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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

On April 12, the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Distinguished Biography by an American Author was awarded to Stacy Schiff for *Vera (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)* (New York: Random House). Pulitzer Prizes, for those who may not be aware, are among the most prestigious literary awards given in the USA. Awarded annually, they are presented in various journalism categories, as well as for the annual outstanding work in the categories of fiction, drama, poetry, biography/autobiography, history, general nonfiction, and music. More than 800 titles are considered each year. The prizes carry a relatively modest cash award of $5,000, but their true value rests in the commercial gains the titles accrue due to the public's perception of the award's great prestige.

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In consultation with, and assistance from, the Vladimir Nabokov Foundation, in January of this year PEN/America announced the creation of the PEN/Nabokov Literary Prize. The award, which will be given every other year, will honor a living author whose body of work, published in the United States, either written in or translated into English, represents achievement in a variety of literary genres and is of enduring originality and consummate craftsmanship. In the spirit of Vladimir Nabokov, whose brilliance, versatility, and formal dexterity enabled him to create innovative literary works in many genres, PEN/Nabokov Award honorees will be writers whose books embody in some measure these qualities and are held in the highest esteem throughout the literary community. A panel of 3-5 judges will

consider only authors who have published a book in the United States during the previous two years.

On May 15, 2000, in a ceremony in New York City, William Gass was named the first winner of the PEN/ Nabokov Prize. The citation by the three-member panel (Edward Hirsch, Charles Johnson, Cynthia Ozick) makes particular reference to his 1999 book, *Reading Rilke*.

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Nabokov Society News

The centennial year ended, fittingly, with the IVNS meetings in Chicago in late December. Galya Diment, incoming President, provides the following brief report:

The International Vladimir Nabokov Society held four Centennial panels in Chicago, in December 1999, at MLA and AATSEEL. All panels were well attended and rewarded the audiences with excellent papers and stimulating discussion.

While in Chicago, the Society's Executive Board and most of the panelists with their guests celebrated the last days of the Vladimir Nabokov Centennial at "Russian Tea Time," a Russian restaurant conveniently situated between the two conference hotels. In between toasts, business was discussed, as the Board planned convention activities for the year 2000.

As of January 1, 2000 the Society's news officers are President - Galya Diment (University of Washington, Seattle) and Vice President - Charles Nicol (Indiana State University).

IVNS income for calendar year 1999 was $6,560;expenditures were $6,102; the 1998 carryover balance was $101; resulting in an end-of-the- year balance of $559. Due to the intense year-long interest in VN and the

persistently strong membership recruitment by Don Johnson and Galya Diment (NABOKV-L) and Jeff Edmunds (Zembla), membership in the Society is at a high level: 230 individual members and 78 institutional subscribers representing 23 countries: USA, Canada, Iceland, England, Ireland, Scotland, Netherlands, France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, Estonia, Austria, Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia, Russia, Israel, Korea, Japan, China, New Zealand.

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Odds and Ends

— *Nabokov's Butterflies. Unpublished and Uncollected Writings*. New translations from the Russian by Dmitri Nabokov. Edited and Annotated by Brian Boyd and Robert Michael Pyle. (New York: Beacon Press, $45) has finally appeared. This splendid, nearly 800-page volume should be in every Nabokovian's library.

— The 1999 Nabokov-related activities of the St. Petersburg Nabokov Museum and Nabokov Fund included the following: April 10-25, the International Nabokov Centennial Festival with participation by the Alexandrinsky Drama Theatre, Lensoveta Theatre, Russian National Library, Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinski Dom), the St. Petersburg Center of Books and Graphic Arts, the Composer's Union, the House of Scientists, and the Nabokov Estate Museum; July, summer Nabokov Readings consisting of 5 lectures, 2 round table, and several seminars; October, important repairs and renovations at the Museum. October 22-25, the international "Nabokov and Germany" program, including 3 exhibitions, 4 theatre productions, a mini-festival of German films, and an international academic conference. Among the items planned for 2000 are the completion of a new Museum web-site, a "Nabokov and France" program (in May), a "Nabokov and USA" program

(in October), the launching of a "Nabokov Library" project, the celebration of Nabokov's 101th birthday, the mounting of various exhibitions, and a program dedicated to Nabokov and chess.

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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** • 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.]

P.P.S.: It has been pointed out to me that the connection between Mme Lecerf (in the Real Life) and Mme Olenine which I mentioned in the previous issues (No 43, p. 43) was suggested by Alexander Dolinin in a preface to a Soviet collection of VN's translated novels (*Romany*. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1991). My apologies to Professor Dolinin.

THOMAS FLATMAN IN *PALE FIRE*

Kinbote's Index to his edition of "Pale Fire" contains 86 entries, of which 45 refer to 42 different people (Gradus, Kinbote, and Gordon Krummholz are each listed twice, both under their "own" "names" and under G, K, and Gordon respectively). Of these 42 people, only two are "real," as distinct from the Zemblan and Appalachian inhabitants of Nabokov's fiction (the only other

exception being Marcel, the non-real inhabitant of a real book). Although *Pale Fire* contains references, either direct or indirect, to a large number of actual people, from Dr Schweitzer to Pope Pius X, including an especially large number of writers, Shakespeare and Pope being the most obvious examples, virtually all are excluded from the Index. The only two "real" people to whom Kinbote grants entry into the Index stand out for the reason of the seemingly marginal places they occupy both in the novel and in real life. Both are writers, but writers of whom almost all readers of *Pale Fire* will never have heard, much less read: Franklin Knight Lane and Thomas Flatman.

Lane, whom the Index describes as an "American lawyer and statesman, 1864-1921" (Vintage paperback edition 310), is the source of the single longest quotation from another (real) writer within *Pale Fire*: it comes from a "manuscript fragment written by Lane on May 17, 1921, on the eve of his death" (261) the next day, as Kinbote accurately summarizes his source, *The Letters of Franklin K. Lane: Personal and Political*, edited by Anne Wintermute Lane and Louise Herrick Wall (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922), p. 464. The quotation is, except for some trivial variations in punctuation, accurate. Kinbote introduces it into the text of *Pale Fire* because it "curiously echoes Shade's tone at the end of Canto Three" (261); and not just Shade's tone, but both his "text" and the textur-al figurations that express that text: for Lane, man's life is a "long ribbon," a "mystifying maze," a "Daedalian plan" that after death simplifies into "one beautiful straight line" (261; Lane 464). The quotation from Lane thus exemplifies another writer's articulation of Shade's central perception of the "contrapuntal theme" of existence as "not text, but texture," as a "game" of "plexed artistry" (62-3, ll. 807, 808, 813-4). Indeed, Kinbote quotes Lane in the course of his comment on Shade's phrase "a web of sense" (63, l. 810). Moreover, Lane's description of the "Daedalian plan" as "involuted" (261; Lane 464) is directly echoed in Shade's description of the "involute/Abode" (63, ll. 817-8) wherein

the "game of worlds" is played. Kinbote also fails to point out the further parallel that the passage from Lane is the last thing that he wrote, immediately before his death, just as "Pale Fire" is Shade's last word, and Kinbote's *Pale Fire* is *his* since Kinbote commits suicide right after completing his edition of the poem, specifically after writing the Foreward, which we are clearly to imagine as the last part of his book he writes (see 28, for example).

Lane may have further reverberances within *Pale Fire*. Although he is referred to as "Franklin K. Lane" in the source book's title, preface, running heads, and index, his middle name "Knight" is mentioned in the first line of the book's first chapter (Lane 1) and only sporadically thereafter. Kinbote, however, carefully gives us Lane's full name in his Index entry, though not in his commentary where Lane is simply Franklin Lane (261). This underlines another parallel between Lane and both Kinbote and Shade, as these are the only three people in the Index whose middle names are given: John Francis Shade (312) and Charles Xavier Vseslav (306). Moreover, "Knight" connects into the texture of *Pale Fire*'s numerous chess references, especially the ones in lines 810 and following. In an interview conducted in 1966 with Alfred Appel, Nabokov remarks, after confirming that Lane, his book, and the passage cited all exist, "Kinbote was rather struck by Lane's handsome melancholy face. And of course "lane" is the last word of Shade's poem. The latter has no significance" (*SO* 73). Lane's book contains a number of photographs of himself, all but one from his mature years. The photo to which Nabokov must be referring faces page 10: "Franklin K. Lane at eighteen"; it reveals a left profile shot of a young man who might conceivably be Kinbote's type and be described as "handsome" and "melancholy" (there are rather dark Proustian rings around his eye). Nabokov's other remark is teasing: why point out that the last word of "Pale Fire" is "lane" if this has no significance in the context of Franklin Lane? Surely Nabokov is being slyly Kinbotian here, for the experienced reader of *Pale Fire* soon learns that Kinbote's claiming something has no significance is a sign that it

does, though perhaps unrecognized by him (see for example p. 255 on the meaning of Izumrudov and p. 265 on the meaning of Zembla, both passages significantly concerned with *names*). The manuscript fragment from which Kinbote cites actually opens: "And if I had passed into that other land, whom would I have sought — and what should I have done?" (Lane 464), a subject that Shade takes up explicitly in lines 536 to 619 of his poem, where he imagines what it would be like to pass into that other land. The textur-al association of Franklin Lane with the nature of death and the "plexed artistry" that links the worlds of life and death is further connected to the "lane" that ends Shade's poem, for this lane between Shade's and Goldsworth's houses is the liminal zone the crossing of which leads to Shade's death (see 293) and whose dangers Aunt Maud's spirit warned against (see "pada ata lane pad not ogo," among other things, "father not to go to the lane" (188)). The lane rhymes in several senses with the windowpane which occupies the same liminal position, the crossing of both resulting in death — for Shade who crosses the lane; for the waxwing who crosses the pane at least figuratively; for Hazel who sinks through the glassy pane of ice; for Kinbote even, hypothetically, who advocates throwing oneself out of a window (pane already opened presumably) as the best mode of suicide (see 220-21). Ironically Kinbote's first meeting with the Shades is prevented by their almost running over him with their car as it swings into the very lane between their houses that Kinbote is "about to cross" (20), an event which forms a wonderful textur-al parallel with the end of the book — Kinbote almost crosses the lane to Shade's house and is almost killed; Shade crosses the lane to Kinbote's house and is killed. "Lane" and "lane" meet thus in their common association with the abyss of death.

If Franklin Lane is subsumed into a series of textural patterns, so is Thomas Flatman. The Index entry for Flatman refers the reader to the long comment on l. 894 (264-69); here Kinbote recounts an extensive Faculty Club conversation in which he, Shade and a number of

other Wordsmith College faculty take part. In the midst of a complex series of puns and verbal plays, Kinbote "quipped" "Flatman" (268). This is the sole reference to Flatman in the Commentary. It is also perhaps the sole example of Kinbote actually demonstrating in a social context the wit on which he prides himself. Conversation revolves around the difficulty that English speakers have pronouncing the "pn" combination in the name of the College's tyrannical Head of the Russian Department — Pnin. The head of the English Department, Professor Hurley says, "Think of the French word for tire': *punoo*" [pneu]. Shade, in his Dr. Johnson mode, responds "Why, sir, I am afraid you have only punctured the difficulty," at which point, Kinbote quips, "Flatman" (268). Within this context the jokes, and particularly Kinbote's offering, seem pretty flat (or tired) themselves, but Kinbote is being much wittier than the immediate context suggests. Two pages earlier, the subject of conversation was the uncertain fate—exile or death—of King Charles II of Zembla. Shade, massaging Kinbote's knee says "Kings do not die — they only disappear, eh, Charles?" (266). Professor Hurley, "ignorant and always suspicious," seeming to recognize a quotation, if not its source, asks, "Who said that?" No answer is forthcoming, for Shade changes the subject and more than a page of conversation ensues on such things as resemblances to other people, Kinbote's name, and the pronunciation of "Pnin." Kinbote's wit of course lies in his amalgamating his contribution to the Pnin—pneu—tire—puncture word play with his answer to a question asked two pages earlier -Thomas Flatman, the source of Shade's quotation. Kinbote's hatred for Hurley is prominent throughout the book, and one can imagine the malicious delight with which Kinbote not only identifies Flatman as the source, after all in an area of study — English literature — that is Hurley's, not his own, but does it in such a way that no one present, other than presumably Shade himself, *knows* that Kinbote is answering the question, "who said that?" Kinbote thus attacks Hurley without the latter even knowing he is being attacked (note then the possible double signifi-

cance of Shade's "We all find it difficult to *attack* that name" [Nabokov's / Kinbote's italics] in the conversation about pronouncing "Pnin" (268)), while at the same time reasserting in a way only Shade can understand his own special closeness, via his recognition of the source of the quotation, to his poet-neighbor.

Flatman's prominence in the Index, however, suggests textur-al importance that needs further exploration. The Index entry reads:

> *Flatman, Thomas'* 1637-88, English poet, scholar and miniaturist, not known to old fraud, *894*.

The "not known to old fraud" is the clue, typical of what the Index often supplies to the reader, to the Flatman puzzle that the previous paragraph has elucidated. (Priscilla Meyer, in her *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden* (Wesleyan University Press, 1988) briefly discusses Flatman on p. 158 but misses the significance of the Index clue and thus Flatman's role in the novel as well. The only other discussion of Flatman that I am aware of in *Pale Fire* criticism is Gerald de Vries, "Fanning the Poet's Fire" in *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, XXIV (1990), 252, where de Vries misses the point too.) It also offers a covert parallel to the culminating phrase in Franklin Lane's Index entry:

> *Lane, Franklin Knight.* American lawyer and statesman, 1864-1921, author of a remarkable fragment, 810. [the 810 is not italicized in either the first edition or the Vintage paperback as for consistency it should be; I assume this is a misprint, not intentional. The reprint of the novel in The Library of America series italicizes the 810.]

Except for the placement of birth/death years, the two entries are exactly parallel: name, nationality, professions/accomplishments, and finally a remark that points, directly in Lane's case, indirectly in Flatman's, to the writing quoted from each. While information about Lane's life seems irrelevant to *Pale Fire* — what is important are

the quotation and the resonances of his name — the same is not true for Flatman. His life and work relate to a number of threads that make up the web of Nabokov's book.

Nabokov had at least two sources for his Flatman material: volume 3 of George Saintbury's edition of *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period* (Oxford University Press, 1921), which contains the only modern text of Flatman's poetry, together with a biographical/critical introduction; and the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Flatman (by A. H. B.). Nabokov's use of the first of these will be seen from what follows as obvious. That he used also the *DNB* is confirmed by a number of things. For one, he gives Flatman's birth year as 1637 following the *DNB*, whereas Saintsbury gives 1635 (III, 277). The description of Flatman's accomplishments in the Index follows very closely the phraseology in the opening sentence of the *DNB* entry: "poet and miniature-painter . . . admitted a scholar of Winchester College. . . .", although all this information is in a more scattered form in Saintbury as well. Possibly relevant is the information in the *DNB*, but not in Saintsbury, that Flatman "is said to have come [originally] from Aldersgate Street" in London. Readers of *Pale Fire* learn soon not to discount "coincidences": in the paragraph immediately before Shade quotes Flatman, a German visitor is described as catching an "eerie note" by virtue of "some quirk of alderwood ancestry" (266). References to "alder" constitute a minor but persistent textural pattern in the novel (see for example 116 and 239), so that it is not too much to connect the "alderwood ancestry" with Flatman's "Aldersgate Street" ancestry right before he is quoted. Finally, Saintsbury notes the "grave interest in Death itself" as the most noticeable characteristic of Flatman's poetry and the "funeral panegyric odes which make a considerable feature of his work" (III, 280). The centrality of death in Flatman's poetry then links him to Shade, whose poem is about death, but also to Lane (or at least his "manuscript fragment") and to Kinbote, who is in some ways more death obsessed than all of them (Meyer on p. 158 makes the connection between Flatman and death).

Saintsbury's edition supplies the text of the poem from which Shade quotes, or as it turns out misquotes — appropriately enough a poem about the demise of another King Charles II: "On the much lamented Death of our late Sovereign Lord King Charles II. of Blessed Memory. A Pindaric Ode" (III, 391-94), first published in 1685, the year of the king's death. The relevant passages are in the first of the poem's five stanzas. After a reference to "Crown'd Heads, who never ought to die" (1. 14), Flatman concludes the stanza with:

> But Princes (like the wondrous Enoch) should be free
> From Death's unbounded tyranny,
> And when their godlike race is run,
> And nothing glorious left undone,
> Never submit to Fate, but only disappear.
> (11. 21-25)

Shade's quotation thus conflates together phrases from two lines that are separated by ten intervening lines. To line 25 Saintsbury adds the following footnote:

> Browning somewhere in a letter laughs at this line, in the form Kings do not die, they only disappear,' which is neither Flatman's nor Waller's, from whom he borrowed the notion, nor Oldham's, who has it likewise, though both these have the disappear.' The thought is not foolish: it means, 'their names and works live after them.' But Browning's knowledge of Flatman, as of other out-of-the-ways, is interesting. He might have made him a 'Person of Importance.'

Clearly then Shade is not directly quoting Flatman, but Browning's mangled version of the original. I have looked in the all the many collections of Browning's letters available to me and found no reference to Flatman (there are many volumes of the scholarly edition of his letters yet to come, so that my not finding the reference doesn't mean it isn't there). I have discovered however what is *probably* Browning's source for his version; it turns out that Browning is himself misquoting someone else's

misquotation of Flatman. Browning's source is almost certainly Thomas De Quincey, who in a footnote in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* says the following:

> For about the year 1686, a poet of rather ominous name (and who, by the bye, did ample justice to his name), viz. Mr *Flat-man*, in speaking of the death of Charles II. expresses his surprise that any prince should commit so absurd an act as dying because, says he,
>
> Kings should disdain to die, and only *disappear*.
>
> [ed. Grevel Lindop (World's Classics, Oxford UP, 1985), p. 38. This is the 1821 text; De Quincey revised it heavily in 1856, but the footnote remains in nearly identical form — see David Mason's edition of the *Collected Writings of Thomas DeQuincey*, 1889-90, III, 380-81]

While not identical with Browning's version, De Quincey's is very close in its conflation of the two widely separated lines in the original.

(A digression: the word "involute(d)" common to both Lane and Shade, as I have pointed out above, also appears in De Quincey. In a famous passage in his *Suspiria de Profundis*, a sequel to the *Confessions*, De Quincey describes how "far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects, pass to us as *involutes* (if I may coin that word) in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us *directly*, and in their own abstract shapes" (De Quincey, ed. Lindop, pp. 103-4; italics in original). If Nabokov had read De Quincey, he might well have been struck by the similarities between De Quincey's concept of the involute and his own (and Shade's) version of compound, reflective experiences. On the other hand, the word in *Pale Fire* is used adjectively in the two occurances already cited (63, 261) and as a noun in the form "involutions" only once (289); De Quincey's is a noun. It might be worth pointing out that Poe uses it as an adjective in "The Murders in the Rue

Morgue" in connection with *chess* (compare Shade's reference to the "involute/Abode" of the chessplayers (63, ll. 817-8): "the possible moves [in chess] being not only manifold, but involute" (*Poetry and Tales*, Library of America edition (1984), p. 398). Poe, of course, was a writer that Nabokov knew well from childhood (see *SO* 64)).

Saintsbury also points out that Flatman's lines are themselves derivative, citing Flatman's contemporaries, Edmund Waller (1606-87) and John Oldham (1653-83) as precursors for the idea. Waller's "Upon the Death of My Lady Rich" concludes:

> Rather, since we beheld not her decay,
> But that she vanished so entire away,
> Her wondrous beauty, and her goodness, merit
> We should suppose that some propitious spirit
> In that celestial form frequented here,
> And is not dead, but ceases to appear.
> (*The Poems of Edmund Waller* ed. G. Thorn Drury (New York, 1968) [a reprint of the original 1893 edition], p. 40, 11. 83-88)

Oldham's poem is "On the Death of Mrs. Katharine Kingscote a Child of Excellent Parts and Piety":

> 'Twas sure some noble Being left the Sphere,
> Which deign'd a little to inhabit here,
> And can't be said to die, but disappear.
> (*The Poems of John Oldham*, ed. Harold F. Brooks and Raman Selden (Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 288, 11. 21-3)

Assuming that these poems were written close to the time of their respective subjects' demises, Waller's poem dates to 1638 (see Drury 302) and Oldham's to 1675 (Brooks and Selden 511), both preceding Flatman's 1685 elegy on Charles II. (Note that the De Quincey/Browning version is in fact closer to both Waller and Oldham than it is to Flatman.)

Although the above discussion might seem all too Kinbotian in its tracing of what seem like irrelevant

minutiae, in fact it exemplifies one of the most prominent patterns, hitherto completely unrecognized, in the texture of *Pale Fire*: many of the book's literary allusions, like the one to Flatman, are in fact references to chains of allusions — quotations of quotations of quotations, imitations of imitations — that sometimes in the process become mangled. Shade does not quote Flatman in the Faculty Club scene; rather he quotes Browning's misquotation of DeQuincey's misquotation of Flatman's imitation of Oldham's imitation of Waller's lines. (This assumes, perhaps wrongly, that Waller is not in turn himself imitating somebody.) Flatman is important to Nabokov and to the novel because he is essentially an imitative and derivative writer. Saintsbury opens his introduction to Flatman by noting that "Flatman has been condoled with on his name" (III, 277), an unfortunate one for a poet perceived as lame and unoriginal. Both Saintsbury and the *DNB* writer emphasize Flatman's lack of originality; both for example quote Rochester's scornful lines about Flatman: "Flatman, who Cowley imitates with pains, / And rides a jaded Muse, whips, with loose reins" (III, 279), and Saintsbury remarks that "except among his friends, it does not seem even in his own time to have been the fashion to think much of his verse" (III, 278-9). What is probably for posterity Flatman's only remembered line is due to De Quincey (whose *Confessions* were much read during the whole nineteenth century), who ironically badly misquotes an already highly derivative line. Flatman is also remembered, as the *DNB* writer points out, for influencing later poets, the writer citing Flatman's "A Thought of Death" "which Pope imitated in The Dying Christian to his Soul'" (see also Saintsbury III, 317). Flatman in the novel is thus involved in a highly complex chain of quotations/imitations, which might be diagrammed as follows:

Waller > Oldham > Flatman > De Quincey > Browning > Shad
\
Pope

Both imitating and imitated, Flatman's lines about the disappearance of a King Charles II enact their own disappearance within the history of English literature, but like the disappearance of kings linger on in a kind of covert immortality, known to Shade and Kinbote, if not to the ignorant head of the English Department, whose question "Who said that?" thus reveals his simple-minded belief in unitary origins and ignorance of the complex reflectiveness that make up literature itself, for, of course, both no one, other than Browning, "said that" in exactly the form Shade proffers the words and at the same time a considerable number of people "said" (variations of) "that".

Pale Fire is among other things a meditation on the nature of artistic creativity — the meaning of "originality" in art; the complex ways in which writers may use or misuse, consciously or unconsciously, the works of their predecessors; the work of literary art as a piece of "plexed artistry," of "combinational delight" (11.814, 973), amalgamating the uniquely individual with the web of the received ("Pale Fire" is of course a meditation on all these things too). Kinbote attempts to act as an artistic influence on Shade, giving him the Zemblan material out of which Shade is expected to construct his poem; Kinbote's Zemblan phantasies are also influenced themselves by the world of New Wye and Wordsmith College which in fact also supplies much of the material for Shade's poem (the musical prodigy Gordon Krummholz, for example, clearly deriving out of Prof. Misha Gordon of the Music Department at Wordsmith (216); Kinbote's version of Disa heavily influenced as he himself admits by Sybil Shade (see 86 and 207)). Shade's poem and Kinbote's Zembla as articulated in a great part of the Commentary are involved in a complex relationship of mutual influence and derivation. This relationship is figured texturally in the novel under the image of thievery — Kinbote literally steals the manuscript of "Pale Fire" after Shade's death, Shade lifts the title of his poem from Shakespeare (literary allusion), Shade and Kinbote appropriate Browning/DeQuincey's misquotations of Flatman's imitation of Waller (quotation/misquotation and literary imitation),

Conmal woefully mistranslates Shakespeare (translation as another form of literary (mis)appropriation), and to "dze Bart" himself, even in Kinbote's Englishing of Conmal's Zemblan, the whole universe is engaged in acts of mutual thievery:

> The sun is a thief: she lures the sea
> and robs it. The moon is a thief:
> he steals his silvery light from the sun.
> The sea is a thief: it dissolves the moon.
> (80)

Everybody/thing steals. Everything/body is a pale fire, a "moondrop" (1. 962) stolen from a moon that is itself a thief. And the thievery is but another form of the deception (and reflection) that characterizes both art and nature (see *SO* 11: "All art is deception and so is nature"). As Manfred Putz well puts it: "Any appearance in the world of *Pale Fire* bears the semblance of independent truth, but soon turns out to be derivative reflection. *Pale Fire* consists only of pale fires" ("Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*: the Composition of a Reading Experience" in *Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (Kiel, 1977), p. 38). The moon's light stolen from the sun via reflection deceives the viewer into thinking it original to the moon. As in nature, so in art: Flatman's lines, "stolen" from his precursors, are themselves "stolen" by his successors; what appears to be an origin is in fact a deception, just a link in a long chain of mirrored reflections (which thus "rhyme" with the links that make up Word Golf). Even much more famous writers than Flatman — like Shakespeare and Pope — are involved within Nabokov's novel in complex linkages of literary appropriations (as I will show in forthcoming notes).

Nabokov wrote *Pale Fire* immediately after completing his edition of *Eugene Oneoin* (see *SO* 77), whose enormous commentary explores in prodigious detail the sources, influences, parallels, appropriations, and mistranslations of Pushkin's great poem. *Pale Fire* in turn constitutes what is in effect a commentary on the Pushkin commentary, and is perhaps as significant a

result of the years that Nabokov spent on research into Russian, French, German, and English literatures as the Pushkin commentary itself. Again and again in the *Onegin* commentary, Nabokov points to the indirect, mediated influences of English authors on Pushkin, insisting that the Russian poet knew English literature "not from original texts but from the stupendous exertions of French paraphrasts" (2nd edition, II, 158); moreover in some cases Pushkin read an English author, Pope in this case, only via a Russian translation of a French translation of the English original (III, 142-3). Nabokov is also interested in seemingly coincidental parallelisms in the works of different authors, an example of one such in Pushkin and Shelley being "explained by the logic of literary evolution working on the same fund of immemorial formulas" (III, 53). From his work on the commentary, then, Nabokov derived an immensity of examples of, as Vivian Darkbloom well puts it, "the transfigurations . . . and betrayals to which great texts are subjected" (*Ada*, Vintage paperback edition p. 591), of literature itself as consisting "only of pale fires."

—Ward Swinson, Colorado State University at Fort Collins

NINE NOTES TO *THE GIFT*

Abbreviations: *D* – Vladimir Nabokov, *Dar*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1975.

I – Vladimir Nabokov, *Izbrannoe/Selected Prose and Verse*, Moscow: Raduga, 1990.

G – Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963.

1

D 29 / *I* 54 [...] *prozrachen, kak khrustal'noe iaitso.*
G 28 [...] *as transparent as a cut-glass egg.*

Concealed by a synonymic substitution in the English translation, in the original Russian this image of the

"crystalline course" (*G* 29) of GodunovCherdyntsev's childhood clairvoyance bears a distinct resemblance to the magic crystal in H. G. Wells' fantasy "The Crystal Egg" ("Khrustal'noe iaitso," in the Russian translation).

2

D 69 / *I* 88 *So dvora po utram razdavalos'–tonko i sderzhanno-pevuche: "Prima Kartoffel ",–kak trepeshchet serdtse molodogo ovoshcha!*
G 62 *In the morning the potato-hawker's cry 'Prima Kartoffel!' rang out in the street, in a high, disciplined singsong (but how the young vegetable's heart throbs!)*

This comically pathetic fallacy (augmented by the pun on the word *Prima*) in Godunov-Cherdyntsev's mental image of a debuttante potato derives from W.S. Gilbert's "Bunthorne's Song" in *Patience*:

Then a sentimental passion of a vegetable fashion must
excite your languid spleen,
An attachment *à la Plato* for a bashful young potato, or a
not-too-French French bean!

3

D 84 / *I* 101 " [...] *Ili vse prostim emu za seryi otliv chernykh shelkov, za rusach'iu polezhku inoi ego frazy?"*
G 75 "[...] *Or should we forgive all his* [Turgenev's] *sins because of the grey sheen of Mme Odintsev's black silks and the outstretched hind legs of some of his graceful sentences, those rabbitlike postures assumed by his resting hounds?"*

Aleksandr Dolinin (*I* 629) identified the first, but not the second, allusion to Turgenev's evocative power in this excerpt from the first imagined colloquy of Godunov-Cherdyntsev with Koncheev. *Rusach'ia polezhka* 'rabbitlike [more accurately, harelike] outstretched hind-legs,' in reference to Turgenev's intonational ca-

dences, was taken, just as the 'grey sheen of black silks,' from *Fathers and Sons* (Ch.XXV):

[...]na zemle vozle nikh pomestilas' Fifi, pridav svoemu dlinnomu telu tot iziashchnyi povorot, kotoryi u okhotnikov slyvet "rusach'ei polezhkoi".

[...] Fifi had placed herself on the ground near them, giving her slender body that graceful curve which is known among hunters as "the hare bend' (tr. by C. Garnett, revised by R.E. Matlaw).

4

D 134 / *I* 142 *[...] "suetu, lishennuiu dushi, "t.e. sostoiashchuiu iz odnikh krikov, bez maleishego nameka na smekh; [...] ètot osobyi vozdukh vsiakogo mesta kitaiskoi osedlosti – progorklaia smes' kukhonnogo chada, dyma ot szhigaemogo nazema, opiia i koniushni [...]*

G 116 *[...] 'bustle devoid of feeling' that consisted solely of shouting without the slightest hint of laughter; [...] that special air belonging to any place where Chinese dwell–a rancid mixture of kitchen fumes, smoke from burned manure, opium and the stable [...]*

Previous annotators have overlooked this collage of quotations from Nabokov's well-known source, G. E. Grum-Grzhimailo's *Puteshestvie v Zapadnyi Kitai* (Vol. 111, 1907, pp. 319-320):

Mnogo shumu i kriku, no vovse net smekha– kharakternaia osobennost' kazhdogo kitaiskogo sborishcha [...]

Kak i vsiakoe inoe mesto kitaiskoi osedlosti, Gurtu okruzheno sovershenno osoboi atmosferoi; no teper', vsledstvie neobyknovennoi tishiny v vozdukhe i moroza, vsia èta otvratitel'naia i progorklaia smes'

kitaiskogo kukhonnogo chada, dyma ot szhigaemogo nazema, opiia i koniushni tochno parit nad seleniem [...]

Much noise and shouting, but no laughter at all, which is characteristic of any Chinese gathering [...]

As any other place where Chinese dwell, Gurtu is surrounded by a quite special atmosphere; but now, in consequence of a remarkably calm air and frost, all this disgusting and rancid mixture of kitchen fumes, smoke from burned manure, opium and the stable hovers, as it were, over the village[...]

5

D 151-2 / *I* 156-7 / *G* 130 *One remarkable Kirghiz fairy tale*

The tale about a tiny bag that can contain everything in the world but can be filled up with a pinch of earth, which Godunov-Cherdyntsev's father used to cite, has a close parallel in the Talmudic legend about Alexander the Great. Nabokov may have read it in the Russian edition, *Agada. Skazaniia, pritchi, izrecheniia Talmuda i Midrashei*, Berlin: Izd. S.D. Zal'tsmana, 1922, p. 232: At the gate of paradise Alexander received from the wise men a skull bone as a memento. Upon return to his kingdom Alexander placed this bone on one cup of the scales and all of his silver and gold on the other. The bone outweighed it. "What does this mean?" Alexander asked the wise men. "This bone," the wise men replied, "is the orbit of a human eye, insatiable in its greed." "How can you prove this?" "Take a handful of earth and strew it over the bone." As soon as the king did so, the gold outweighed the bone.

6

D 152 / *I* 157 / *G* 131-2 The episode involving the French missionary and botanist Barraud is inspired in part by Grum-Grzhimailo's description of his meeting in Suchow the courageous French explorer Joseph Martin, who was soon to die of illness in Novyi Margelan (*Puteshestvie v*

Zapadnyi Kitai, III, pp. 126-7). Cf. *G* 132: "we parted, he to his companions calling him from a ravine and I to Father Martin, dying in a remote hostelry." That the last reported conversation with Godunov-Cherdyntsev's father was about "a tiny, light blue iris which grew in the vicinity" appears to be a detail of special autobiographic significance. It evokes the memory of the circumstances under which Nabokov received the report of his father's death:

> On the night of March 28, 1922, around ten o'clock, in the living room where as usual my mother was reclining on the red-plush corner couch, I happened to be reading to her Blok's verse on Italy–had just got to the end of the little poem about Florence, which Blok compares to the delicate, smoky bloom of an iris, and she was saying over her knitting, "Yes, yes, Florence does look like a *dymnyi iris*, how true! I remember–" when the telephone rang (*Speak, Memory*, 1966, p. 49).

7

D 167 / *I* 169 / *G* 143-4 The title "*La femme et la panthère*" appears to blend Baudelaire's "La femme et le chat" with «La femme et le pantin" by Pierre Louys.

Ia nichego ne pomniu iz ètikh p'esok, krome chasto povtoriaiushchegosia slova 'èkstaz": kotoroe uzhe togda dlia menia zvuchalo kak staraia posuda: "èks-taz".

The untranslatable pun, which Nabokov had to render in English as *transport, a means of moving from one place to another*, echoes Pasternak's joke in *Okhrannaya gramota* (*Safe Conduct*) I.3, based on the similarity between the title of Skriabin's famous piece and the trade name of Russian soap ("Ecstasy"):

> On priekhal, i srazu zhe poshli repetitsii èkstaza. Kak by mne khotelos' zamenit' teper' èto nazvanie, otdaiushchee tugoi myl'noi obertkoi, kakim nibud' bolee podkhodiashchim.

> He arrived, and immediately the rehearsals of *Ecstasy* began. How I should like now to replace this title, smacking of a tight soap wrapper, with something more suitable.

8

D 361 / *I* 329 [...] *konchaia otvratitel'no-malen'kim, pochti portativnym prisiazhaym poverennym Pyshkinym, kotoryi proiznosil v razgovore s vami: "Ia ne dymaiu" i "Symasshestvie", slorno ustraivaia sroei famil'e nekoe alibi [...]*

G 306 *[...] to the repulsively small, almost portable lawyer, Poshkin, who when talking to people said 'I pot' for 'I put' and 'coshion' for 'cushion 'as if establishing an alibi for his name /... /*

Nabokov borrowed the idea from the memoirs of Blok's friend the poet Vladimir Piast (*Vstrechi*, Moscow, 1929, p.214), who described the characteristic manner in which the influential journalist A.V. Rumanov used to answer telephone calls, articulating his *O*'s as *OO's* – to suggest, as it were, that his surname should actually be pronounced as that of the imperial family, Romanov:

> U nego byla osobaia manera otvechat' na telefonnye zvonki. "U telefuna Rumanov", – protiagival on nemnogo v nos, -- "zakryvaia" na shvedsko nemetskii lad bukvu "o" v slove "telefon", kak by preduprezhdaia, chto i v ego familii "o" budet zvychat' tak zhe "zakryto"; chto, sobstvenno govoria, ego familiia takaia zhe, kak i u tsarstvuiushchego doma.

9

D 390 / *I* 354 [...] "*Ne dumaiu, chto nasha Zinaida Oskarovna budet osobenno kholit' vas. As', printsessa ?*"

G 330 [...] *'I don't think our Zinaida Oskarorna will look after you too well. Eh, princess ?'*

Turgenev's unpopular tale "Neshchastnaia" (*The Unhappy One*) contains an antecedent of Zina's character (treated by Nabokov in the spirit of polemical emulation): an illegitimate daughter of a Russian nobleman and a Jewish mother (a musician) is cruelly abused and eventually driven to suicide by her Bohemian stepfather, who has had designs on her. The stepfather addresses her ironically with the same vulgar Russian interrogative interjection "As'?" (Ch. VIII):

> [...] vse zhidy, tak zhe kak i chekhi, urozhdennye muzykanty! Osobenno zhidy. Ne pravda li' Susanna Ivanovna? As'? Kha-kha-kha-kha!
>
> [...] all yids, just as Czechs, are born musicians! Particularly the yids. Is this not true, Susanna Ivanovna? Eh? Ha-ha-ha-ha!

—Omry Ronen, University of Michigan

NABOKOV'S "ON DISCOVERING A BUTTERFLY" AND PUSHKIN'S "EXEGI MONUMENTUM"

In 1942, excited by the sight of *his* Neonympha dorothea (the butterfly that he had caught during his trip through the Grand Canyon earlier that year) at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Nabokov wrote his poem "On Discovering a Butterfly" ("I found it in a legendary land ..."). Published in *The New Yorker* in 1943, it has received its share of critical attention and has been characterized as "Nabokov's best English poem to date" (Brian Boyd, *The American Years*, 53). What nobody has noticed so far is that "On Discovering a Butterfly" is a parody of Alexander Pushkin's 1836 poem "Ia Pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi." Nabokov would publish his translation of Pushkin's "Pamiatnik,"

entitled "Exegi monumentum," in the 1945 collection *Three Russian Poets* and later include it in his 1964 commentary to *Eugene Onegin*. It is my contention that by establishing the connection between Pushkin's "Exegi monumentum" and Nabokov's "On Discovering a Butterfly" we get a more nuanced reading of his 1942 poem as well as of certain passages in his 1964 *Commentary*.

The latest link in the chain of poetic homages–Nabokov parodies Pushkin who parodies Derzhavin who imitates Horace–"On Discovering a Butterfly" plays with the theme of the inspired if nonmaterial achievement outliving monuments "wrought by hands." Pushkin compares his "monument"–his poetic heritage–with the Alexandrine Column, "erected by Nicolas I ... in the Palace Square in St. Petersburg to commemorate Alexander I's victory over Napoleon" (Nabokov, *Commentary*, II: 311), and he observes that the "unyielding head" of the former "soars higher" than the all eighty-four feet of the latter. Nabokov, in his turn, contrasts his entomological catch–seemingly ephemeral and yet immortal as far as it embodies the restless and inquiring spirit of humanity–with various sturdy mnemonics, such as "dark pictures, thrones, the stones that pilgrims kiss," that shall rust and decay with the passage of time. He further does Pushkin one better by slyly noting that even "poems that take a thousand years to die / but ape the immortality of this / red label on a little butterfly."

Where Pushkin claims that his "soul in the fond lyre [will] survive [his] dust and flee decay" (I am using Nabokov's translations of both Derzhavin's and Pushkin's poems), Nabokov asserts that the rare species of butterfly that he caught in the Grand Canyon will "transcend the dust" of the very "stronghold" (i. e., the Museum of Natural History) where it is currently being displayed. The contrast of Pushkin's "soul" with Nabokov's "butterfly" is key to our understanding of Nabokov's parody. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in later Greek Mythology, Psyche was frequently represented as having butterfly wings or as a butterfly. Psyche also means "breath" or "soul"–a fact that Nabokov was of course aware of when he juxtaposed his "soul"–the

newfound butterfly–with Pushkin's "soul"–his poetry.

Curiously, Nabokov sometimes bypasses Pushkin and turns to his source–Gavrila Derzhavin. Derzhavin claims that the "wondrous" monument that he "set up" to himself is "stronger ... than metals"; Nabokov points out that his preserved butterfly sits "wide open on its pin" and yet is "safe from ... rust." Similarly Nabokov develops further the allusion to Egyptian pyramids present in Derzhavin with his imagery of mummification. Derzhavin's poetic monument is "higher than pyramids"; Nabokov's precious dried-up specimen is kept "safe from creeping relatives" in the "secluded stronghold" (the "dust" of which it will, nevertheless, triumphantly "transcend").

Hence my interpretation of the word "mummery" used by Nabokov in his *Commentary* to *Eugene Onegin*. There, Nabokov places his translation of Derzhavin and Pushkin's poems side by side with the following comment in between: "In 1836, in one of the most subtle compositions in Russian literary history, Pushkin parodied Derzhavin stanza by stanza in exactly the same verse form. The first four have an ironic intonation, but under the mass of high *mummery* Pushkin smuggles in his private truth" (*Commentary*, II: 310; italics mine). I suggest that in this particular context the word "mummery" functions as an in-joke, as it refers not just to the pompous style of Derzhavin's poem but also to the mummification motif contained in Nabokov's 1942 revision of Pushkin's poem.

The ending of Nabokov's poem–the image of the fragile "red label" outliving the inspired outpourings of the genius–is remarkable not only as a teasing inversion of the conventional mind-body binary but also as an implicit statement of Nabokov's somewhat vexed belief in the preeminence of natural science over politics. According to Nabokov, in the fourth stanza of his poem, Pushkin leaves off parodying Derzhavin and articulates his "private truth" about the political mission of his poetry. Pushkin hopes that unlike Derzhavin, whose claim to fame is "simpleheartedness" and the ability to write poetry "in the light Russian style," he will be cherished by his "nation" for having "exalted freedom in [his] cruel age

/ and called for mercy toward the downfallen." (As Nabokov notes, the reference to the "downfallen"–Pushkin's friends the Decembrists–was politically provocative enough to prompt Zhukovski to edit the poem after Pushkin's death and to exclude this mention of Nicolas I's enemies.)

Read in the context of Pushkin's "Exegi monumentum," Nabokov's 1942 poem thus represents a subtle yet powerful challenge to the idea that a poet should be "dear" to his "nation" for the political intrepidity of his poetry (however problematic Nabokov's denial of his own art's investment in any political programme may appear from looking at his oeuvre). A distinguished poet in his own right, Nabokov asserts that he wants "no other name" besides that of a "godfather to an insect." *His* "monument" shall have entomological not poetical foundation, if the latter cannot escape being invested with political meaning.

—Lisa Zunshine, University of California at Santa Barbara

NOTE ON *PNIN*

Waindell College, that "provincial institution" where Pnin teaches "monstrously built farm boys and farm girls" (Pnin, p. 8) is but one of a number of farming images (topoi) in the novel: Pnin, browsing in the attic, remarks, "I am only grazing" (p.30); the topic of the lecture preceding Pnin's at Cremona is "agriculture in China" (p. 22); and, of course there is the parodic naming of Cockerell, himself a parodist. Aside from its "barbarous" mispronunciation as Vandal (p. 28), Waindell yields the compound wain (wagon) + dell (valley). Associatively, the dell echoes another nursery rhyme in addition to the "Oranges and Lemons" consumed by the Clementses and chimed by the Waindell bells. The roundelay "The Farmer in the Dell", to some extent, mimicks the course of Timofey's reductive life and career:

The farmer in the dell (2)
Heigh ho the merry 0,
The farmer in the dell. (Refrain)
The farmer takes a wife.
The wife takes a child.
The child takes a dog...
The dog takes a cat.
The cat takes a rat.
The rat takes a cheese...
The cheese stands alone.

* All page references are to the Penguin Classics edition of *Pnin*.

—Ruth Kolani, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem

[A version of this word, "dale", sounds a melancholy euphonic note in the theme of mortality in Chapter 3: "...or will the neighboring dale, *dolina*, accept my ... cold dust." And later in that chapter, Pushkin's lines criss-cross and reverberate in Pnin's mind, bringing up "the doleful dell of Waindell": "In fight, in travel, or in waves? Or on the Waindell campus"? G.B.]

MORE ON THE NAME *PNIN*.

As Gennady Barabtarlo points out in *Phantom of Fact*, "The name [Pnin] is...a truncated variant of Repnin," the surname of an old Russian noble family which is even mentioned by Pushkin in *Poltava*. Julian Connolly echoes this assumption in his "Note on the name 'Pnin'" (VNRN, No.6, Spring 1981) by referring to the eighteenth-century tradition among Russian noblemen to give their illegitimate offspring a truncated surname; this, according to Connolly, would be appropriate for Timofey Pnin "for throughout the novel, Nabokov weaves around the figure of Pnin the aura of dispossessed or deposed royalty."

Another possibility is that Pnin's name is a direct translation of the French idiom *de la souche (de vieille souche / de bonne souche)*, which means literally "of good stump" (souche = stump = pen' in Russian) and has two meanings in the French literary language: it denotes either "someone from a good, old family" or someone who is "authentic, genuine, pure-blooded." Both of these meanings apply quite well to Timofey Pnin, for he is described as coming "from a respectable, fairly well-to-do, St. Petersburg family"; his father is a renowned ophthalmologist and had once treated Leo Tolstoy "for a case of conjunctivitis." His manners are also obviously high-class: "during the staid European era of his life" it was unthinkable for Pnin to show himself "to ladies minus collar and tie" or to see his concierge without his *faux col*; he knows exactly how to kiss a lady's hand, etc. The notion of Pnin being a descendant of a respectable, possibly noble lineage could also be related to "the aura of deposed royalty" commented on by J. Connolly.

The second interpretation of the idiom is also very appropriate for Pnin. Barabtarlo reproduces Nabokov's letter to one of his publishers in which he sums up the plot of the novel:

In Pnin, I have created an entirely new character, the like of which has never appeared in any other book. A man of great moral courage, a pure man, a scholar and a staunch friend, ...he never descends from a high plane of life characterized by authenticity and integrity...

Certainly, an aura of authenticity, uniqueness and even rarity surrounds Timofey Pavlovich throughout the novel – the narrator refers to him a s"the genuine and, to me, unique article"; the Clementses learn to appreciate him "at his unique Pninian worth"; to Hagen, he is "a delicate imported article worth paying for in domestic cash"; his sense of humor, his "mirth" is inimitable, and near the end of Chapter 6, Laurence Clements even proposes to have Pnin's "wonderful personality" televised. Besides, "Timofey was a veritable encyclopedia of Russian shrugs and shakes," such as the Russian "relinquishing" sign, the Russian "I-am-disarmed" gesture, etc., and his firm adherence to his roots, to his Russian manners, as well as his moral probity, definitely make of him a figure of striking authenticity.

Another idiomatic offshoot which is interesting to explore is the expression *vieille souche* (literally – "old stump"), which means "old friend". the narrator constantly refers to Pnin as "my friend", "my [poor] Pnin"; Hagen suggests to arrange a teaching position for Pnin under the direction of N–, whom he erroneously considers Pnin's "old friend," and in response Pnin admits that N–and he "know each other thirty years ore more," but that he would never "work under him." In fact, a considerable part of chapter 7 is devoted to N–'s trying to prove his good acquaintance with Pnin, and their supposed familiarity, in addition to Nabokov's description of Pnin as a loyal, staunch fiend, could be inscribed in Timofey's last name.

It is also important to point out that a character in *L'école des femmes*, one of Molière's comedies, bears a surname which is directly derived from the aforementioned idiom and is almost identical to Pnin's name translated into French. It is Arnolphe, who, in a pathetic attempt to usurp a noble ancestry, demands that he be addressed as "Monsieur de la Souche" (literally – "Monsieur *Pnin*"). Arnolphe is guided by the mortal fear of being deceived by his future wife and in order to avoid this embarrassing situation he raises Agnès, his bride-to-be, in what he considers a perfect security of his home with two insipid, clumsy servants for guardians of her maidenly virtues. Expectedly, Arnolphe is deceived by Agnès even before their marriage, and, of course, Pnin is also doomed to play the role of a cuckolded husband both in *Liebelei*, an amateur play in which he performs at the age of 18, and for the rest of the novel, where he is twice (at least twice !) deceived by his beloved wife Liza. Besides, as the footnotes to the Larousse edition of the comedy explain, "saint Arnolphe était le patron des maris trompés" ("saint Arnolphe was the patron of the deceived husbands"), and it is symbolic that Pnin, in addition to his angelic patience and his exemplary moral rectitude, is explicitly taken for a saint by Desdemona, the charwoman at the Clementses' house, when she "happened to glimpse Pnin basking in the unearthly lilac light of his

sun lamp, wearing nothing but shorts, dark glasses and a dazzling Greek Catholic cross on his chest."

Ironically, Pnin constantly makes the mistake of literally translating various French expressions: "What price are you prepared to demand ?", "What makes heater ?", "No *douche* ?", etc. In his case, these French clichés could be symptomatic, for his own name may also be a literal translation of a French idiom.

—Mikhail Avrekh, University of California at Berkeley

AN UNSUSPECTED MUSE: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF ZOLA ON NABOKOV'S *KING, QUEEN, KNAVE*

Contributing to the genesis of *King, Queen, Knave*, Vladimir Nabokov has pointed out the possibility of the influence of both Balzac and Dreiser, whose works he swore not to have read at the time of his own novel's creation. Another muse, however, may have been present while Nabokov wrote this maliciously fascinating love triangle, and in recognizing this muse, one can find numerous similarities between Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* and Nabokov's *King, Queen, Knave*, which were both engendered by twenty-eight year old writers.

The basic plot of the two novels is the destructive affair between a married woman and an outsider who attempt to murder the husband in order to assure wealth and eternal happiness with one another. In both novels, the marriage between the wife and her husband are founded on material needs and lacks passion and love; Thérèse marrying for the haberdashery and her only hope of financial security; Marthe marrying in order to live "a life dedicated to the acquisition of possessions that conform to a bourgeois notion of elegance and refinement" (Connolly). The sterility of these marriages is confronted by an outsider in Franz and Laurent who not only resemble each other in their biological relation to the husband, but also in their crude, peasant backgrounds

as "Laurent était un vrai fils de paysan" (*T.R. chapter V*) and Franz was "a timid provincial nephew with a banal mind and limited ambitions." [106]. In both accounts, this rural knave is a relative of the husband who is invited into the family residence for the first time as a result of the husband's profession; Camille meeting Laurent at the Orléan train station where he worked; Dreyer inviting Franz into his clothing enterprise. Upon meeting their husband's relative for the first time, both Marthe and especially Thérèse experience a sudden awakening (Marthe needed a lover and an object to manipulate and "was angry that Franz's visit had given her a strange pleasure" [41] while Thérèse met for the first time a genuine, unsickly man). The outsiders, Franz and Laurent, begin after their first visit to the couples' homes to fantasize about sexual relations with the wives and themselves (and in Franz's case, we initially see this after the train, although his real desires manifest themselves after he had formally met Marthe in her home.) Laurent expresses these thoughts in chapter VI, "-Voilà une petite femme, se disait-il, qui me sera ma maîtresse quand je le voudrai." In addition to these interesting pre-affair facts, the living arrangements are similar in the two stories as both Franz and Laurent move into a tiny apartment in another part of town while frequenting the married couples' homes on a regular basis, especially on a certain day of the week (le jeudi in *Thérèse Raquin* and Sunday in *King, Queen, Knave* – times when other guests were often invited).

The actual sexual liaisons between the queens or ra-quins and the peasant lovers are alike in their quasi-pornographic details, which were scandalous at the times that both books were released. These secret encounters took place in both novels while the husband was at work and not only are the two cuckolded men unaware of their wives depravities, but they actually believe that their wives dislike the relative from out of town. The plots of both *Thérèse Raquin* and *King, Queen, Knave* become more heinous at the moment when the two queens of grave-digging spades and their brutes decide to murder the husbands in order to ensure eternal happi-

ness and financial well-being – "bed and bank." All four schemers go through numerous possible means of homicide (poisons and guns) before deciding later, due to a sudden inspiration, on the evidence lacking method of drowning. It is quite interesting that the death of the husband is planned, in both plots, when the married couple and their "friend" leave the city for some relaxation. Intriguing congruities appear again in the fact that the drownings both are staged from rowing boats.

Another amazing facet to this comparison is the relationship between the domestic animals and the murderous schemers. In both stories the animals (François the cat in *Thérèse Raquin* and Tom the dog in *King, Queen, Knave*, especially in the English version) are detested by the lovers because they "know" what is transpiring:

"Le chat tigré, François, était assis sur son derrière, au beau milieu de la chambre. Grave, immobile, il regardait de ses yeux ronds les deux amants. Il semblait les examiner avec soin, sans cligner les paupières, perdu dans une sorte d'extase diabolique." (T.R. chapter VII) These animals and their awareness frighten the lovers in both novels: " – Regarde donc François, dit Thérèse à Laurent, on dirait qu'il comprend et qu'il va ce soir tout conter à Camille. . ." (T.R. chapter VII). "Tom was barking his head off. He shall be destroyed tomorrow" (K.Q.K. chapter 11). Keeping to her plan, Martha had the gardener destroy Tom, while Laurent brutally tossed François out of a window to a slow and torturous death from a broken back. Franz is hardly innocent of animal abuse himself as he recalls an old dog that he "had managed to kick smartly on several occasions" (30); later he mentions how he and a friend shot "lots" of stray cats at home (51) (Connolly). One might find irony in the fact that the name Franz is the German version of François, which may even suggest a crude cycle where the victim returns as the aggressor, who in Franz's case is not much different than an animal, whose leash is manipulated by his sadistic lover.

An important aspect of both books is the evolution of the characters which follows the same path for both Zola

and Nabokov. Camille and Dreyer become increasingly uglier and loathsome to their wives as the stories evolve, even though they never quarrel; the hatred is simply generated by their murderous desires. Likewise, the lovers begin to deteriorate as the plot unfolds: Franz doesn't only start to abhor Marthe, but also becomes thin and mindless (a perfect future Nazi executioner), Marthe dies from a weakened immune system, and Laurent and Thérèse plot to kill each other only to resolve their piteous existence by suicide instead.

When Zola wrote the preface to the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin*, he remarked, "J'ai simplement fait sur deux corps vivants le travail analytique que les chirurgiens font sur des cadavres." Initiating his pseudo-science of naturalism with the release of this novel in 1858, Zola demonstrated to the world that he was an observer of natural, scientific conditions and not a writer. Examining his characters in a similar manner, Vladimir Nabokov appears in the novel as the data collecting and observing photographer, Mr. Vivian Badlook and the ever present Blavdak Vinomori (both anagrams of Vladimir Nabokov). In this manner, both novels are scientific or artistic experiments being perceived by their controllers.

The existence of some major dissemblances between the two novels seem to contrast the similarities described herein before, but these may simply be Nabokovian "reparations" of Zola's work. The most blatant discrepancy is that the murder attempt is successful in *Thérèse Raquin* while never being executed in *King, Queen, Knave*. Perhaps Nabokov preferred greed over homicide or simply wanted fate to intervene as it often does in his other writings. Another conspicuous difference between the two stories is the "dominant" role of the two lovers which exists in the wife in *King, Queen, Knave* and Laurent in *Therèse Raquin*. In both cases, the leading protagonist is the controlled lover who even happens to take the title in Zola's *Theresa Shark*. Once again, Nabokov probably decided upon the more Orestian route, choosing the female to be the worse of the two plotters.

Only one source can truly affirm whether or not Vladimir V. Nabokov was ever exposed to *Thérèse Raquin*,

and since 1977, it has become nearly impossible to confirm this theory. We know from Brian Boyd's biography that his father Vladimir D. Nabokov read "Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Knut Hamsun, Anatole France, Zola, Hugo, Wilde, and many others" from his prison cell, but that confirms absolutely nothing about Zola and the younger Vladimir Nabokov. One can assume, however, that his studies of French literature at Cambridge, combined with his quick mastery of French as a child and his love for Flaubert (who greatly influenced Zola) and Balzac (whose influence can be seen in both Zola and Flaubert) can give high probability to Nabokov having read Zola when coupling these facts with the political importance of Zola at the turn of the century (*J'accuse*). Nabokov may have pulled some of his ideas unconsciously from *Thérèse Raquin*, unaware of their origins. Perhaps the deluge of French literature, which he had read throughout his life, combined numerous authors giving Nabokov muses in the form of Balzola or Zolzac. Whatever the circumstances of these two works may be, there are undeniable and quite recognizable similarities which will eternally link these two masterpieces of French and Amerussian literature.

—Matthew S. Pavich, University of Michigan

TOP HATS, TOYS, AND GUILLOTINES: NABOKOV'S METHODS FOR TRIUMPHING OVER MORTALITY

"We are all crashing," Nabokov writes, "to our death from the top story of our birth to the flat stones of the churchyard and wondering with an immortal Alice in Wonderland at the patterns of the passing wall." Those who are focused solely on the stones below, this quote suggests, might be missing out on immortality. The inevitable plot progression toward death is not where one will find the greatest significance. In the first sentence of *Speak, Memory* he states, "[C]ommon sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two

eternities of darkness." An eternity of darkness, the end result of Alice's fatal fall, might appear to be more permanent than the brief light of mortal life. Vladimir Alexandrov, however, has demonstrated that this view, within Nabokov's own terms, is "highly ironic" and "simply wrong."

One of Nabokov's means for overcoming the sense of death's inevitable power is to make the elements of the plot seem less real. In many novels he achieves this effect by associating the image of a top hat with death. The euphemism for execution in *Invitation to a Beheading* is "to don the red tophat"; in *King, Queen, Knave* we see "pale, top-hatted city fathers driving to the execution"; *Despair* describes "the burly executioner in his top hat." When V. accidentally intrudes on the aftermath of a funeral in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, he notices "two solemn top hats." One would ask, of course, what Nabokov's purpose is for so often juxtaposing top hats and death. In some of the above images it is clear in context that he is combining images of execution by guillotine with the idea of heads as easily removable as hats. Nabokov's book on Nikolai Gogol suggests that he may have borrowed this idea, as he mentions Gogol's creation of a "sham world where hats are heads." Nabokov's juxtaposition of top hats and death creates a sense of the unreality of the head itself, thus the unreality of death. Material is less real than one might assume, even the material of one's own head. (It is also clear from these examples that Nabokov alternately uses the term "tophat," "top-hat," and "top hat." However, he remains consistent in each work.)

In *Bend Sinister*, Krug notices this object: "Cute little model of guillotine (with stiff top-hatted doll in attendance)." That a guillotine could be considered "cute" is a comment on the world of that novel, where death is the plaything of tyrants. At the same time, however, the image suggests that death is not as all powerful as it may initially seem. Terror is less effective to those who consider death unreal. Here we might recall V.'s inability to understand the reaction of Sebastian Knight's last love to Knight's death, that she "held special views about death

which excluded hysterics." Those who are firm believers in the material world may not understand the reactions to death of those who are not.

There are no top hats in *Pale Fire*, but another way in which Nabokov creates a sense of the unreality of objects is with the image of toys, such as the above guillotine. John Shade's early experience of death is somehow associated with--or prompted by--a toy wheelbarrow. (A wheelbarrow is also associated with death in *Sebastian Knight*: "We had passed Sebastian and Belov pushing the heavily burdened wheelbarrow through the crunching snow. This picture now stood motionless before my eyes...as a charmed thing doomed to its paralyzed eternity. A few months later we learned that our poor friend had been shot." Thus the wheelbarrow may represent the burden of material reality.) The final written line of Shade's poem, moments before his more "real" death at the hands of Gradus, tells of a gardener "trundling an empty barrow up the lane." The structural movement from a "toy" object to a "real" one is another method by which Nabokov raises questions about levels of reality. Objects are less reliable than a materialist might assume.

The same technique is used in *Bend Sinister* "What looked like a fluffy piebald toy dog was prettily placed at the foot of the bed. Before rushing out of the ward, Krug knocked this thing off the blanket, whereupon the creature, coming to life, gave a snarl of pain and its jaws snapped, narrowly missing his hand." The pretty toy dog turns into a snapping animal: levels of reality are brusquely juxtaposed. In Cincinnatus' cell, which he shares with a spider, the process is reversed: "he pulled down the thick gray cobweb and with it the spider, which he had once nursed with such care...it consisted of a round plush body with twitching legs made of springs, and, there was, attached to the middle of its back, a long elastic." This moment is a paradigm for the structure of *Invitation to a Beheading*: what had seemed to be most "real," most worthy of one's personal care and attention, turns out to be a toy, a sham world where reality is "crudely but cleverly made." The conclusion of that novel, of course, shows Cincinnatus' entire world revealing itself to be a

sham construction: "[trees] barely held on with their branches to the ripping mesh of the sky." There is a similar hint of the world revealing itself to be a false construct in John Shade's second described death experience: "A sun of rubber was convulsed and set." Whatever essential quality had made an object seem most real in life is drained away in the experience of death. One would think that a rubber sun couldn't reflect even the palest of fires.

I said that there are no top hats in *Pale* Fire, but there is one indirect top hat. Kinbote writes, "my gray-haired friend, my beloved old conjuror, put a pack of index cards into his hat--and shook out a poem." One most often thinks of such a magic trick taking place with not just any type of hat, but specifically a top hat. The magic top hat--and there is also one associated with the conjuror in *Sebastian Knight*--represents another means by which material reality can be rendered less real.

The purpose of all this is to convey the sense that one's inner world may be more real than the world of outside objects. Victor Shklovsky, the Russian Formalist critic, writes: "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony." Nabokov, however, makes the stone stony, then makes it evaporate, perhaps, or has it sprout feathers and fly off in a new form, like the "stone melting into wing" in *Sebastian Knight*. The Nabokovian stone is *more* than stony. Irrational imagination is a force capable of transforming the rational world. It is not that Gradus's face is a death mask, but that death itself is merely a mask.

Therefore, one cannot triumph over mortality by studying the start and finish of any given life: the time before birth ("the prenatal abyss") and after death yield no secrets. The flat stones on which Alice and everyone else will eventually land hold no clues to mortality. All one can see at the start and finish of life is the most obvious plot, the "two eternities of darkness." Shade speaks of "Infinite foretime and/Infinite aftertime." Nabokov's purpose for disrupting reality with his top hats, toys and guillotines is to lead the reader beyond the usual view of objective

reality. As he suggests elsewhere, if one looks looks solely at the start and finish of any given life, then existence becomes nothing more than "the dash between two dates."

—David Rutledge, University of New Orleans

THE AUTHOR IS DEAD - LONG LIVE THE AUTHOR! THE PUZZLING CHRONOLOGY IN NABOKOV'S LOLITA

"I confess I do not believe in time", Nabokov writes in *Speak, Memory*. This idea seems to be realized in *Lolita* where time becomes a paradox in the final key scenes. Tekiner was the first to suggest in her article "Time in *Lolita*" (*Modern Fiction Studies*, 25, 1979) that, because of the chronological impossibility Humbert starting writing on September 22, the meeting with Dolly and the murder of Quilty are merely the product of Humbert's imagination. The principal positions in this discussion are reflected in the polemics between Dolinin and Boyd in *Nabokov Studies* 2, 1995. Dolinin infers that Humbert has written the ending himself, while Boyd argues that the possibility can not be excluded that Nabokov made a mistake and confused November 16 with November 19.

Although defending different positions, these scholars ask the same question: have the reunion with Lolita and the murder of Quilty taken place or are they just imagined by Humbert? Considering that *Lolita is* a work of fiction anyway this might be the wrong question. Viewed from the extra-fictional perspective these events are just as "unreal" as Anna Karenina throwing herself in front of a train or as Kovalev chasing his nose through St Petersburg. But they are an indisputable reality in the reader's mind and memory. By the time the reader finds that the meeting with Lolita and the murder of Quilty might have been staged only by Humbert's imagination, it is too late; to borrow Nabokov's terminology the reader cannot "unsee" the detailed descriptions of Dolly and the

killing of Quilty. Therefore the question to ask should be: Who stages the reunion with Lolita and the murder of Quilty - the author or the narrator?

Before returning to this question, Humbert's victim, Quilty, needs to be treated to a posthumous examination. It is generally agreed that Quilty is Humbert's double. If this premise is kept in mind and the traditional features of the *Doppelganger* tale applied, it seems logical to conclude that the perverted pornographer Quilty is Humbert's evil self. However, it is only after September 22 that Quilty is presented as a decadent paedophile. Without Humbert's biased depictions of Quilty only a few certainties can be stated about this enigmatic character. He is a playwright who is always a step ahead of Humbert in the paperchase across America. The clues especially he leaves in numerous motels on the way show a strange omniscience for a character of fiction. He even refers to 1952, as if he knew that this would be the year when Humbert and Dolly die. Quilty can only be the author himself who sneaks into his own novel wearing the mask of another writer. He is also linked to Nabokov by his anagrammatic mistress Vivian Darkbloom. Quilty, the author, is imitated by the narrator Humbert claiming to be the only and true author of the story. This turns the traditional *Doppelganger* tale upside down; the focal character of the story is not the original who chases his double, but the double who chases his original.

Humbert does not realize that he is the "galley slave" of an author until the author cannot resist teasing him again with a hint at the fate of fictional characters. Humbert receives Farlow's letter from which it becomes apparent that the author has allowed Farlow to break free from the fate "to remain [...] the dull, sedate and reliable person he had always been". Humbert becomes aware of his own imprisonment in a fictional world when the letter prompts him to recognize the "stability [...] that literary characters acquire in the reader's mind". He realizes that in contrast to King Lear and Emma Bovary who are characters of completed stories, he cannot become a reality in any reader's mind because Lolita's disappearance in Elphinstone has left the story without a conclu-

sive ending. The novel has been abandoned by the author (just as Lolita's predecessor *The Enchanter* was given up by Nabokov). Humbert can only exist if the story has an ending. And he can only escape from the prison of literature by becoming his own McFate, i.e. the author. If he can create the reality of his own ending, then the reader cannot "unsee" this reality once this "fate is fixed in our [the readers'] minds".

Farlow's letter is also decisive in setting the creative process in motion. Humbert passes through the different stages of literary gestation which correspond with Nabokov's description of the act of writing in his Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*. The initial "direct perception of a dear object"' (*EO*) is substituted by the memory of Humbert's dear Lolita the letter reminds him of. This motivation to start writing is supported by Farlow's urge to "better *produce* Dolly quick" (my italics, SG). The "hot silent shock of irrational rapture accompanying the evocation of that impression in one's fancies or actual dreams" *(EO)* follows immediately when "the other letter began talking to me in a small matter-of-fact voice". The letter does not anticipate a happy ending. Yet at least it promises an ending of a sort by giving Humbert the chance to see Lolita again. The subsequent "preservation of the image" *(EO)* during the interval between September 22 and 25 is realized in Humbert's detailed descriptions of the meeting with Lolita and the murder of Quilty. Finally Humbert applies "the cooler touch of creative art" *(EO)* while writing in prison. Like the writer of a detective story, Humbert has created first of all the outcome of the story before composing the previous sequences as the now authentic and only author. But is he?

The dramatic High-Noon scene Humbert intended to stage turns into cartoon slapstick. Quilty's mocking responses to Humbert's death threats undermine the seriousness of this final confrontation between Quilty-author and Humbert-narrator. Since Quilty is relaxed enough to parody his own death "in an absurd clownish manner, as if he were exaggerating the pain", he must be certain of his immortality. Indeed, there is no evidence for his death since Humbert himself admits that

"I could not bring myself to touch him in order to make sure he was really dead". Quilty's friends seem strangely unmoved by Quilty's death, as if it had not happened. Who are these people that are far more worried about being too late "to go to that game"? The obscure gathering of "two dark-haired [...] sisters [...], big one and small one", a "florid-faced fellow with sapphire-blue eyes" and "a woman in slacks" is Humbert's encounter with the author's reality of the grown-up and the adolescent Dolly. Dick Schiller. and Charlotte Haze. Nabokov, who had gained weight in the forties after having given up smoking, is present as the "fat man in an easy chair" while Humbert is naturally not able to recognize himself in the "unidentified man". These "ghosts" are the manifestation of Humbert's failure to destroy the author. His conviction that "this [...] was the end" is relativized by his subjective insertion "I said to myself". Humbert senses that his victory was a false one, an "ingenious play staged for me by Quilty".

Although Humbert has succeeded in creating the reality of Dolly Schiller and Quilty's death in the reader's mind, he has failed to kill the author. This is not the end of the game, it has only just begun. The author resurrects himself in the new guise of the editor John Ray, Jr., a new double of the author. The naturalist John Ray alludes to Nabokov, the lepidopterist. Furthermore, "Ray" reflected in a mirror reads "ya" which transcribes a Russian letter that looks like a mirrored "R" and is the first person singular pronoun as if Nabokov gave the reader the hint: "I am (still or already) here!" The author takes revenge and kills Humbert through coronary thrombosis. But even more cunning is that he kills him three days too early in prison. By thus raising doubts about the authenticity of Humbert's claimed authorship the author forces Humbert back into his role as a fictional narrator. By exchanging a 9 for a 6 the author shows that he is in total control of everything and everybody inside the story. His omnipotence, however, seems to be questioned by Humbert's success in creating his own ending. But is there an ending?

Humbert must have existed as a fictional character and narrator before he can become aware of his own fictionality. He must have become aware of his own fictionality before he can write his own ending. He must have written his own ending before he can start writing as the fictional narrator of *Lolita* with the ending already in mind. Prompting Humbert to write his own ending the author traps Humbert in circular time which robs him of one definite ending. By writing his own ending Humbert has only completed the "vicious" circle abolishing any possibility of an ending. He has to relive his life not only in this circular structure but also every time the book is read. Contemplating the fate of fictional characters Humbert says: "No matter how many times we reopen 'King Lear', never shall we find the good king banging his tankard in high revelry, all woes forgotten, at a jolly reunion with all three daughters and their lapdogs". Humbert describes his own tragedy; although we shall find Humbert at a reunion with his "daughter", no matter how many times we reopen *Lolita*, never shall we find any ending of the book. The circular motion repeats itself again and again, but at the end of every turn we can hear the author laughing, not only at Humbert, but also at the reader who gets trapped in the same circle by replaying this game in his mind. Humbert and the reader could only escape if the author who started the turning of the wheel were dead. But you cannot kill the author. The author is not dead.

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MAUD: WORDPLAY AND THE LETTER M

In the verse paragraph containing lines 86-98 of the poem "Pale Fire", we learn about the Aunt Maud who raised the orphaned John Shade:

I was brought up by dear bizarre Aunt Maud,
A poet and a painter with a taste
For realistic objects interlaced

With grotesque growths and images of doom.
She lived to hear the next babe cry. Her room
We've kept intact. Its trivia create
A still life in her style: the paperweight
Of convex glass enclosing a lagoon,
The verse book open at the Index (Moon,
Moonrise, Moor, Moral), the forlorn guitar,
The human skull, and from the local *Star*
A curio: *Red Sox Beat Yanks 5-4*
On Chapman's Homer, thumbtacked to the door.

Charles Kinbote provides a note to lines 90-93 containing the following variant:

.....her room

We've kept intact. Her trivia for us
Retrace her style: the leaf sarcophagus
(A Luna's dead and shriveled up cocoon)

Kinbote suspects "Shade altered this passage because his moth's name clashed with 'Moon' in the next line" (p.114), but his comment serves to emphasize for us Maud's association with the moon, and, indeed, with the letter M.

The pattern involving the letter M that began with Maud's verse book can be traced into the Commentary, where, in the note to line 230, "one winter morning Shade, upon rising and taking a look at the weather, saw that the little table from his study upon which he kept a Bible-like Webster open at M was standing in a state of shock outdoors, on the snow (subliminally this may have participated in the making of lines 5-12)." (p. 165-166) Kinbote's parenthetical remark refers to the image in lines 5-12 of furniture outside in the snow:

And from the inside, too, I'd duplicate
Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:
Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass
Hang all the furniture above the grass,
And how delightful when a fall of snow

Covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so
As to make chair and bed exactly stand
Upon that snow, out in that crystal land!

The correspondence between Maud's verse book with its M words and Shade's dictionary open at M, however, is a subtlety not remarked by Kinbote.

Now we must turn to Canto Four, which Shade devotes in great part to composition and inspiration. In the lines 873-886 we see not only a repetition of a domestic item outside on the grass, but a repetition of four consecutive words beginning with M:

My best time is the morning; my preferred
Season, midsummer. I once overheard
Myself awakening while half of me
Still slept in bed. I tore my spirit free,
And caught up with myself-upon the lawn
Where clover leaves cupped the topaz of dawn,
And where Shade stood in nightshirt and one shoe.
And then I realized that *this* half too
Was fast asleep; both laughed and I awoke
Safe in my bed as day its eggshell broke,
And robins walked and stopped, and on the damp
Gemmed turf a brown shoe lay! My secret stamp,
The Shade impress, the mystery inborn.
Mirages, miracles, midsummer morn.

Because of his "secret stamp, the Shade impress", we may assume he was conscious of the repetition of the images of household items outside, as well as the more subtle repetition of four M words. The eerie reappearance of both of these elements in the note to line 230, written by Kinbote, is a different matter though; it forces us to give consideration to Shade's presence in, or influence on, the Commentary. But first let us look further at Aunt Maud's possible involvement.

Kinbote describes in the Foreword a snapshot in which "Shade is seen leaning on a sturdy cane that had belonged to his Aunt Maud (see line 86)." (p.26) Shade carries the cane on his nature rambles (p.168), and it

appears in the note to line 347, used by him to poke at the spot where Hentzner's barn had stood.(p.186) It is in this note that Hazel's experience with the barn ghost - Maud's spirit - is recounted. There is a correspondence between the eighty index cards containing the poem "Pale Fire" (p.13) and the eighty alphabet recitations (p.189) necessary to produce the scrabbled message warning Shade of the fatal events that will occur upon completion of the poem. This numerical coincidence is initiated while John and Hazel are alive; only Maud is dead at this point. The coincidence becomes more complex when we realize that the seventeen false starts, or alphabet recitations yielding no results, correspond to the seventeen variants given by Kinbote under "Variants" in the Index. Because of his involvement in their creation, we sense that he must be an essential part of a design of which he is ignorant, in spite of his belief in his central importance in Shade's creation. It is a Nabokovian deception used throughout *Pale Fire* that what appears to be true actually is true, but in a more profound and hidden way.

Towards the beginning of this same note to line 347, in which Maud plays such a large part, Kinbote uses "harebreath" for "hairbreadth" (p. 185) in recounting one of his rambles with Shade. Now, while John Shade was a formidable wordsmith and a fan of word golf, and Hazel twisted words and is associated with mirror words (p.193), it is Maud who has been associated with puns; namely, by way of the punning newspaper clipping on her bedroom door: "A curio: *Red Sox Beat Yanks 5-4 / On Chapman's Homer,* thumbtacked to the door." Kinbote draws our attention to this pun by dedicating to it the note to line 98, wherein he mistakes the headline as a printer's droll transposition of Keats' sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer". (p. 1 16) We must look more deeply into this pun involving baseball. After all, Nabokov needn't have, wouldn't have, provided a note to explain the clever, but hardly obscure pun; nor can the purpose of the note be convincingly dismissed as mere exposition of Kinbote's self-absorbed ignorance. Rather, his highlighting of this play on words indicates something beneath the surface, something more elaborate involving

baseball imagery and puns, another use of the conspicuous to camouflage the profound.

First, there is the short poem entitled "The Swing", which was written by Shade shortly before composing "Pale Fire". "The Swing" (p.94-95) contains these lovely lines:

> The shadow of the doorknob that
> At sundown is a baseball bat
> Upon the door

The subtle connection of baseball and door in the short poem (whose title, "The Swing", is also a baseball term) recurs in "Pale Fire" as the baseball headline thumbtacked to the door.

Kinbote uses line 130 ("I never bounced a ball or swung a bat") as the point of departure for a note whose opening ("Frankly I too never excelled in soccer and cricket") is his second misunderstanding involving sports; thus, it serves as a connection to his note on the newspaper headline. Let's push through the surface of Kinbote's ignorance and see what it covers. It is impossible in an article such as this, which reorders the elements of Nabokov's book, to convey the impact of the unexpected continuation of the baseball theme just prior to the dramatic moment of Shade's demise. In the note to line 991, Kinbote inquires about Shade's progress with his poem. Shade's response ends thus:"A few trifles to settle and [suddenly striking the table with his fist] I've swung it, by God." (p. 288) Here, Shade, who "never swung a bat" has "swung it, by God", as had Nabokov himself, who must have beamed mightily at having weaved America's national pastime into his creation - not merely as an isolated bit of cleverness, as at first appears, but as an essential thread incorporating Maud's occult presence.

And the baseball punning is not yet finished. In that note to line 130 ("I never bounced a ball or swung a bat"), there appears in the courtyard outside the lumber room where Charles II is under house arrest, a "batlike moth" that "blindly flapped - until the punter knocked it down

with his cap." (p. 123) Later in the note, as Charles II flees through the secret subterranean passage, he passes a pool of ditch water along whose "edge walked a sick bat like a cripple with a broken umbrella." (p. 133) This bat limping along seems to show the effects of the blow suffered by the batlike moth ten pages earlier. Both can be associated with Maud, and not just because of the quibble involving baseball bats and mammalian bats. Let us revisit the note to lines 90-93, in which a draft variant mentions "...the leaf sarcophagus / (A Luna's dead and shriveled-up cocoon)". We've already noted Maud's connection to the letter M and the moon; now we can note that the Luna is a large moth, echoed by the "batlike moth" above. And Maud, with her taste for "images of doom", left behind an oil painting entitled "Cypress and Bat". (p.165) This bit of information was given in the very note to line 230, already glanced at, whose "Bible-like Webster open at M" implicated Maud. (Later, Kinbote uses the image of " a bat... writing a legible tale of torture in the bruised and branded sky" (p.289), a phrase that evokes Maud.)

The other image of doom in Maud's painting is the cypress, a tree often planted in cemeteries, and symbolic of death, sadness and gloom. This tree, "a clown's sad cypress from Illyria" (p.291) is included on the famous New Wye avenue of all the trees mentioned by Shakespeare. (The reference is to the song sung by Feste, the Clown, in Twelfth Night, II, iv, 51-66. The song also contains a yew - a tree that figures prominently in Canto Three of "Pale Fire".) This same paragraph on p.291 merits further study because it closes the pattern involving the letter M, the verses dealing with domestic items outside on the snow and the lawn, and the note to line 230, with its mysterious phenomena and its "Bible-like Webster open at M." The paragraph, enumerating some of Shakespeare's trees, concludes with: "a midsummer elm, its barky fingers enringed with ivy; a midsummer mulberry, its shade inviting to tarry; and a clown's sad cypress from Illyria." (p.291) Return now to the verse paragraph containing lines 873-886 and see the *first* double occurrence

of "midsummer", one of which appears among the four M words: "Mirages, miracles, midsummer morn."

Before closing, let's trace Maud's connection through one more pun. After John Shade's heart attack and speedy recovery, as recounted in the note to line 691, he returned to the classroom and "was again speaking of his favorite Pope to eight pious young men." (p.250) The pun, "...Pope...pious...", provokes a return to an earlier, heretofore curious note, whose sole purpose seemed to be that of emphasizing Kinbote's religious preoccupation. The note to line 85 reveals an interesting juxtaposition; here it is in its entirety: "Pius X, Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto, 1835-1914: Pope 1903-1914." Immediately below, the note to lines 86-90 begins with an identically terse obituary dedicated to Aunt Maud: "Maud Shade, 1869-1950, Samuel Shade's sister." The pun involving Pope Pius X and Alexander Pope is thus connected by obituary style and immediate proximity to the punster, Maud. (I must admit that the connection would have been more certain, more esthetically compelling, had it been Maud, rather than the maid's niece, Adele, who'd seen the Pope in line 85.) In any event, Maud has led us to Alexander Pope, whose ubiquitous presence - apparent, as well as submerged, in the poem, in the Commentary, and in the Index - must be the subject of another article.

—Tony Fazio, Chicago, Illinois

VLADIMIR NABOKOV AND WOMEN AUTHORS

by Maxim D. Shrayer

She had imagination–the muscle of the soul–and her imagination was of a particularly strong, almost masculine quality.

Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*

*I have been reading–after Fielding–a very curious fat book, with incredible Victorian coils of coyness about it–*Daniel Deronda *by G. Eliot.*

Nabokov to Edmund Wilson, June 20, 1953

In Nabokov's epistolary short story "The Admiralty Spire" (1933), the *Vorgeschichte* is a Russian novel by an unknown émigré author published in one of the Baltic countries in the interwar period. The novel's title, *The Admiralty Spire*, borrowed as it is from the prologue to Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman*, catches the eye of the protagonist, who is a professional Russian writer. He picks it up, reads it, and then dashes off an indignant response to the author. Although the name printed on the cover is a male one, Sergei Solntsev, the protagonist opens his letter with an address to a woman. He conjectures that the author of the novel is a female who obtained private information from his first beloved, a Russian by the name of Katya, with whom he had not been in touch for sixteen years. Now, as the middle-aged, caustic émigré writer reads a mediocre and overwritten tale of his own first love, the maimed memories provoke him to seek literary revenge. And avenge himself he does! In addition to a number of transparent parallels with the Tamara chapters of Nabokov's autobiographies, the story pre-

sents a series of authorial gestures, that–dismissive as they may be–attempt to parse a poetics of women's writing. What does Nabokov mean when he proclaims that "every sentence [of this novel] buttons to the left"? In thinking of Nabokov's uneasy relationship with women authors, I am bewildered by the readiness with which some of Nabokov's critics apply an omnibus solution to this rather complex problem. Must one take as a guiding principle a remark Nabokov allowed himself in a letter to Edmund Wilson in the context of discussing a reading list for his fiction course: "I dislike Jane [Austen], and am prejudiced, in fact, against all women writers. They are in another class" (May 5, 1950)? Was Nabokov indeed misogynistic as a reader of and writer about women authors?

First, briefly, what do we know about Nabokov and women writers? A number of them, both major and minor, have speaking parts in Nabokov's biography. Among others, they include, in order of their first appearance, the Russians Zinaida Gippius, Marina Tsvetaeva, Raisa Blokh, Zinaida Shakhovskaia, Nina Berberova, Anna Prismanova, Aleksandra Tolstaia, and the Americans Mary McCarthy, Katherine White, and Dorothy Parker. Among Nabokov's correspondence files at the Library of Congress, one runs across a curious handwritten note, signed by the first wave émigré poet Anna Prismanova. Undated, it was most likely given to Nabokov during one of his visits to Paris in the 1930s. In the top right corner one notices the words "Proshu peredat'" (Please pass on) while the word "Parizh" (Paris) is written beneath the text and Prismanova's signature. The note is a quatrain in iambic pentameter, written out as six lines of prose:

V. Sirinu

Byvaiut liudi–zolo-
tye ruki, byvaeit i
iz plameni stena...
Byvaet golos, dannyi
na poruki, no zhizn's

zhivaia–golosu tsena.

In a literal translation, the note reads as this: "There are people with gold hands, there are walls of fire...There is a voice released on bail, but only life itself can put a price on such a voice." What is Prismanova cautioning Nabokov against?

During the Russian years, Nabokov reviewed a number of books by women as well as their contributions to émigré collections and periodicals. Here is a tentative, probably incomplete catalogue of names and works, arranged according to the years in which Nabokov's reviews appeared. 1927: poetry of Irina Kondratovich and Ekaterina Tauber. 1928: poetry collection by Raisa Blokh (*Moi gorod* [My City]) and chapbook by Mariam Stoian (*Kham* [Vulgarian; also the Old Testament name 'Ham']); poetry collection by Nina Snesareva-Kazakova (*Da sviatitsia imia tvoe* [Hallowed Be Thy Name]); poems of Anna Prismanova. 1929: Marina Tsvetaeva's drama in verse; Tsvetaeva's essay with translations of Rilke's letters, K. Irmantseva's poetry, and criticism by Nadezhda Mel'nikova-Papoushek; collection of stories by Avgusta Damanskaia (*Zheny* [Wives]); novel by Irina Odoevtseva (*Izoltda* [Isolde]). 1931: poetry by Ekaterina Tauber, Sof'ia Krasavina, and Tat'iana Shtiltman; novel by Nina Berberova (*Poslednie i pervye* [The Last and the First]). 1940: collection under the co-editorship of Zinaida Gippius (*Literaturnyi smotr* [Literary Inspection) with an essay by Lidiia Chervinskaia (with the exception of the latter review, Nabokov's reviews appeared in the Berlin émigré newspaper *Rul'* [The Rudder]). Thus, Nabokov's reviews analyzed poetry by 10 women, prose fiction by 3 women, and criticism by 4 women, a total of 17 authors in 13 reviews. Only one review–that of Berberova's novel *The Last and the First* (1929)—is outright positive. The review of Damanskaia's stories is cautiously encouraging. The rest of Nabokov's criticism about women authors is in the destructive vein, ranging from laconically dismissive remarks in passing ("Ek. Tauber, who generally writes very clearly and very tediously") to entire reviews pro-

pelled by morbid irony (about Irina Odoevtseva's novel: "All of this is written, as they say, 'dryly,'–which for some reason is considered an achievement–and in 'short phrases,'–which is also, they say, a plus"). Are Nabokov's reviews of women authors on the whole more negative than his reviews of male authors? Probably not, although they do betray two gender-specific tendencies. The first has to do with Nabokov's misgivings about the influence of Anna Akhmatova, the second with his aversion for female narrators in prose.

Finally, a memorable cohort of female authors passes through Nabokov's fiction. This bilingual procession sets out in *Glory*, where Martin loses his virginity in the arms of Alla Chernosvitova, a fictional poetess and a composite caricature of the women of the Russian Silver Age. Alla's poetry, as the reader finds out, "left [Martin] somewhat perplexed. When he said that Constantinople was anything but amethyst-colored, Alla objected that he was devoid of poetic imagination" (*Glory*, 30). Next comes the "Madam" of "The Admiralty Spire," allegedly a female belletrist hiding behind a male pseudonym. I should add that in 1937, Nabokov also composed a not very successful parody of Tsvetaeva's jaggedly emotional verse, while both *The Gift* and his last Russian story, "Vasiliy Shishkov," brilliantly poke fun at Zinaida Gippius, who informs the character of Christopher Mortus in the novel and makes a cameo appearance in the story as "an ample female (a translatress [sic], I believe, or perhaps a theosophist) with a gloomy little husband resembling a black breloque" (*Stories*, 498). The procession of Russian female litterateurs completes its journey with the character of Pnin's ex-wife Liza Wind, who "wrote verse–mainly in halting anapaest" (*Pnin*, 44). Vladimir Vladimirovich, Nabokov's namesake and the narrator of *Pnin*, unequivocally connects Liza with a kind of crude version of the cultural mythology surrounding the life and poetry of early Anna Akhmatova: "she went on with her psychodramatics and her lyrical overpositing, laying all over the place like an Easter rabbit, and in those green and mauve poems–about the child she wanted to bear, and the lovers she wanted to have, and St. Petersburg

(courtesy Anna Akhmatov)–every intonation, every image, every simile had been used before by other rhyming rabbits" (*Pnin*, 44-45). While in *Glory*, Alla's character, but not her verse, seems to carry something of the mythologized aura of the early Akhmatova, in *Pnin* Liza is most certainly an epigone of Akhmatova's verse; she imitates several emblematic poems from the collections *Evening* (1912) and *Rosary* (1914). In addition to an Akhmatovesque poem that Liza recites to Pnin during her visit to Waindell, the reader's knowledge of Liza's verse also comes from a poem the narrator quotes while recollecting his prewar encounters with Pnin's ex-wife. We find out that Liza asks the narrator, who is a Russian writer, "if she could send [him] for appraisal a batch of her poems" and later sends him "a fair sample of her production [...] the kind of stuff that émigré rhymesterettes wrote after Akhmatova" (*Pnin*, 180-181). This episode reenacts–some fifteen years later–the main events of the story "Vasiliy Shishkov" and also–if I may so speculate–one of Nabokov's real life meetings with émigré female poets in Berlin, Prague or Paris.

All the above brings me to a very curious letter Nabokov wrote to Zinaida Shakhovskaia on 25 July 1933 (the letter is at the Library of Congress). I will quote a long passage in a literal English translation from Nabokov's Russian:

> It so happens that recently I have been reading many books of the female gender [knig zhenskogo pole]. *Facts Only, Sir* [*Tol'ko fakty, sèr*, 1933] by Mrs. Kunina, for instance, and *The Body* [*Telo*, 1933] by Mrs. Bakunina. The first is far from being untalented, but she writes unevenly, breaking into a gallop, and the ending is no good. The second is not very talented, but writes as if she were washing the floor à grandeau, noisily wringing out the black-wet rag over a bucket, from which she then lets the reader drink: altogether a boring and crippled book. My translator [Doussia] Èrgaz published (in French) a book of stories, which were praised by [Mikhail] Osorgin (whom she also translates). Also: everything written by Virginia Woolf

> and Katherine Mansfield. [This means that Nabokov was likely to have read, among Woolf's other books, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*, and *The Waves*, and also Mansfield's three lifetime collections of stories, *In a German Pension*, *Bliss*, and *The Garden Party*]. You might read, say, *Orlando* [1928]; this is an exemplar of first-rate poshlost'. Mansfield is better, but there is also something terribly irritating about her, a banal fear of banality and this flowery sweetness. Her *Journal* [1927] deserves some attention. I even felt like writing an essay about these ladies [ob etikh damakh], but I kept myself from doing it.

Just as Lolita's class list belongs, in Nabokov's own admission, to the "nerves" of the novel, this passage in the letter to Shakhovskaia occupies the position of the spinal cord in the body of Nabokov's writings about women authors. Written after *Glory* and Nabokov's reviews of the late 1920s and early 1930s and containing a sizable reading list, the letter tells of Nabokov's engrossment in the works of Russian and English women authors. If one also considers the fact that Nabokov's letter was written in July of 1933, only two months after he had composed "The Admiralty Spire," one arrives at an intriguing juncture in Nabokov's career. If the fictional statement of "The Admiralty Spire" and the epistolary one of the letter to Shakhovskaia summarize Nabokov's response to writings by women, what is one to conclude about his position?

My strategy has been to reread the works by women authors whom Nabokov is known to have read and/or reviewed while also assessing both the meaning and fairness of his critical remarks. I have also sought to identify the possible correspondences between the writings by women to which Nabokov responded and his fictional women authors. Finally, I have wondered whether the fiction by women authors that Nabokov had reacted to ended up leaving a trace in his own prose.

I will start with Nabokov's responses to Russian female poets. The leitmotif here was that Anna Akhmatova

had had a detrimental impact on women's poetry in emigration. Consider these comments: "It would be embarrassing to find fault with Irina Kondratovich. Most female poets like to write 'mouth' [rot] instead of 'lips' [guby] and to extol sorceresses, silks and Pierro with Columbine. And Ekaterina Tauber has a feature pertaining to all poetesses [poetessam]. This is the use of the form "you" [the Russian formal *vy*], not "thou" [the familiar ty]. Her poems have not been spared the ruinous influence of Akhmatova, a lovely poet [poetessy prelestnoi], no doubt, but one who should not be imitated." Nabokov concluded his review of Raisa Blokh's collection My *City* (1928) as follows: "Thus in the end all this [poetry]–golden, lite [svetlen'koe] and slightly permeated with Akhmatova's cold perfume (something almost unavoidable in women's poetry)–may give the undiscriminating reader the impression of something pleasant, simple, birdlike." And here is a very telling opening of the review of Irina Snesareva-Kazakova's collection *Hallowed Be Thy Name* (1928): "Anna Akhmatova impacts contemporary female poets in a detrimental fashion. She originated this mixture of feminine sinfulness and devoutness [smes' zhenskoi 'grekhovnosti' i 'bogomoltnosti'; ironically, in 1946 Stalin's henchman Andrei Zhdanov would characterize Akhmatova as 'a nun and harlot, with whom harlotry is mixed with prayer']." In *Glory*, Nabokov writes this of the poetess Alla: "her own poems, so sonorous, so spicy, always dressed the man in the polite form ('you,' not 'thou')...One of them...began thus:

On purple silks, beneath an Empire pall,
You vampirized me and caressed me all,
And we tomorrow die, burned to the end;

Our lovely bodies with the sand will blend (*Glory*, 29).

In the Russian original, the second line is: "On vsiu menia laskal, vpivaias' rtom vampirnym" (literally: He caressed me all, stinging me with his vampire's mouth). The image of an Akhmatova epigone acquires caricatural proportions in *Pnin*, where as late as the 1940s and early 1950s, Liza's poetry continues to overflow with stock images

from Akhmatova's first two collections. In the following example, Alla's poem finds a most direct antecedent in Akhmatova's famous "Vse my brazhniki zdes', bludnitsy..." (We are all drunks here, harlots, 1913).

Alla in *Pnin:*	Akhmatova in *Rosary:*
Ia nadela temnoe plat'e,	Ty kurish' chernuiu truLku,
I monashenki ia skromnei:	Tak stranen dvmok nad nei.
Iz slonovoi kosti raspiat'e	Ia nadela uzkuiu iubku,
Nad kholodnoi postel'iu moei	Chtob kazat'sia eshche stoinei.
(I have put on a dark dress	(You smoke a black pipe,
And am more modest than a nun;	How strange is the thin smoke rising from it.
An ivory crucifix	I put on a tight skirt,
Is over my cold bed [*Pnin*, 56]).	To look even more slender.)

Did Nabokov object to Akhmatova's poetry or just the appropriation of her literary legacy by female poets? What did he resent, literary personae fashioned specifically after the *femmes fatales* of the early Akhmatova or any female poetic voices speaking to the woman's condition? (According to Lidiia Chukovskaia's *Notes about Anna Akhmatova*, Akhmatova regarded Pnin as a direct jibe at her, while Chukovskaia herself noted this in her memoir: "I also do not like the book ... but does it lampoon Akhmatova [paskvil' li na Akhmatovu?] or parody her female epigones [parodiia na ee podrazhatel'nits?] it is difficult to say"). On thing seems clear: In reviewing émigré poetry, Nabokov convincingly advanced the notion that Akhmatova's influence upon female poets had been deleterious, and he chose the victims of his remarks accordingly. It is curious, for instance, that he never picked a fight with the poetry of Irina Odoevtseva, a much better poet than most of those whom Nabokov critiqued, and one whose signature in poetry was robust and muscular ballads quite far afield from Akhmatova's poetics. Moreover, of all the women poets whom Nabokov discussed in his reviews, only two, Marina Tsvetaeva and Anna Prismanova, represented real competition for Nabokov, and in both cases he failed to offer grounds for

his dismissive remarks at their expense.

Another case in point are Nabokov's reviews of and remarks about fiction by Russian women authors. Here the responses are far less uniform than those addressed to female poets. Nabokov's review of Damanskaia's collection, *Wives* (1929), proves that he was capable of an objective evaluation of a woman's literary work. Damanskaia's stories, although ably constructed, suffered from a flatness of language as well as a superficial, Baedecker-like tone of descriptions, and probably deserved Nabokov's lukewarm review. In his acerbic review of Odoevtseva's *Isolde* (1929), Nabokov correctly pointed out the novel's principal faults–a bric-à-brac set of characters, including a Scottish aristocrat in love with a precocious Russian teenager, a contrived ending with both a murder and a double suicide, voyeuristic sensualism aimed at stirring the imagination of the middlebrow émigré reader.

While Damanskaia's stories and Odoevtseva's novel had very little in common save their authors' gender, the two Russian novels that Nabokov discussed in his letter to Shakhovskaia do share a central feature of their poetics. Nabokov paired up Ekaterina Bakunina's *The Body* and Irina Kunina's *Facts Only, Sir* not only because they were both published in Berlin in 1933 and their authors' rhyming last and first names caught his punning eyes. Both novels are narrated by female protagonists and in places employ Woolfian interior monologue. Disrelishing female narrators, Nabokov attached Virginia Woolf's minor Russian imitators in a private letter while electing not to demolish them in a critical essay.

The subject of Nabokov's responses to women writers of prose, both non-Russian and Russian, awaits its further investigators. Jane Austen is clearly a case in point, and Simon Karlinsky famously stated in his 1979 introduction to *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* that "with Jane Austen...it was [Edmund Wilson's] particular triumph to overcome Nabokov's typically Russian prejudice against women novelists." Ellen Pifer has been doing pioneering work on Nabokov and British female writers

(Nabokov and Mary Shelley; Nabokov and Austen). Three directions of future research on Nabokov and women authors strike me as the most deserving of future research. The first is the matter of Nabokov and George Eliot. I am puzzled by the lack of Nabokov's critical response to this British woman novelist with a male penname and the most Tolstoyan sensibility of all the Victorian authors. Does the dearth of Nabokov's reaction reveal more than it conceals? Equally intriguing is Nabokov's reaction to Katherine Mansfield. Could it be that in Mansfield's conscious (if not quite successful) emulation of Chekhov's style, the territorial Nabokov probably saw an act of trespassing on the boundaries of the artistic estate that he was charting for himself in the 1930s and even prior to switching to English? Perhaps even more fascinating is the case of Nabokov and Russian émigré women novelists. To take just one example, both Odoevtseva's *Isolde*, which Nabokov deplored, and Berberova's important novel *The Last and the First*, which Nabokov praised, are among the émigré subtexts of his novel *Glory*. As with his male contemporaries in exile, Nabokov absorbed fiction of varying quality by expatriate Russian women, and hypertextual reactions to the prose of émigré women are therefore likely to be found in his Russian and American works.

Let me then go back to the starting point of these provisional remarks, to the story "The Admiralty Spire." If Nabokov indeed wrote "The Admiralty Spire" (May 1933) in response to the novels by the Russian and English female authors he had read earlier that year and contemplated taking up in a critical essay, what sort of statement does his story make about female authors writing about themselves in the first person? There is so much brilliance in Nabokov's exiting trick in the story–recall his "An Evening of Russian Poetry," where "the conjurer collects his poor belongings/–the colored handkerchief, the magic rope,/ the double-bottomed rhymes, the cage, the song" (*PP*, 162). Having pierced one by one every secret bubble of the feminine persona who narrates the novel *The Admiralty Spire* and now addressing her

with the name of his first love, having deflated along the way his own "arrogant rubber fatman who...clowned around at the beginning," Nabokov's male author ends his epistolary diatribe with a salutary possibility: "perhaps, after all, Katya, in spite of everything, a rare coincidence has occurred and it is not you who wrote that tripe, and your equivocal but enchanting image has not been mutilated. In that case, please forgive me, colleague Solntsev" (*Stories*, 357). The possibility that the author of the wretched novel is not a female but a male actualizes a quintessential Nabokovian situation, where the ideal reader is the author's complete double, to whom it makes perfect sense that the male writer Vladimir Nabokov authors the male protagonist of the story "The Admiralty Spire" who is writing an epistolary review of the novel *The Admiralty Spire* by the male author Sergei Solntsev whom Nabokov also authored and who may or may not be a woman author lurking behind a fictional male façade. What troubled Nabokov about certain writings by women writers was certainly not the gender of their authors–he was, to be sure, above crude sociological misogyny. Rather, Nabokov probably considered it a mark of low artistry when a woman author created a feminine persona and told the story in her name. And yet, when in 1935 Nabokov undertook to compose a short story told by a woman, this resulted in one of his weakest works of fiction.

The voice of the pathetic heroine of "A Slice of Life" is a potpourri of everything Nabokov must have detested in women's writing and mocked in his reviews. This émigré woman leaves the room "without even consulting [her] mirror, just as [she] was–in the rumpled dress of a slatternly after lunch siesta." Of her black dress she says that she wears mourning: "for everybody, for everything, for my own self, for Russia, for the fetuses scraped out of me." In the "looking glass of the hallway" she sees herself "as resembling a forlorn little nun." Her gestures, her phrases, her looks of "gear sadness" and her "lips masked by the fringe of [her] black shawl" (*Stories*, 406-08) seem to have leaped to Nabokov's story from the verses of Akhmatova's epigones among émigré women. In the end,

this bleak feuilletonistic piece does not succeed as a parody of a woman's voice, instead drawing the reader's attention to the crooked seams of its own construction–as though a master blacksmith were doing needlework.