. Only such a legend is a literary fact."

A NOTE ON SOURCES

* I wish to thank the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies for facilitating my research with a Short-Term Grant during the summer of 1996. I record my gratitude to Mr. Dmitri Nabokov for the permission to access and quote from Nabokov's papers at the Berg Collection, New York Public Library (hereafter VN Berg) and the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter VN LC). The unpublished materials by Vladimir Nabokov are copyright © by The Estate of Vladimir Nabokov. Unless a source of an English translation from the Russian is provided, the translation is mine and literal.

I gratefully acknowledge the help of Vladimir and Pavla Petkevioc during my research trip to Prague in

April-May 1993, and especially as concerns Nabokov's equivocal relationship with his sister Olga. I take full responsibility for the speculative link between Olga in the story "A Russian Beauty" and Olga Petkevioc (née Nabokov).

Several works of biography and criticism, listed below in the order of their appearance, have contributed to the making of this piece: V. Stark, "Nabokov—Tsvetaeva: zaochnye dialogi i 'gornie' vstrechi," *Zvezda* 11 (1996): 150-56; Nikolai Raevskii, "Vospominaniia o Vladimire Nabokove," *Prostor* 2 (1989): 112-17; Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, New York, 1995; Ronald Hayman, *A Biography of Kafka*, London, 1996; Gennady Barabtarlo, "Prizrak iz pervogo akta," *Zvezda* 11 (1996): 140-45; Alan C. Elms, "Nabokov Contra Freud," *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology*, New York, 1994, 162-83; 277-9; Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré*, Paris, 1982; Michael Sims, "The Metamorphosis of Franz K.," *Darwin's Orchestra: An Almanac of Nature in History and the Arts*, New York, 1997, 399-400; John Burt Foster, Jr., "Nabokov and Kafka," Vladimir E. Alexandrov, ed., *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, New York, 1995, 444-51; D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, Ann Arbor, 1985; Charles Nicol, "'Ghastly Rich Glass': A Double Essay on 'Spring in Fialta,'" *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 24 (1991): 173-84; Maks Fasmer [Max Vasmer], *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, 4 vols., Moscow, 1964-73; O.A. Kuznetsova, "Don Aminado," P.A. Nikolaev, ed., *Russkie pisateli 1800-1917. Biograficheskii slovar'*, 2, Moscow, 1992, 156-57; Boris Tomashevskii, "Literatura i biografiia," *Kniga i revoliutsiia*, 4 (1923): 6-9; Iu [rii]. N. Tynianov, "Literaturnyi fakt," *Poëtika. Istoriiia literatury*. Kino, Moscow, 1977, 255-70.

© Copyright 1998 Maxim D. Shroyer. All rights reserved.

ABSTRACTS FROM THE NABOKOV SOCIETY
SESSION
1997 MLA CONVENTION

LOLITA OF THE LIMBERLOST

A light-hearted look at Lolita as a Hoosier. I argue that Lolita may well have been born in Indiana (my home state) and that Gene Stratton-Porter's 1911 bestseller "Girl of the Limberlost" reverberates in VN's novel. Stratton-Porter's treachly novel for teenaged girls stars a homespun heroine who makes her way to better things by catching and selling moths from the famed Limberlost Swamp. Humbert presents the novel to Lo on her 13th birthday. Also revealed is how a 50-year-old Russian intellectual came to know of Stratton-Porter's humble tale.

— D. Barton Johnson, University of California, Santa Barbara

POSSIBLE WORLDS THEORY AND NABOKOV'S
NOVELS

In its modern formulation, possible worlds theory (PWT) is an approach developed by modern analytical philosophers concerned with the logico-semantic aspects of modal systems. Some of the issues of primary importance in this area include the modal status of worlds not obtaining in the actual world, accessibility relations between such possible worlds and the actual world, the nature of counterfactual discourse, and the instantiation of objects and individuals within or across worlds. While these philosophies are characterized by complex analyses of modal systems and are often grounded in the specialized language of quantified modal logic,

possible worlds theory has long been seen to have significant applications outside its own sphere, even by its own practitioners. As Michael Loux notes in his introduction to the collection of essays *The Possible and the Actual*, ". . . the fact is that reflection on some of our most deep-seated intuitions suggests that the appeal to possible worlds is nothing more than a formalization of generally held philosophical views about matters modal. All (or at least most) of us think that things might have gone otherwise, that there are different ways things might have been. . . ." (30).

