

THE NABOKOVIAN

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THE NABOKOVIAN

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## NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

Readers will note that this fall's issue does not include the annual Nabokov bibliography for the preceding year. Because costs preclude the publication of an edition with more than approximately 90 pages, and in order to publish the 20-year Index, we have to postpone publication of the 1997 Nabokov bibliography along with several other submitted pieces (notes, essays, abstracts, and a special bibliography). My apologies to the authors of these pieces. The 1997 bibliography will appear in the next issue, and we shall attempt to publish all of the submitted items during the coming year.

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### Conference Activities

MLA National Convention, San Francisco, December 27, 1998: Panel, "Reading Nabokov Reading," chaired by Stephen Blackwell; papers by William Monroe, Russell Kilbourn, Kevin Ohi, Jeffrey Netto. The second panel, as usual, will be an open session on December 29, 1:45-3:00 pm (this unfortunately conflicts with the AAASS Society panel—see below), chaired by Ellen Pifer; papers by Dana Dragunoiu, David Rutledge, Geraldine Chouard, and Maxim Shrayer.

AAASS National Convention, San Francisco, December 29, 1998, 1:00-3:00 pm: Nabokov Society Panel, "Vladimir Nabokov at the End of the Century, His and Ours." Chair, Galya Diment; papers by Kirsten Rutsala, Julia Trubikhina, Stephen Blackwell; discussant, Eric Naiman.. Another panel, not sponsored by the Society, is on the program December 29, at 8:00am: "Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*," chaired by Michael Gorham; papers by Nikita Dimitrov and Tony Moore.

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Please note the new rates, listed on the inside cover of this issue, now in effect for all subscriptions/memberships. Because of unexpected significant increases in printing costs as well as postage increases, along with a backlog of unsold issues of *Nabokov Studies* (numbers 1 and 2), we have expended our reserves and will be nearly in the red at the end of the 1998 calendar year. We therefore urge all readers to renew their memberships/subscriptions at the earliest possible moment so that we shall have sufficient funds for the spring issue. It would be a grotesque irony were *The Nabokovian* to cease publication for lack of sufficient membership during this Nabokov centennial year.

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Our thanks to Ms. Paula Courtney for nearly two decades of irreplaceable assistance.

## THE NABOKOV CENTENARY

by Stephen Jan Parker

The Nabokov Centenary Festival at Cornell University, September 10-12, served as the spectacular opening to the coming year's centennial activities. Blessed with four days of mild weather in the splendid setting of one of the world's most beautiful campuses, Gavriel Shapiro succeeded in brilliantly orchestrating three days of Nabokov happenings — including, in chronological order, one of the first American showings of the new *Lolita* movie; the dedication of a Nabokov Commemorative Plaque; the opening of a library exhibit of Nabokov materials; a performance of *Dear Bunny/Dear Volodya*, a dramatic dialogue adapted from the letters of Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov by Terry Quinn, with William F. Buckley, Jr. in the role of Edmund Wilson and Dmitri Nabokov in the role of Vladimir Nabokov; a reception for the exhibition of Kathryn Jacobi's illustrations for *Invitation to a Beheading*; a Nabokov Centenary Festival Concert featuring noted performers presenting songs on poems of Vladimir Nabokov, including a new rendering of "The Ballad of Longwood Glen," and Dmitri Nabokov's performance of several Heine poems translated by his father; and a closing banquet with the keynote address by Dmitri Nabokov. These events punctuated, as it were, three full days of scholarly papers given by thirty-four presenters assembled from around the world to celebrate the life and achievements of Vladimir Nabokov (to be collected and published in 1999 by Cornell University Press).

It was an auspicious beginning to centenary festivities. Tasteful style and special attention to details marked its success, from the handsome Cornell festival centenary logo by Leslie Carrere, which graced posters and helpful programs of various sorts, to the collations following conference sessions, to the use of various attractive sites around the Cornell campus, to the print-

ing and distribution of abstracts of all the papers read. As one participant remarked, Gavriel Shapiro, with the aid of Ms. Jenka Fyfe, his affable and remarkably efficient assistant, had set the bar exceedingly high for centennial events to come.

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As the centenary year begins, *Lolita* is under license in 23 languages—estimated world sales since the Olympia Press 1955 edition, 50 million copies. Editions of the complete works of VN are on-market or in preparation in 7 languages:

- \* Chinese Shi Dai Wen Yi, Beijing
- \* Dutch Bezige Bij, Amsterdam
- \* English Vintage, New York; Penguin, London
- \* French Gallimard, Paris
- \* German Rowohlt, Reinbek-bei-Hamburg
- \* Italian Adelphi, Milan
- \* Polish Da Capo, Warsaw

Books scheduled for publication in the centenary year include, from Everyman the world-English edition of *Speak, Memory* with commentary by Brian Boyd; from the University of California Press at Berkeley, Simon Karlinsky's revised edition of the Nabokov-Wilson letters, *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*; from Beacon Press, Boston, *Nabokov's Butterflies*; from Rowohlt, Dieter Zimmer's compilation of Nabokov's screenplays for *Lolita*.

Adaptations of Nabokov are also flourishing: following the world premiere at the Royal Opera, Stockholm, the opera of *Lolita*, score and libretto by composer-conductor Rodion Shchedrin, will publish with Schott Musik International, Mainz; Adrian Lyne's *Lolita* finally had its American release in September 1998; more films are in progress — *The Defense* in pre-production with ICE3, Paris and Renaissance Films, London; *Laughter in the Dark* is under option with Gregory Mosher, New York;

and *Ada* is under option with Michael Alexander, London.

### The Centenary Calendar (to date)

November/December 1998. A travelling exhibition of Nabokoviana, curated by Dr. Daniela Rippl under the auspices of Literaturhaus, Munich, will open in Munich; Alexander Fest Verlag, Berlin, will publish the catalogue. It will subsequently travel to sites in Germany, Europe, and perhaps the USA.

March 12-14. International Conference, "Pushkin, Nabokov and Intertextuality," at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Conference organizer, Dr. Priscilla Meyer.

Early April. Russian celebrations will be orchestrated by the Nabokov Foundation, St. Petersburg.

April 15. The PEN America Center will put on an evening at Town Hall, New York City, tentatively entitled "Vladimir Nabokov: Reflections and Reminiscences."

Mid-April. The New York City offices of rare book dealer Glenn Horowitz (19 East 76th St.) will exhibit a collection from Nabokov's private library, featuring all of VN's butterfly autographed copies to his wife.

April 23. The New York Public Library will open a major exhibit of Nabokov papers from the Berg Collection; Rodney Phillips, curator.

Late April. Swiss celebrations will be hosted by the city of Montreux and the Montreux Palace Hotel.

June 27-29. "Teaching Nabokov," a conference sponsored by the University of Minnesota, Morris, the University of North Carolina Asheville, and the Vladimir Nabokov

Society. To include workshops and guest lectures. Conference organizer, Dr. Samuel Schuman.

July 6-10. "International Nabokov Centennial Conference," London and Cambridge, England hosted by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. To include conference papers and various entertainments including a performance of "Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya," a tour of Trinity College, the film "Skazka," adapted by Francois Rossier from Nabokov's story, a lecture by George Steiner, receptions and a gala dinner. Conference organizer, Dr. Jane Grayson

Mid-July. Dmitri Nabokov will read from VN's poetry and Terry Quinn's adaptation of the Nabokov-Wilson letters at the Ledbury Festival, Ledbury, England.

BANQUET KEYNOTE ADDRESS  
(PUBLICATION VERSION)  
NABOKOV CENTENARY FESTIVAL  
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

By Dmitri Nabokov

As I stand here before you, ladies and gentlemen, I have a cozy sense of *déjà vécu*, for it was in just such a convivial aura that I recall the Nabokov Festival of 1983, guided by the expert hand of George Gibian, at which one of my many pleasures was rooming at the "White House" with Maestro Borges.

Gavriel Shapiro's organizational hand was untried when he embarked upon this project, with whose foretaste he had lived lovingly for some ten years. It is to his eternal credit that he developed posthaste from the rigorous academic with whom I had the pleasure of appearing at the Sorbonne two years ago into an extraordinary "detail man." And without detail, a famous writer has said, art cannot exist. His attention has verged on the telepathic. Besides plunging me into a Jacuzzi of luxury at the Cornell super-Statler, he has, at every turn, foreseen and resolved potential troubles and trifles, from pressing engagements to pressing a suit.

As for me, among the things that have changed of late are my girth and roll center, which would make it impossible for me to scale the faces and chimneys of my mountaineering days, or the façade of Harvard's Memorial Hall, which I once did, although not, as one well-meaning embellisher has affirmed, while father was lecturing inside on *Don Quixote* ("Quicksote" — his pronunciation). The same friendly Shakespearean academic, whose views father respected, suggested it was not a good idea for a son to attend or audit his father's courses. Father passed the advice on to me, and I complied, which was a mistake. But I do have a fond and

vivid recollection of the classes I did nevertheless visit, and those were mostly right here at Cornell.

Apocrypha abounds, from the inane to the insane, and most of us have heard much of it — that father was a narcissistic alcoholic who died of cancer (modest portions of red, bronchitis); that mother was a harpy who, inter alia, entered Ithaca book shops to upstage *Zhivago* window displays with *Lolitas* — but the Véra Nabokov record will soon be set straight, perhaps to the chagrin of those to whom a miserable connubium is prerequisite for an artist — in what promises to be a splendid biography of Mother by Stacy Schiff, who is getting to know my mother almost as well as I, and will, I hope, forgive me for citing what could hardly have been said better. I quote:

Resentment of Mrs. Nabokov accumulated in equal proportion to the mystique. Who was this “Grey Eagle” in the classroom, the students wondered, while the faculty — very much aware that Nabokov had no Ph.D., no graduate students, no freshmen, and, by the mid-Fifties, enviably high enrollments — chafed at the husband-and-wife routine. When Nabokov was being considered for a job elsewhere .... an ex-colleague discouraged the idea: don’t bother hiring him; *she* does all the work. Nabokov did nothing to check this kind of sniping. He told his students that Ph.D. stood for “Department of Philistines.” .... His colleagues were jealous of the enrollments, mystified by the butterfly net, astounded by the loyalty of the wife. In this last, they echoed the sentiments of Edmund Wilson, who hated her exam administering and her general devotion. Other writers’ wives were asked point-blank why they could not be more like Véra, who was held up as the gold standard, the International Champion in the Wife-of-Writer Competition.

.....

Véra Nabokov was a striking woman, white-haired and alabaster-skinned, thin and fine-boned. The discrepancy between the hair and the young face was particularly dramatic. She was “mnemogenic,” as Nabokov wrote of Clare in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* [who, I interject, is an excellent refutation of the charge that Nabokov created no sympathetic female characters; Zina Merz is another (DN)] — “subtly endowed with the gift of being remembered.” And that is where the trouble begins. According to the faculty and the students at Cornell, she was luminous, regal, elegance personified, “the most beautiful middle-aged woman I have ever set eyes on”; or else she was a waif, or dowdy, or half-starved, or the Wicked Witch of the West. To those same students and faculty emeriti went the obvious question: what was Mrs. Nabokov doing in her husband’s classroom, lecture after lecture? the answers come prefaced with the reminder that it was Nabokov who termed rumor the poetry of truth [the list (DN)]:

\* Mrs. Nabokov was there to remind us we were in the presence of greatness, and should not abuse that privilege with our inattention.

\* Because Nabokov had a heart condition, and she was at hand with a phial of medicine to jump up at a moment’s notice.

\* That wasn’t his wife, that was his mother.

\* Because Nabokov was allergic to chalk dust—and because he didn’t like his handwriting.

\* To shoo away the coeds this before the publication of *Lolita*.

\* Because she was his encyclopedia, if he ever forgot anything [this is perhaps a bit closer to the truth (DN)].

\* Because he had no idea what was going to come out of his mouth — and no memory of it after it did — so she had to write it all down so that he would remember what to ask on the exam.

\* He was blind, and she was the seeing-eye dog, which explained why they sometimes arrived arm in arm. [Mother would have liked this one (DN).]

\* We all knew that she was a ventriloquist.

\* She had a gun in her purse, and was there to defend him.

[The above excerpts are reprinted with the kind permission of Stacy Schiff, and courtesy of *The New Yorker* (Feb. 10, 1997) and *The Nabokovian* (Spring, 1997).]

To a loving and observant son, Mother was of course even more, ineffably more, than the most sensitive biographer can say — self-taught literary assistant who sacrificed a jewel case of talents for what both adoration and objectivity dictated, but, most of all, utterly human and humane and maternal. I remember her distaste for the superficial, the approximate, and her insistence that I explain comprehensibly, with diagrams, how an automobile differential or an early binary system worked. Yet she was not only superbly precise of mind, but tenderness personified, to deserving man or beast. When I lay in the deliberately darkened isolation of a burn unit and she could barely see me from her wheelchair under an ineffective outdoor infra-red heater, she exclaimed “look what’s going on behind you! —” for the Swiss TV was running a program on animals, a love and cause of her life. In Ithaca she did a lot of things, including learning how to drive, without benefit of anyone’s lap, under the guidance of a colorful gentleman named Jacoby — both teacher and dealer — who sold us our first car, a slightly limping mouse-gray pre-war Plymouth that took me to boarding school. She shopped, she typed, she knew

exactly to what bone-manipulator to take me when I threw out my sacroiliac playing tennis. She had enjoyed target-shooting in her youth, as well as riding and stunt-flying, but she carried no gun to class and had attempted no political assassinations. The Browning .38 for which we had traded a rickety old revolver of mine at an Ithaca gun shop reposed, unused, in a drawer. It now hangs in its holster by my bed, loaded for pears, mad biographers, and other demented souls.

One bit of nonsense — well meant, but exactly the kind of human-interest hogwash that Nabokov detested — caught my eye last week. A 1992 mini-tribute to VN from a coastal college that I feared might be slated for republication quotes a long-ago student as follows:

...the professor wore dirty tennis shoes with holes and no socks and a shabby jacket with patches and ill-matched trousers, an outfit borrowed from fellow émigré Mikhail Karpovich, a history professor at Harvard.

Sorry, Palo Alto — we may have been émigrés, but we were not proto-beatniks. And anyone familiar with Nabokov’s tall, gaunt figure of the Forties and Karpovich’s roly-poly shape would have a real belly-laugh at the thought of their exchanging clothes. Perhaps another story got mixed in here — a true one about the tailcoat that kind but misguided friend Sergei Rachmaninov gave Nabokov for his debut at that summer session. The tailcoat remained unused, while Rachmaninov’s gift to me of my first radio — an oval, beige Philco portable — was cherished for years.

I quote *ibidem*:

....I don’t recall taking any notes.... it would have been rather like scribbling .... while Michelangelo talked about how he designed and painted ..... I don’t recall that he lectured in any conventional sense of the term ..... The

author read from his own works, which were often autobiographical, and "smacked of life."

The source gentleman's adoration is truly touching, but mnemosyne has misspoken again. Father lectured, that distant summer, on Russian drama and other matters from meticulously prepared texts, which exist to this day in my archive. These particular lectures are largely unpublished, but the fact that father spoke from manuscript rather than off the Nabocuff, as some would have liked, has made it possible to publish precious Cornell and Harvard lectures that would have been lost, and has, in the process, allowed me to make up for having missed the live performances.

Other award-winning tripe abounds. I have already bestowed my personal booby prizes on the likes of British ecclesiastical journalist Oddie, who ascribes the evils of our — quote — permissive society to jazz, the Beatles, *Playboy* and *Lolita*; critics Valium Val and born-again Bernie; various US Hatches and Podhoretzes who would throw out the babies of art with the messy bathwater of the media; the non-reading virtue-leaguers striving to protect the babies who remain on board, free to watch the grizzliest of dismemberments, the squabbles of Jerry Springer's transvestites, and the possible impeachment of our president for the consequences of bedding what I guess he considered a peach; negligee-photographed scholar Pia Pera — "pear," appropriately, in Italian — who rips off much of *Lolita*, not in parody as her publishers' lawyers would have it but in an attempt at some earnest statement "from the girl's viewpoint," allowing her sleazy Italian publisher to proclaim as much via a belly-band on her book that implies a nexus with Adrian Lyne's totally extraneous fine new film. And besides the legislators who would have the Internet red-flag the word "breast" whenever it is not complemented by "cancer," there are, on the fence's fruitful other side, many frac-tail riders besides Pera who, it seems, can think of nothing new to write

about, but whom one ignores unless they cross into the actionable zones of plagiarism and infringement.

We have worse — the infamous biographer Nosik, whom I shall belabor, sticking to my guns and noses ad nosikum. Fortunately he will soon be supplanted, on the needy Russian scene at least, by Brian Boyd.

And still worse: a gentleman named Begley who, in a proposed introduction to *Speak, Memory*, accused the author of *Bend Sinister*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Tyrants Destroyed*, and "Cloud, Castle, Lake" of being scandalously soft on Hitler. The introduction did not appear.

But let us recall happier things:

Wonderful Morris Bishop, a truly cosmopolitan man and scholar, who brought Nabokov to Cornell.

The congeries of sabbatical houses that we rented in Ithaca, each with its personal charms, from horseshoes to basement workshops to a splendid cannonball of unknown origin that I dug up in the Hansteens' garden, somehow related in my memory to the expression "go over like a lead balloon" that, freshly learned, made me roll with laughter during a tennis game with Gordon Sutherland, son of the eminent Cornell law professor and family friend.

Countless games with Father at the same Cascadilla courts, and even skiing with him, one particularly wintry winter, on the slope of what was then called the University Library.

The general cocoon of love and well-being and encouragement in which both my parents always enveloped me, whatever the locus — and I was not always an easy son.

Dr. Asher, our old-world family physician, and his sons, who introduced me to the joys of private flying.



My model-airplane motors that had prophetically tormented our neighbors long before, during school vacation days spent in Ithaca.

Watching *The Honeymooners* together on one of the sabbatical TVs, bisected by a perpetual black stripe, or Alfred Hitchcock episodes that presaged a collaboration with Hitchcock that was almost to happen some years later.

The whole charming aura of Ithaca, where I spent relatively little time because of my studies elsewhere, but which retains far more than its share of space under the subtitle "happy time and place, with parents."

My father is enjoying some wonderful presents as his hundredth birthday approaches:

The first film based on a work of his that, I am convinced, he would have truly enjoyed.

Many splendid editions in many tongues, from Vintage to Penguin to Adelphi to Rowohlt to Anagrama to imminent Pléiade to the Library of America, the American Pléiade.

Adoration, if rather anarchic and often piratical, among a people for which he felt, as he left Europe, that he would never write again.

That nation's spontaneous project of making the Nabokovs a prototype for restitution, in this case the restitution of the setting for his childhood. And were not language and childhood two of his three great losses?

The various lists — the BBC's great men of the century and the 100-book affairs, where he would have been happy to march behind Joyce, whatever the selection process.

A subtle feeling that he and Joyce are indeed marching together into the pantheon as the great English-language writers of our time, without benefit of Nobels or US citizens' postage-stamp committees.

The marvelous celebrations planned worldwide for his birthday, some organized by established Nabokovians, others by brilliant newcomers who have materialized like *dei ex machina* when they were most needed.

The fact that these celebrations start out here at Cornell, a university he dearly loved, even at moments when he felt sick of teaching in general, for its splendid setting and the academic freedom it accorded him.

For that I thank, from the warmest cockles of a Nabokovian heart, President Rawlings, Professor Shapiro and his cohorts and colleagues, dear friend Bill Buckley, who had to dash off after Thursday night's thespian foray, Terry Quinn who prepared it — and all of you, many of whom I already knew in person, others who have become faces rather than Internet digits and letters on sites that have touchingly hung out signs saying "gone to Ithaca" to commemorate Vladimir Nabokov, as well as all those whose presentations I have yet to enjoy.

Now, two final, more personal thoughts. I don't know how many of you were able to attend my brief reading yesterday from my translation of an unpublished continuation of *The Gift*. What I would have gone on to read, had not a final slice of time inexorably consumed itself, was what the protagonist's father invents — a thunderingly new classification system for the animal world that was, in a way, prophetic. For only now are Vladimir Nabokov's own new concepts of classification being acknowledged by the entomological world — in part thanks to the specimens preserved at the Cornell Museum — and newly recognized variants being named after characters in his books.

Finally, finally: While the basic furnishings of Ithaca have not changed much — the hills, the lake, the splendid waterfalls — thank God some of the superstructure is different. Had time stood still in every way — the old friends, the brown buses, the period cars we meet in the new *Lolita*, details of streets and buildings, the differently garbed populace, *The Honeymooners* and the Hitchcock — that would have been too poignant for tears, for only Véra and Vladimir Nabokov would be missing.

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## NOTES AND BRIEF COMMENTARIES

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](mailto: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.]

### THE OTHERWORLDLY ROLE OF WATER

Water plays a greater role in Nabokov's personal lexicon than most readers have recognized. Sinks, drips, drinks, and even ice and snow may have a metaphysical importance in Nabokov's art. Puddles and rainstorms often reflect a deep, perhaps transcendent meaning. Water, in a variety of forms, consistently represents the possibility of otherworldly communication. I would like to present only a few examples to illustrate this reading of Nabokov's use of water imagery.

In *Glory*, Martin Edelweiss contemplates death and momentarily senses mortality approaching, only to discover that the presence he felt was nothing but water:

He imagined how he himself would be dying some day, and felt as if the ceiling were coming down on him

slowly and inexorably. Something began to drum rapidly in the darker part of the room, and his heart missed a beat. But it was merely water that had been spilled on the washstand and was now dripping onto the linoleum.

His fearful anticipation of death is replaced by water. In this image water seems to be an appeasing sign sent from the other side, indirectly telling Edelweiss that his fear is unfounded. One may look at this passage from *Glory* on its own terms and perceive the relevance of water without the need for other texts. However, Nabokov's use of water is consistent, and one can better appreciate the metaphysical role of water in Nabokov's lexicon by looking at examples throughout his body of work.

As Alexander Yakovlevich Chernyshevski lies dying in *The Gift*, the sound of water represents the illusion of nothingness, the limited vision of those who see nothing beyond. He says to Fyodor, "Of course there is nothing afterwards... There is nothing. It is as clear as the fact that it is raining." Chernyshevski's certainty of nothingness, however, as the next paragraph shows, is an obvious misinterpretation of the facts: "And meanwhile outside the spring sun was playing on the roof tiles, the sky was dreamy and cloudless, the tenant upstairs was watering the flowers on the edge of the balcony, and the water trickled down with a drumming sound." Needless to say, Nabokov never had much sympathy for the finite conclusions of existentialists. A few pages further on, Fyodor speaks the better lesson of this deceptive dripping, "Definition is always finite... I search beyond the barricades (of words, of senses, of the world) for infinity." Though Chernyshevsky never gets the message, for the reader (and for Fyodor) the water in the above scene demonstrates that there is more outside than the believers in nothingness and finite conclusions are capable of perceiving, that perhaps there may even be a "dreamy and cloudless" spring day somewhere beyond one's limited perception.

The story "Ultima Thule" provides another example of Nabokov's metaphysical use of water. In responding

(somewhat) to questions about an afterlife and that question to which Nabokov himself only responds in his own terms--"does God exist?"--the character Falter, who "stands *outside* our world, in the true reality," significantly juxtaposes a statement about revealed 'essence' with a request for water: "I certainly cannot doubt that, as you put it, essence has been revealed to me." Some water please." Falter refuses to elaborate on the nature of this "essence," and instead there is a reference which is best understood within the personal terms of Nabokovian metaphysics. He, too, knows more than he can say in words, though perhaps some water might help. Water, for Nabokov, is the sign of communicated essence as well as the means by which that communication can be made.

In *Ada*, the telephone is replaced by the "dorophone," a communication device which literally runs on water: "All the toilets and waterpipes in the house had been suddenly seized with borborygmic convulsions. This always signified, and introduced, a long-distance call." The proper protocol for answering the dorophone is to say, "A l'eau!" This is a bilingual pun on the English 'Hello,' and the French for 'by water.' It is also a further pun on Nabokov's sense of communication by water. Water as a means of communication takes on additional meaning in this novel when Lucette commits suicide by drowning. After the drowning, the possibility of water acting as a means of communication with the other side--truly "long distance" communication--is further developed. Here is a mistyped word corrected by one of Van's editors: "Although Lucette had never died before--no, *dived* before, Violet--from such a height...she went with hardly a splash through the wave that humped to welcome her." Although the site of suicide, water does not represent a permanent end. Brian Boyd discusses "the messages Lucette seems to send from her watery grave." Rather than discuss the details of this communication in *Ada* or elsewhere, I only want to stress that Nabokov often uses water as the means of interaction between the two sides.

In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* the narrator V. says to the artist Carswell, in regard to Knight, "Any man

can look into water." Carswell responds, "But don't you think that he did it particularly well?" Knight was particularly able to understand the other side of mortal life, Carswell seems to be saying. Like Falter, Carswell is using Nabokov's language, making a statement which might not mean as much when read alone. The context is Nabokov's metaphysical imagery. Water could represent the means by which Knight can communicate with this side, also, the means by which he can make himself known within V.'s text. There are plenty more examples of Nabokov using water in this way: the icicles of "The Vane Sisters," Krug's puddle in *Bend Sinister*, and perhaps the puddle--the authorial watermark--of *Pnin*. Shade's daughter Hazel commits suicide by drowning; Humbert contemplates drowning Charlotte. The aspiring artist Victor Wind "placed various objects in turn--an apple, a pencil, a chess pawn, a comb--behind a glass of water and peered through it at each studiously." In Nabokov's work, water is a means for looking through to the other side, an emblem for interaction with an other realm. *Pnin* is another character who receives a significant sign through dishwater, though his is literally in the sink.

At the start of the final chapter of *Sebastian Knight*, there is a passage which connects water, ghosts and the possibility of transcendent communication: "Rain drops trickled down the panes: they did not trickle straight but in a jerky, dubious, zig-zag course." The zig-zag quality of the novel might make the presence of Knight seem as dubious as these rain drops. However, knowing the role of water in Nabokov's lexicon, we might see--as apparently V. does not--that this detail of the weather could be a sign from Knight. If this initial zig-zag hint is not enough, moments later the same weather seems a bit more insistent that we (and V.) see its potential source: "a ghost-like snowflake settled in one corner and melted away." The zig-zagging Knight--in the guise of this ghostly snowflake--seems to be present in the text.

Vladimir Alexandrov further illustrates the role of water in Nabokov's art by following some significant raindrops through *Lolita*. His discussion of water imagery seems to be in agreement with the idea that Nabokov uses

water as the means of transcendent communication. Alexandrov writes: "The series of rain and water images can be interpreted as hints that Charlotte's spirit is a constituent element of Humbert's fate" (*Nabokov's Otherworld* 181). Charlotte, like most of Nabokov's ghosts, is characterized by water. As in the conclusion of *Sebastian Knight*, a watery ghost can make its presence known through a restless dream: "for some minutes I miserably dozed, and Charlotte was a mermaid in a greenish tank." Water is the image for movement back and forth from the other side to the earthly side, the ghost's method for sending messages.

The suspicious spinster, for example, who stops to question Lolita outside her house, could be a disguised ghost, making an appearance much like the suspiciously coincidental characters of *Sebastian Knight*: "The odious spinster...stood leaning on her slim umbrella (the sleet had just stopped, a cold wet sun had sidled out)... 'And where is your mother, my dear?'" Alexandrov provides other examples. Humbert himself does not know why he so strongly insists on the power of water: "Oh, my poor Charlotte, do not hate me in your eternal heaven among an eternal alchemy of asphalt and rubber and metal and stone--but thank God, not water, not water!" He says this in response to his own decision not to drown Charlotte, but Humbert does not realize that one need not die by water--like Lucette or Hazel--in order to communicate by water--like Knight or Cynthia and Sybil Vane. Humbert further demonstrates his ignorance of Nabokov's use of water in the screenplay, calling it "the anonymous fluid." Obviously he sees no potential for transcendent communication in a fluid he considers to be "anonymous." For Nabokov, water is anything but anonymous.

--David Rutledge, Cleveland, Ohio

NEGATIVE ACTION  
(AN ODD SOURCE FOR INVITATION TO  
A BEHEADING)

In his classical criticism of *War and Peace*, published shortly after the novel came out under the title "Recollections of 1812" in the *Russian Archive* (1869), Prince Peter Viazemski, a famous poet and wit, takes Tolstoy to severe task for doctoring events, distorting characters, and generally palming the reader an invented history of the epoch. He ascribes this artistic behaviour to a certain modern skepticism towards things long past, which he calls, curiously, a "moral materialism in literature" leading to abject nihilism. At that point of his essay, Viazemski tells the following ghastly story, making a strange parallel with Tolstoy's treatment of history:

Over 30 years ago I saw, in a Saratov gaol, a member of a sect which belonged to the branch called *Nietovshchina* [nay-saying, nihilism, apophasis]. These sectarians killed one another. One of them would condemn himself to death and put his head on a wooden block and the next in line would hack it off. The chap that I saw was the only survivor of more than 30 murdered in one night in a village barn. These were men, women, men advanced in years, children. Before the end each would say: "*Prekrati menia* [terminate me, cancel me, put an end to me], for goodness' sake." I do not know [continues Prince V.] wherefore or for whose sake our historical *prekrashchateli* [exterminators] labour, but it would be well if that branch, too, assumed the denomination of *Nietovshchina*. [pp. 186-87].

The readers of this publication need not be told that this passage fits astonishingly well the plot of *Invitation to a Beheading*, in at least two important places: the special combination of horror and farce making up the decapitation theme in the novel, and the "non-nons" theme (*nietki*, in Russian), which sets up a very peculiar process of restoring the truth by *negating its distorted image*—or exactly the other way round, as in Viazemski's story,

where utter evil is done for the perceived sake of good. This is obvious. Less so, especially to non-Russophones, is the verbal proximity of "*prekratit*" and "*sokratit*", the latter being one of the dreadful black puns in *IB*, where an "opera" *Sokratis/Sokratik* ("Socrates Must Decrease," i.e. be "terminated") is to be staged after the public ceremony of beheading. It is for this opera that one of Cincinnatus's brothers-in-law, a singer, rehearses a certain aria in his cell: letters in that musical phrase reshuffle into a Russian dictum that goes in English

"The secret is  
That death is bliss."

(Gene Barabtarlo's two-sentence version loses all the scansion of a musical aria and sounds rather like a clumsy translation of a ponderous maxim. Sorry, Gene!).

Now, could VN have seen that Viazemski's essay before the summer of 1934, when, already composing *The Gift*, VN plunged into *Invitation to a Beheading*? Why, it is not at all implausible that he came across the essay in the Berlin Public Library while sifting through the Russian periodicals—those "obscure magazines of the Roaring Sixties in marbled boards" (*Pnin*, 77)—for the Chernyshevski chapter. After all, do not certain reviews of Godunov-Cherdyntsev's biography of one of the most famous Russian nihilists resemble in thrust—but reflected as it were in a "nay-mirror"—Viazemski's indignation at the distortion of history? At the end of this passage, Viazemski gravely states that "one must treat history conscientiously, reverently, and lovingly,"—does not this resemble strangely, in meaning *and* in tone, the split sonnet embracing *Life of Chernyshevski*?

—Robert Aldwinckle, Yarmouth, N.S.

## ADA'S SPRINGBOARD

A paper by Charles Nicol, "Buzzwords and Dorophonemes: How Words Proliferate and Things Decay in *Ada*," at the Cornell Nabokov Centenary Festival, September 10-12, 1998, opened by saying that when I wrote about the genesis of *Ada* at the start of the "Annotations to *Ada*" series here in the *Nabokovian* (30, Spring 1993) I had ignored the telephone call that caused the novel to leap into existence. I could not help calling out from the floor that I didn't go into the matter there because I had already explained it in the biography. After Charles finished his paper, I explained that a meeting with James Mason and Vivian di Crespi in Vevey seemed to have triggered Nabokov's idea for the call. Charles followed the matter up by e-mail after the conference, and asked me to set things out in more detail. Working from my files, I wrote the paragraph that follows:

On February 16, 1966, the Nabokovs met James Mason and his friend Countess Vivian di Crespi for lunch at the Hotel Trois Couronnes, the grand hotel on the waterfront at Vevey, the next town along the shore of Lake Geneva to the west of Montreux. The next day Nabokov noted in his diary: "New novel has started to flow." In a 1969 interview Nabokov stated: "I began working on the Texture-of-Time section some ten years ago, in Ithaca, upstate New York, but only in February, 1966, did the entire novel leap into the kind of existence that can and must be put into words. Its springboard was *Ada's* telephone call (in what is now the penultimate part of the book." (SO 122) The setting of the last chapter of Part Three and the goal and endpoint of Part Four of *Ada* is the Hotel Les Trois Cygnes in Mont Roux, a fusion of the Nabokovs' own hotel, the Montreux Palace Hotel, where they stayed in the older, Cygne, wing (once a separate hotel, the Hotel du Cygne), and the similar-looking and similarly-situated (both are on the banks of the lake) Trois Couronnes in Vevey. Since *Ada* uses the in-house phone to call up from the lobby area of the Trois Cygnes to Van, already in-

stalled upstairs, and since the idea for that crucial call came to Nabokov within a day after the lunch with Mason and di Crespi, it seems highly likely that the Nabokovs' call on the inhouse phone up to their lunch hosts the previous day from the lobby floor of the Trois Couronnes precipitated the phone call that at last triggered *Ada*. *III décrocha l'apparat et déclancha un roman*. On February 21, 1966, Nabokov noted in his diary: "Her name: *Ada*." Five days later: "New novel progressing at an alarming rate—at least half a dozen cards daily."

Only then did I check the biography, where (VNAY 508) I report the lunch meeting at the Trois Couronnes and then turn to the scene at the Trois Cygnes in *Ada's* Mont Roux. But as soon as I opened my master copy, I noticed my pencil hand in the margin, and a post-it sticker with the same message: "sentence dropped" (not by me, I can assure you: I discovered this only on rereading the passage as printed, in the course of writing another piece on *Ada*, and then checking with my computer file when I saw something crucial had disappeared). I cite the first few lines of the paragraph in the biography, with, in italics, the portion you should restore to the text: "In *Ada* the crucial scene of Van and *Ada's* ultimate reunion takes place in the Hotel Trois Cygnes, an obvious fusion of the Trois Couronnes and the old Cygne wing of the Montreux Palace. *A phone call from Ada in the lobby to Van in his hotel room seems to hold out the promise that they can reconnect with their remote past, but Their meeting face-to-face proves a disaster, and on a flimsy pretext Ada leaves for the Geneva airport.*" I note from my marginalium that I had had "from *Ada* in her room in the hotel down to Van in the lobby", my deletion of that absent-minded transposition in the proofs was noticed by the printer, but the correct version I substituted for it was overlooked, making nonsense of the page that follows, with its discussion of this phone call as the springboard of the novel.

No wonder Charles thought I had overlooked the phone call.

--Brian Boyd, University of Auckland, New Zealand

#### THE ART OF ARCHERY

Stephen Parker and I have decided to change the name of this section, after twenty years of use, in part because no queries are any longer made in print. As in many other departments of life nowadays, people see no point in waiting long for a reply to their demand when they can get it in a keystroke. This past August, Mr. Igor Friedman posed a question about the meaning of Nabokov's short story "Krasavitsa" ["A Russian Beauty," 1934], and particularly of its enigmatic ending, on the electronic Nabokov discussion forum, and one of the typical ephemeral exchanges ensued: a flurry of comments, a tangle of loose or dead ends, then a void without a ripple. Even "Dubliners" were mentioned as a possible model.

On rereading the story, I proposed that it belongs to the specific variety whose *other* meaning cannot be derived from within the text, without the scaffolding of an auxiliary consideration. Here such necessary construct may be "Bunin," specifically, VN's difficult, and significantly disguised attitude to that singular writer. On several occasions, VN attempted to outdo Bunin in what he thought Bunin did best in prose, which Nabokov calls "brocade prose" in the Russian version of his memoir. In those few competitive or complimentary works VN would deliberately throw up in high relief painterly writing, rustic detail, a device of slow-paced, precise yet utterly fresh description, and of course the lyrical, unspoiled, gentrified Russian diction of noble literary descent,—and indeed he would surpass his predecessor in almost all of these. It is as if VN felt, every once in a while during the 1930s, an urge to engage in that oddly keen, one-sided competition, and applied himself to show that he could do

all these things better than the renowned master—who was, on the other hand, helpless in the departments where VN excelled—the art of structural engineering, especially of larger compositions, let alone the art of thematic patterning and golden egg-hunt and the multi-layered distribution of philosophical content. One aspect in which Nabokov could not match Bunin's artistry was depiction of Russian peasantry and their speech and customs, something that VN knew only in passing, as he shows in his "Bad Day," while Bunin knew them first-hand, but also made a *point* to master, holding especially Tolstoy as his model.

Many peculiar sides of "Krasavitsa"—the quality of portrait detail, the strangely "inclusive" and familiar tone of the narrator, or better to say "story-teller" (e.g. this astonishingly sudden "*nechego nos vorotit*"—"no use to turn up your nose"—which is not an exact translation, by the way), the special sadness of it all, the submerged sexual ballast (e.g. Ol'ga seems to have told Vera that she is a virgin, which causes Vera to burst out laughing in disbelief) and particularly the mention of "soft breasts" (atypical for Nabokov, while Bunin had a dreadful weakness for this trite phrase and its variations), even the title of the story,— all these and similar features strike me as characteristically and specifically Buninian.

But Nabokov's parodies, in the true Greek sense of the word, are usually delivered, like certain sardine tins, with an opener attached. The ending ("unexpected", he calls it in his send-up) appears to be such a key. Bunin's stories were almost always open-ended, unidirectional, life variously sliced, so that the note of sadness would ring out after the all-important last sentence has been read—but there is no urge, nor need, to re-read the story, for the enchantment and sadness will be repeated but not amplified by a new discovery. VN therefore abruptly cuts off the story thread but ties a hasty nabokovian knot at the end: the narrator does not know a continuation, but—behold!—the arrow of his parody has already hit its target and thus will be in flight until "at least one poet's left under the moon." Bunin did not practice such methods and detested them as "trickery," and that was,

I think, the point. VN dedicated his "Obida" [translated phonetically as "A Bad Day"] to "Ivan Alexeevich Bunin," and the story is an intricate combination of literary flattery and contest. But there are other Bunin-like charges deliberately planted in *The Defense* and elsewhere. Maxim Shrayer has written much on the subject both in Russian ("Bunin i Nabokov: Poetika Sopernichestva," [The Poetics of Rivalry], in I.A. *Bunin i russkaia literatura XX veka*. Moscow: Nasledie, 1995, 41-65) and recently in English ("Vladimir Nabokov and Ivan Bunin: A Reconstruction". *Russian Literature*. No. 43. Amsterdam-Elsevier, 1998, 339-411.). He thinks (as does Boyd—see RY-408) that the arrow reaching its mark signifies the abrupt manner of ending the story in a "stylistic death," i.e. death of the heroine reported in an extension of a compound sentence, one of Nabokov's favorite methods (cf. "Spring in Fialta," "Perfection," perhaps "Aleppo"). On the other hand, Bunin's endings were often weak, and Shrayer quotes VN's recently published letter to Aldanov in which he states as much (and harsher). But I am still inclined to think that the dart at the end of "Krasavitsa" hits the target of a benevolent parody, its tail vibrating in a friendly, yet victorious, salute.

It appears that soon after the famous dinner with Bunin at a Paris restaurant, Nabokov gave him an inscribed a copy of *Despair* (now at Cornell's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library), and that contemporary inscription, very reverent and humble, captures something of Nabokov's real emotion towards Bunin at the time and thus clashes sharply with the arch tone of the pages describing the episode in *Conclusive Evidence*. (Bunin, on reading this anecdote in the book, was indignant and called VN, in a letter to Aldanov, a "cheap buffoon," *shut gorokhovyi*). It is well to remember, by the way, that the Russian version of the memoir three years later pays a special homage to Bunin, who had died shortly before the publication of *Other Shores*, by parodying his style in the strong resolution of the last paragraph of that chapter (absent in either English version), the very paragraph in which Nabokov regrets that their conversations never

turned into anything serious, and now it is too late, and the hero leaves the house and goes out into the park, and a Buninesque period, from undiluted concentrate, follows (TN-21, 33-5; see also Shrayer's "VN and Ivan Bunin: A Reconstruction," 392). This post-mortem tribute to Bunin, incrustated in the extension of a long, cadenced period, resembles the closing technique mentioned above, as if Nabokov touched that nock again to make the shaft of the arrow sway. And why then could not "A Russian Beauty," written months after Bunin had won the Nobel Prize, be meant as a congratulatory yet polemical tribute to an indisputably older master by an arguably better one?

GB

PS: There is an article on "A Russian Beauty," which I have not consulted, by Irina Belobrovtsseva and Svetlana Turovskaia, "Krasavitsa' Vladimira Nabokova," in *Wiener slawistischer almanach*, no. 38, 1996.

#### CORNELL REFERENCES IN PNIN

Nabokov scholars have long acknowledged that the writer used Cornell University as a prototype, if not the prototype, for Waindell College in which Pnin, the novel's title character, holds a teaching position (cf. Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact* 300; Diment, *Pniniad*). In these notes, I will attempt to unravel some clues that appear in the novel in support of this assumption.

1. The novel contains a reference to John Thurston Todd, "the eminent bibliophile and Slavist" who "in the nineties" "had visited hospitable Russia" (*Pnin* 77). (This Russian connection was, perhaps, the reason Nabokov finally settled Pnin in the house on Todd Road which the protagonist considers buying.) It is very likely that Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918) served Nabokov as the prototype for John Thurston Todd. First, it seems that Nabokov modeled the full name of Waindell's "biblio-



phile and Slavist" on that of Cornell's first President. His given name (John) is that of another Apostle, the middle name (Thurston), most likely his mother's maiden name, is, like White's, of Anglo-Saxon origin, as well as the surname (Todd) that means "bush" in Middle English (see Basil Cottle, *The Penguin Dictionary of Surnames*, 2nd ed. [New York: Penguin Books, 1978], 383). In addition, Todd is anagrammatically included in the name of Andrew Dickson White.

Furthermore, a number of facts from the life of A. D. White corroborate this supposition. In the early 1890s, White served as the U. S. Minister to Russia where he met with the country's cultural elite, including Leo Tolstoy. White "had amassed" Russia-related books which in his case were not "quietly chuted into a remote stack" (*Pnin* 77), but rather formed a unique collection that bears his name at the University Library (now Uris). Nabokov apparently conveys his own experience of working in the President Andrew D. White Library, as this collection is officially called, when he describes how "Pnin would go to those books and gloat over them: obscure magazines of the Roaring Sixties in marbled boards; century-old historical monographs, their somnolent pages foxed with fungus spots; Russian classics in horrible and pathetic cameo bindings, whose molded profiles of poets reminded dewy-eyed Timofey of his boyhood, when he could idly palpate on the book cover Pushkin's slightly chafed side whisker or Zhukovski's smudgy nose" (*ibid.*). Finally, in referring to Todd, whose "bearded bust presided over the drinking fountain" (*ibid.*), Nabokov perhaps alluded to A. D. White's statue in front of Goldwin Smith Hall. (Note: "presided" in the above-quoted phrase derives from the same root as the word "president.")

2. Earlier in the novel, we come across a fleeting character, "Professor Entwistle of Goldwin University" (*Pnin* 30). Goldwin University suggests, of course, Goldwin Smith (1823-1910), an English-born Cornell Professor of History and a close friend of A. D. White, whose name bears one of the University's main buildings in the College of Arts and Sciences—Goldwin Smith Hall (see Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact* 92). Further, the mention of

Goldwin is undoubtedly self-referential since it was in Goldwin Smith Hall that Nabokov occupied an office—Room 278—and taught courses during his Cornell tenure (1948-59). We may recall that for this reason Nabokov dubbed himself "strictly a Goldwin Smith man" (SL267). (At the Cornell Nabokov Centenary Festival, 10-12 September 1998, which celebrated also the 50th anniversary of his coming to teach at Cornell, Nabokov's office was distinguished with a commemorative plaque.)

The name of Professor Entwistle also has a Cornell connection, albeit less obvious and much more intricate than Todd or Goldwin. It leads to Morris Bishop who was instrumental in bringing Nabokov to Cornell and who was among his closest friends there. Bishop, Professor of French and Italian literature, was also known for his light verse and humorous stories which occasionally appeared in periodicals such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*.

On December 17, 1949, *The New Yorker* published a feuilleton entitled "Adaption in the Faculty Club" in which Bishop pokes fun at senseless scientific research. In this feuilleton, set in a faculty club, a certain Professor Entwistle recounts a story about Clarence Clute, "a chap in Zoology who was crazy about adaptation" (107). In particular, Clute conducted "experiment[s]" (*ibid.*) which were concerned with adaptation of rattlesnakes to the climate of Ireland or of sharks to fresh water for which he used "a fresh-water bayou in Louisiana" (108). It is evident from Entwistle's account that Clute's preposterous 'research' meets with his full approval. Moreover, we learn that Entwistle himself nurses a Clute-like 'research' project: he intends to solve the water problem, "the greatest problem confronting America today" (109), by human adaptation to salt water. To demonstrate his commitment to the idea, Entwistle "took the saltcellar, unscrewed the top, and emptied the contents into his glass of water. He swished it around for a moment. He then took a leisurely drink, and lit a cigarette" (*ibid.*). But as soon as his interlocutor "was out of the door, Professor Entwistle put down his cigarette and moved with rapid, uneven but still dignified steps to the men's room" (*ibid.*).

It appears that Nabokov employed the tenor and tonality of Bishop's feuilleton in *Pnin* to expose and ridicule the pretense and absurdity that exists in academe. We may recall that when introduced to *Pnin*, Nabokov's Professor Entw(h)istle "rattled off" Russian greetings "in excellent imitation of Russian speech" (*Pnin* 36). Entwistle's innocuous disguise foreshadows the much more serious scholarly sham and incompetence of Leonard Blorengé, Chairman of French Literature and Language" who "disliked literature and had no French" (*Pnin* 140). (We may recall that Blorengé was modeled after Cornell's Gordon Fairbanks, about whom Nabokov complained that this "head of Russian Language Dept. / .../ does not have any Russian" ["SL" 263].) And like Bishop in his earlier feuilleton, Nabokov ridicules senseless grant-supported scholarship in his depiction of Waindell anthropologist Tristram T. Thomas who "had obtained ten thousand dollars [tantamount nowadays to approximately \$60,000—G.S.] from the Mandoville Foundation for a study of the eating habits of Cuban fishermen and palm-climbers" (*Pnin* 138). The bogus nature of Thomas's scholarship is alluded to in the name of the Foundation—Mandoville—which most likely refers to "the *Travels* of 'Sir John Mandeville' /.../ the most successful forgery of its time" (Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact* 221), as well as in Thomas's given name—Tristram—which also is apparently designed to cast ironic light on Thomas's scholarship by associating him with the title hero of Laurence Sterne's eccentric and whimsical novel.

Nabokov and Bishop frequently amused themselves by exchanging light verse, specifically limericks (SL 141), but usually kept this exchange to themselves. The appearance in *Pnin* of "Professor Entwistle of Goldwin University" as well as Waindell's Thomas, reminiscent of Bishop's feuilleton's Entwistle and Clute, points once again to the amusing Nabokov-Bishop exchange, but this time in print, and perhaps constitutes Nabokov's tribute to his closest Cornell friend.

—Gavriel Shapiro, Cornell University

ANNOTATIONS TO ADA  
12. Part I Chapter 12

by Brian Boyd

**Forenote:**

If I had to choose a small sample sachet that offered the full flavor of *Ada*, I would probably select Part I Chapter 12.

The chapter focuses on the intensity of the children's falling in love. That theme has been developing, of course, since Van's arrival at Ardis, especially in the catalogue of *Ada*'s physical attributes in I.9 and the showcase of her mental attributes in I.10. But here for the first time we see the depth of their desire, Van's, haunting his nights, *Ada*'s, brightening her morning.

Here for the first time, too, we encounter the full force of their love's lasting into old age. At ninety-four, Van has to endure "the small gray hours" of an ashen insomnia and to resort to pills to keep the pains of age at bay. In one sense, then, time proves to be decay, yet Van still has *Ada* with him and can still retrace and relive the magic of his past with her.

This is also the first time we see how intricately *Ada* is involved in celebrating the past she shares with Van (hitherto she has merely demurred in the margins) and how readily each can speak for each other. Here too we see the extent of *Ada*'s arrogance, the inseparability of her and Van's love from their sense of superiority to a world they think they can exclude, even if billions of other Bills and Jills happen to have also fallen in love. Throughout *Ada*, Nabokov explores the peculiar balance of similarity and difference in love, and the peculiar tension between transcending the isolation of the self and shutting out the rest of the world in passionate love.

Although the chapter focuses on the intensity of Van's yearning, it also relates his passion to his metaphysical panic, to his philosophical urge to know his place under the star-haunted skies, an impulse that will