Not surprisingly, given the longstanding use of the "world" metaphor to describe narratives, literary studies has adapted many of the concepts from PWT to explore a variety of issues, such as the question of fictionality as such, typologies of fictional worlds, the status of fictional characters (their "existence", transworld identity, etc.), and others. Some of the key theorists in this field include Thomas Pavel, Lubomir Dolezel, Ruth Ronen, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Kendall Walton. However, as recently as 1992, Ryan observed the disparity between the relative wealth of theoretical discussions of possible worlds in literature and the lack of practical, extended applications of these insights with respect to particular authors and works. It seems to me that the novels of Vladimir Nabokov present an ideal opportunity to take up this challenge. Virtually all of his novels serve up a wealth of complex relations resulting from the proliferation of fictional worlds within each textual universe, making them in many ways perfectly suited to the PWT approach.

Following a brief discussion of the developments referred to above, I demonstrate, using *Pale Fire* as an example, the ways in which PWT can provide a productive framework for engaging Nabokov's fictional worlds and can help to clarify, with heuristic assistance of modal analysis, such questions as, "How is it that we are able to say that Zembla is 'fantasy' and New Wye fictionally 'real'?", and, "On what fictional levels do Kinbote, Shade, and Botkin reside?" I focus in particular on a couple of

concepts that I see as especially relevant to negotiating VN's worlds: Ryan's theory of fictional recentering (and the consequent insights into the modal system of narrative universes) and Walton's use of the idea "make-believe" to describe the reader's fictional experience. I situate this discussion with reference to some of the major readings of *Pale Fire* in Nabokov scholarship (Alexandrov, Boyd, Johnson).

My aim, then is both to provide an overview of the development of possible worlds theory in its application to literary studies and to stimulate further consideration of these issues as they relate to Nabokov's novels, using *Pale Fire* as a case study.

— Cary Henson, Indiana University, Bloomington

EDITING NABOKOV AT THE NEW YORKER: THE LETTERS OF VN AND WILLIAM MAXWELL

The correspondence between VN and William Maxwell, the writer's editor at the *New Yorker* from the mid-fifties to 1977, provides new insight into Nabokov's views about his fiction, his opinions about his publication, as well as the way he responded to editing suggested for such works as "Ultima Thule", *Pale Fire*, and *The Defense*. My paper will examine this writer-editor relationship and the effect it had on VN's writing, as well as focus specifically on how the two men — with input from general magazine editor, William Shawn — negotiated fine points of Nabokov's work prior to its appearance in the magazine.

Because Nabokov had a first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker*, Maxwell read all of his work, including novels, short stories, and poetry — both his literature written in English and that translated by Dmitri Nabokov. The interchanges between them reveal the author's impeccable attention to fine points of both English and Russian, his rationale for choosing particular words and

images, as well as Maxwell's reactions and guidance.

My presentation will rely primarily on unpublished letters, galley questions proposed by Maxwell and Shawn, Nabokov's responses, interoffice *New Yorker* communications, and my own extensive interviews with Maxwell.

— Barbara Burkhardt

NABOKOV AND COMIC ART

The paper points out that Nabokov was familiar with comic art (caricature, cartoon, comic strip) and was fascinated by these pictorial forms already in his formative years. The paper argues that Nabokov's interest in comic art was heightened at that time not only because he aspired to become a painter, but also because his father, Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, a prominent jurist and statesman of the early twentieth century, was frequently the target of caricature.

In the examples from *Prin*, the paper demonstrates that the fascination with comic art accompanied Nabokov throughout his creative life and found its expression in his fiction. Finally the paper focuses on Nabokov's attitude toward comic art and does so by examining the portrayal of the cartoonist in *Kamera Obscura / Laughter in the Dark*. The paper presentation was accompanied with illustrative handouts.

— Gavriel Shapiro, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY