THE NABOKOVIAN

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

Editor: Stephen Jan Parker

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

Subscriptions: individuals, $17 per year; institutions, $22 per year. For surface postage outside the USA add $8.00; for airmail postage, add $12.00.

Back issues: individuals: $10.00; institutions, $15; for surface postage outside the USA add $4.00; for airmail, add $6.00. Issues #1, 5, 7, 11, 14, 17, 23-29, 32, 33 are out of print.

Checks should be made payable to the Vladimir Nabokov Society.

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

Vladimir Nabokov Society
Slavic Languages & Literatures
2134 Wescoe Hall
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Lawrence, Kansas 66045 USA

Number 49 Fall 2002

CONTENTS

NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

Nabokov Society News

Priscilla Meyer will chair a Nabokov Society panel at the AATSEEL National Convention in December in New York. Papers to be presented: "Rereading *Pale Fire*: Literal and Poetic Readings," Yannicke Chupin (Sorbonne); "Twirl of Mirror Darkness: Nabokov and Visual Poetics of the Text," Yuri Leving (USC); Discussant, Zoran Kuzmanovich (Davidson).

The Modern Language Association Convention in New York will have the following Society panel: "Nabokov's Obsession." Papers to be presented: "Vivian Darkbloom: Floral Border of Moral Order?", Lisa Sternlieb (Princeton); *Lolita* as a Deviant Narrative," Eric Goldman (North Carolina); "Why Nabokov Had It In for Freud, Marx, and Einstein-and Balzac, Faulkner, Camus, Lorca, and Hundreds of Others," Gene Harold Bell-Villada (Williams College).

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The "International Vladimir Nabokov Symposium" in St. Petersburg, July 15-19, under the auspices of the V.V. Nabokov Museum, was a tremendous success. The prodigious program was as follows:

July 15. General Session. "Nabokov as Storyteller," Brian Boyd; "Stories Hidden Inside the Plot (An Approach to

Vladimir Nabokov's Poetics of Concealment)," Alexander Dolinin; "'Signs & Symbols': Nabokov & Iconicity," Donald Barton Johnson; "On the Genre of Nabokov's 'First Poem'," Alexander Zholkovsky; "'A poem, a poem, forsooth': Immortality and Transformation in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and Nabokov's Novels," Samuel Schuman.

July 16. Nabokov and the United States. "The Tongue, that Punchinello," Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts; "The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. Pnin in the Land of North Americans," Galya Diment; "Perversion in *Pnin*," Eric Naiman; "Aubrey Beardsley and *Lolita*," Stephen H. Blackwell; "'Mirages and Nightmares': The Narrative Lessons of *Lolita* from Novel to Script to Screen," Sarah Funke; "La Morte d'Humbert - Nabokov's Medieval Texts," Jenefer Coates; "Nabokov's Aesthetics of Mistranslation," Juliette Taylor; "In Place of a Preface: Reading Chapter One of Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark* as a Foreword to the English Translation," Corinne Scheiner; "Vladimir Nabokov's Impact on American Post-Modernists: The Case of John Hawkes," Maxim D. Shrayer; "Nabokov and Transcendentalism," Paul Benedict Grant; "Nabokov and the Chekhov Publishing House: New Materials from American Archives," Galina Glushanok.

July 17. St. Petersburg and Russia in Nabokov's Oeuvre. "*Shishki* on Adam's Head: Literary Hoaxes by Khodasevich and Nabokov," Sergei Davydov; "Nabokov and Georgyi Ivanov–Two Conflicting Petersburgs," Yuichi Isahaya; "On Bely's and Nabokov's Use of Space in Fiction," Ole Nyegaard; "Russian Neo-Idealism and Vladimir Nabokov's Philosophical Domain," Dana Dragunoiu; "Dream as a Structural Device in Pushkin, Tolstoy and Nabokov," Olga Voronina; "The Poetry of Nabokov's Drama *The Waltz Invention*," Paul Morris; "Vladimir Vladimirovich N., Ivan

Petrovich Pnin: An Earlier Encounter?," Stanislav Shvabrin.

July 18. Beyond Nabokov's Metaphysics. "The Politics of Zembla," Michael Wood; "Philosophy and Politics in Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*," Lyubov' Bugayeva; *Samozvantsy* in Nabokov's *Despair*," Igor Smirnov; "The Elemental Nabokov: The Role of Natural Elements in Nabokov's Fiction," Julian W. Connolly; ""A Blissful Abyss": Nabokov's Imagination of Limits," Zoran Kuzmanovich; "The Metaphysics of the Garage (Nabokov and Automobile Aesthetics)," Yuri Leving; "Substantial Ontological Foundations of Nabokov's Fiction," Liudmila Ryaguzova; "Do you believe in ghosts? Nabokov and French Thought," Jacqueline Hamrit; "Proutian Echoes in Nabokov's Novels: In Search of the Truth of Art," Juliette de Dieuleveult.

July 18. Nabokov's Butterflies. "Chinese Rhubarb and Caterpillars," Dieter Zimmer; "Neutral Evolution, Teleology and Nabokov on Insect Mimicy," Victoria Alexander; "The Family Zygaenidai (Lepidoptera) in Nabokov's Works," Konstantin Efetov; "The Other Trees: Crimean Flora in Nabokov's Poetry," Andrei Ena.

Poster Papers. "'Thou Are Not Thou': Nabokov and Evelyn Waugh," Margarit Tadevosyan; "A Portrait of the Artist as a Child: Vladimir Nabokov and Steven Millhauser," Daniela Monica Oancea; "Transcendence of Exile: Nabokov's St. Petersburg," Anita Kondoyanidi; "Nabokov's Neoplatonist Views of 'This World' and 'The Other World' in His Poem 'Death'," Christoph Henry-Thommes; "'Consciousness, Locked in a Book': A Problem of Opposition between Writer and Language in Nabokov," Elena Dorofeyeva.

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Dr. Mario Caramitti recently provided NABOKV-L with a bibliography of Italian scholarship on Nabokov. Since there have been few citations from Italian scholarship in our annual bibliographies, we offer Dr. Caramitti's brief bibliography here for our readers' convenience.

Garetto, Elda. "Berlino, citta d'ombre nell'opera de Vladimir Nabokov." *Europa Orientalis*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1995): 151-161.

_____. "Lo spazio autobiografico di Vladimir Nabokov." *Slavica Tergestina*, vol 4 (1996): 251-262.

Pavan, Stefania. "Nabokov, il bilinguismo e il problema della traduzione letteraria." *Problemi di morfosintassi delle lingue slave* (Bologne), (1990); 169-186.

_____. "La corrispondenza tra Vladimir Vladimirovic Nabokov e Edmund Wilson. Due culture a confronto." *Ricerche slavistiche*, vol 39-40, no. 1 (1992-1993): 537-580.

_____. *Nabokov. Una vita.* Roma: Castelvecchi. 1994.

_____. La traduzione della letterature. Nabokov, lo scrittore-traduttore e i diritti des testo." Quaderni des Dipartmento de Linguistica dell'Universita de Firenze, no. 8 (1997): 267-282.

_____. Possamai, Donatella (in collaborazione con D. Banzato. "Nabokov traduce se stesso." *Testo a fronte*, no. 13 (1995): 61-78.

_____. *Che cos'e il postmodernismo russo? Cinque*

percorsi interpretativi. Padova: Il Poligrafo. 2000.

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Recent and Forthcoming Books

– Gavriel Shapiro, ed. *Nabokov at Cornell.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Forthcoming early 2003.

– Justin Weir. *The Author as Hero: Self and Tradition in Bulgakov, Pasternak, and Nabokov.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 2002

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Please note that prices (posted on the inside cover) have not increased for 2003. However, members /subscribers are again encouraged to add one or more dollars to their annual dues payment in support of the Zembla Website, an essential, much appreciated dimension of the Society.

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Thanks, as always, to Ms. Paula Courtney for her crucial assistance in the production of this publication.

NOTES AND BRIEF COMMENTARIES

By Priscilla Meyer

[Submissions should be forwarded to Priscilla Meyer at pmeyer@wesleyan.edu. E-mail submission preferred. If using a PC, please send attachments in .doc format; if by fax send to (860) 685-3465; if by mail, to Russian Department, 215 Fisk Hall, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06459. 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 undergo some slight technical alterations. Kindly refrain from footnotes; all citations 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.]

AN UNKNOWN SOURCE OF *KING, QUEEN, KNAVE*?

A list of the sources which arguably influenced Nabokov's *King, Queen, Knave* (*KQK*) is rather long and includes Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Lev Tolstoi, Chekhov, Bunin, Andrei Belyi, Madame de La Fayette, Hans Christian Andersen, Raymond Radiguet, Lewis Carroll, James Joyce and a number of other writers (see, for examle, a review by M.Tsetlin in *Sovremennye Zapiski* [Contemporary Annals], 1928, no. 37, 537; A.Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art*, 158; L.Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, 57; and N.Buhks, *Eshafot v khrustal'nom dvortse* [A Scaffold in the Crystal Palace], Moscow, 1998, 41, 50-53). What has not been sufficiently explored is the novel's connection with the art of cinema. And yet the affinity between the artistic devices used in *KQK* and

as 1928 in a review by Iurii Aikhenval'd published in the Berlin Russian-language newspaper *Rul'* [The Rudder] of 3 October. His astute observation was reinforced by Nabokov himself (who, incidentally, when in Berlin, was trying to make a living as a scriptwriter and an extra), although at a much later stage. While revising *KQK* for its 1968 English-language edition, he added a mention of a film by the same title that was advertised in a cinema near the place of residence of one of the fictional characters in the novel (see V.Nabokov, *KQK*, 216; see also *ibid.*, 172, 261). *KQK* abounds in cinematic allusions (see, for instance, 56, 81, 83, 92, 117-18). Perhaps it is not by pure chance that, unlike quite a few other works by Nabokov, it was turned into a motion icture, *Herzbube*, by Jerzi Skolimowski (1972; with Gina Lollobrigida and David Niven; for evaluations see, for instance, G.Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist*, 44; and J.W.Connolly's entry in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, 213-14).

One notable exception to the rule is Alfred Appel's book *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* (138-39), which established a link between *KQK* and the film *Metropolis* (1927) by the German director Fritz Lang (1890-1976). Although Nabokov publicly claimed that Lang's name meant nothing to him (*Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, 58), it is hardly possible to imagine that he would have missed Lang's widely popular two-art blockbuster, *Dr. Mabuse, Der Sieler—Ein Bild der Zeit* and *Inferno—Menschen der Zeit* (1922), known to the English-speaking world in an abridged version entitled *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*. In it the motif of playing cards becomes a key element in the plot and signifies the advent of a whole new era in post-war Germany (see P. M. Jensen, *The Cinema of Fritz Lang*, New York and London, 1969, 43; and L. H. Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, London, 1976, 57-8).

A much less obvious, though still quite possible, source of *KQK* seems to be the film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* [3rd Meshchanskaia Street; generally known in English as *Bed and*

Sofa] (1927) by Abram Room (1894-1976), which caused a controversy in the Soviet Union and was released in Germany at the time when Nabokov was working on his second novel. Just like *KQK*, *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* focuses on a love triangle. It involves Kolia, a construction suervisor, his wife Liuda and his friend Volodia, a printer. This triangle is finally resolved by Liuda's unexpected departure (she leaves Moscow to escape from the unsatisfying threesome), while the two men in her life are left wondering what to do next. Such a denouement is vaguely reminiscent of the final chapter in *KQK*, when the sudden death of Martha leaves both her husband Kurt and her lover Franz in utter bewilderment (coincidentally, both Liuda and Martha are housewives; it is also worthy of note that *meshchanskaia* in Russian means 'petit bourgeois', which fits in well with the main target of Nabokov's satire in *KQK*). More imortantly, the scene of the first love-making between Liuda and Volodia is preceded by a memorable cartomantic session where the relationship in the triangle is represented by a King, a Queen and a Jack symbolising Kolia, Liuda and Volodia respectively. The idea of associating Kurt, Martha and Franz with the three court cards might have been partly insired by Room's picture.

Although I do not have any firm evidence that Nabokov actually saw *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, such a possibility cannot be ruled out. The contemorary resonse to the film was once described as follows: "All Germany talked of *Bed and Sofa*. It became tiresome in any cinematic discussion to be silenced with, 'But you don't know, you can't judge, you haven't seen *Bed and Sofa* '[...] [The film] ran in ordinary cinemas throughout Germany for months" (W.Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, Riant Chateau, Territet, 1929, 72, 75). It is known that Nabokov would occasionally go to Soviet films being shown in Berlin. Thus, his novel *The Gift* contains a reference to the famous *Mother* (1926) by Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893-1953) (see *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, 42-3). The

concealed presence of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* in *KQK* makes perfect sense in the context of the novel, which contains a number of obscure references to Russia's history and culture (see, for examle, *KQK*, 43, 143, 232, 258-59).

— Andrei Rogachevskii, University of Glasgow

SANDRO BOTTICELLI AND HAZEL SHADE

Together with Leonardo, Botticelli is mentioned rather frequently in Nabokov's novels. His name is recalled in his sixth novel, *Laughter in the Dark*, and in his last one, *Look at the Harlequins*, and also in some novels published in between, namely in *Bend Sinister* and *Lolita*. Although the artists are contemporaries, their paintings show a striking contrast. Leonardo's abundant use of chiaroscuro, most manifestly in his *Saint John the Baptist* where the subject's body seems to dissolve in its dark background, is totally absent in Botticelli's best-known works. These are characterized by a linear grace, which gives the subjects pure and pellucid outlines. Leonardo's *Saint John* has qualities concordant with those of Nabokov's art; his body is as difficult to ascertain as the characters in Nabokov's novels. Saint John's pleasing and mysterious smile has the same deceivingly amusing tone as Nabokov's prose, and his index finger, pointing to somewhere outside the picture, resembles Nabokov's many allusions which hint at a world beyond the visible one. In *Pnin*, the expression and gesture of Leonardo's *Saint John* is imitated, when, with "a Gioconda smile on his lips" and his finger "pointing up," Pnin suggests that "'the Judge in Heaven sees you'" (2, IV).

In contrast to the profundity of Leonardo's portraits is the plainness and transparency of Botticelli's forms, which, in combination with their diaphanousness, makes many of his pictures so popular. In addition, Leonardo's portraits are the

result of anatomical research and his landscapes are based on numerous studies, while Botticelli's creations suffer from physical and botanical flaws. Leonardo and Botticelli represent two different traditions of Florentine art: Leonardo followed the adherents of scientific naturalism, Botticelli those of linear grace and fancy.

Given Nabokov's high standards of empirical accuracy and his affinity with Leonardo's artistic values, it is clear that his appreciation of Botticelli's art must be explained by different qualities. Twice, in *Lolita and Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov compares his heroines with the melancholy beauty of Botticelli's female subjects. Lolita looks "like Botticelli's russet Venus—the same soft nose, the same blurred beauty," and Annette resembles "the flower-decked blonde with the straight nose and serious grey eyes, in Botticelli's *Primavera*." (Humbert, who presented himself as a sort of scholar as he wrote some "tortuous essays" and a paper entitled "The Proustian theme in a letter from Keats to Benjamin Bailey," might have added that he was not the first author who compared the object of his love to a Botticellian beauty. In *Swann's Way*, Odette is compared to Zipporah, who, in Botticelli's fresco *Youth of Moses*, is the girl standing on the left in the middle of the mural. Proust, with uncommon precision, compares Odette to Zipporah while she is standing next to Swann, looking at an engraving with her head inclined).

In *Look at the Harlequins!* the narrator writes that "the mad scholar in *Esmeralda and Her Parandus* wreathes Botticelli and Shakespeare together by having Primavera end as Ophelia with all her flowers," a reference to the rigmarole on *Hamlet* in *Bend Sinister*. *Primavera* is one of Botticelli's secular paintings, each of which is a treasure of iconological detail, which have induced numerous studies and interpretations. For this reason it has been concluded that Botticelli's art "allegedly hides more than it reveals" (L. and S. Ettlinger, *Botticelli*, Thames and Hudson, 1976, 206). Apart from the

splendour of Botticelli's art, the richness of such polysemous details might have been another reason for Nabokov's interest in this painter. Although using different modes, the three artists share a certain degree of secrecy. Great artists are gifted with hidden powers and these three virtuosi have in common that they have transferred these powers to their creations.

Venus rose from the sea, and an ancient statue represented her as a mermaid (Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, Faber and Faber, 1986, 395). This distinction connects her with the many mermaids which surface in Nabokov's novels. In *Lolita* Dolly is given Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" for her thirteenth birthday. In the same chapter (II, 3) she is lauded for her "garland" (a bi-iliac one, the Housmanian briefness of which is praised because Humbert loathes girls with a "low-slung pelvis.") Immediately after she receives this present, the reader gets a glimpse of Dolly's calculating mind ("Lo's glance skipping from the window to the wrist watch and back again") which, after some less successful attempts, finally allows her to escape. In *Pnin*, Russian myths related to old pagan games, are discussed. According to these myths "peasant maidens would make wreaths of buttercups and frog orchises; then singing snatches of ancient love chants, they hung these garlands on riverside willows" (III, 6). This passage, of course, brings Pnin to Ophelia's death, although at first he could not catch the association by its "mermaid tail." As Don Barton Johnson has explained ("'L'Inconnue de la Seine' and Nabokov's Naiads," *Comparative Literature*, Summer, 1992, esp. 239-240), Pnin's sweetheart, Mira Belochkin, who was killed in a German camp during the war, is firmly linked to the mermaid theme.

Bend Sinister opens with the death of Adam Krug's adored wife Olga. During the first meeting with his friend Ember after her death, we witness how compassionately Ember shares Krug's distress. To make things "less emotional" Krug gives a causerie on *Hamlet*, which takes up a substantial part of the novel's seventh chapter, and starts with the evocation

of a "mermaid" through the "fish scales" of the shingle tiles of Elsinore while "burdock and thistle" invade its garden. *Speak, Memory* has two mermaids, one from the fairy tale young Nabokov had just been reading about with his governess, lovely Miss Norcott, who, for some reason, was asked to depart at once, leaving her pupil inconsolable (IV, 4). The other is the incomparable Tamara, Nabokov's first love, who, during the last summer of their romance, "like all little Russian mermaids," weaves "crowns of flowers" (XII, 2). In *Pale Fire*, Fleur is reflected in a "fantastic mirror," thus turning into "garlands of girls" which finally recede into "the wistful mermaid from an old tale" (Commentary to line 80). Fleur is rejected by Prince Charles, who compares Hazel Shade's suicide following her rejection to Ophelia's (C. 493). And it is during Ada's impromptu lecture on the various names of marsh marigolds that Ophelia is mentioned (*Ada*, I, 10). Nabokov's fascination with the theme of Ophelia's flowers, as noted by Brian Boyd, is resumed once again during the picnic—actually a high tea in the garden—in chapter I,14 ("Annotations to *Ada*," *The Nabokovian* , 43, Fall 1999). Ada's sibling, Lucette, who committed suicide after being repudiated by Ada's lover, Van, is twice compared with Ophelia, as well as with a mermaid (II, 6; II, 8; III, 6; IV). Lucette's last supposed thought is the recollection of the garland Ada wore during that picnic, made of daisies, one of the flowers Ophelia used for her wreaths (III,5; I,14).

In these frequent references to water nymphs, two persevering companions can be observed. In all cases the loss, death or departure of a dearly beloved girl is involved. And, secondly, crowns or wreaths of flowers and garlands are mentioned, closely interwoven with the naiads.

The interrelations between mermaid, garland and beloved girl are in some cases more obscure than the ones just mentioned. In *Ada*, for example, just before Lucette commits suicide an unexpected association is given: "Dimanche. Déjeuner sur l'herbe." This might refer to Herb, Lucette's favourite painter,

or to the Sunday of chapter II, 8, the last occasion on which Ada, Van and Lucette are assembled, at breakfast time. As Don Barton Johnson has noticed, it also evokes Ophelia's rue, or, as she calls it "herb of grace o' Sundays," which name has been explained as a symbol for "sorrowful remembrance" (A.W. Verity, ed., *Hamlet*, CUP, 1950, 196. Cf. the "herb of repentance" in Ada's letter, II,5). And it recalls the picnic just mentioned. In addition, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* is the title of Manet's famous painting of a pastoral waterside picnic. It is generally known that the picture was inspired by a lost painting by Raphael, which has survived thanks to an engraving by Marcantonio Raimondo, *The Judgement of Paris*. The poses of Manet's three foreground figures are identical to Raphael's, whose woman is a water nymph (Wayne Andersen, "Manet and the Judgement of Paris," *Art News*, February 1973, 63-69). The return from Manet to Raphael not only reveals the girl's origin, but provides her with the garland which Manet omitted as well. Since the story of Paris's judgement has been regarded as the subject of the *Primavera*, this short pictorial jaunt brings us back to Botticelli.

In *Look at the Harlequins!* Nabokov says that in *Bend Sinister*, "the mad scholar...wreathes Botticelli and Shakespeare together by having Primavera end as Ophelia with all her flowers" (IV, 2). The passage in *Bend Sinister*, however, does not bear out this programmatic reference. There is just one observation related to Ophelia to stress the tenderness of her skin: "the uncommon cold of a Botticellian angel tinged her nostrils with pink and suffused her upperlip" (VII). And of "all her flowers"—her farewell gifts from *Hamlet* IV, 5: rosemary; pansies; fennel; columbines; rue; daisies and violets, as well as the flowers for her garlands: crow-flowers; nettles; daisies and long purples (*Hamlet* IV, 7, 169)—only the last one, *Orchis mascula*, is mentioned (apart from the weeping willow—*Salix babylonica*). Burdock and thistle, although mentioned in *Bend Sinister*, are not among them (King Lear's garland, however,

contains burdocks, the "hardocks" of line IV, 4, 4). The relationship between Botticelli's heroine and Ophelia is obviously quite important as Venus and Shakespeare's mermaid have the same origin, "the ancient pagan Sea-goddess Marian" (Graves, 395). By drawing attention to the flowers associated with them, Nabokov adds an interesting aspect to this relationship.

In *Look at the Harlequins!*, because of her "Botticellian face" (III, 1), Annette Blagovo is compared to "the flower-decked blonde...in Botticelli's *Primavera*" (II, 7), the central figure of which is Venus. This fair lady is the nymph Flora, and on the occasion of the Festival of Flora Vadim arranges for the room where he is to meet Annette to be decorated with all kind of flowers: "carnations, camomiles, anemones, asphodels, and blue cockles in blond corn" (II, 8). As the *Primavera* contains an infinite number of flowers—in the meadow alone there are one hundred and ninety flowers, the greater part of which are identifiable—it is impossible to select those flowers whose double occurrence is the result of a deliberate choice (Umberto Baldini, ed., *Primavera*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1986, 101). The "blue cockles in blond corn" seems to defy this rule. The cockle, or corncockle, is a small scarlet flower, but the description seems to suggest the blue cornflower, the only flower which emblazons the white robe of the nymph who in Botticelli's picture holds out a cloak to clothe Venus after her birth. It is also the flower which dominantly adorns Flora's hair in the *Primavera*. The cockle, at least its shell, dignifies the hat in Ophelia's song (IV, 5, 25, a token that the wearer has gone on a pilgrimage to St. James's shrine) and is used by Venus as she sails to shore on it in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*.

In the discourse on *Hamlet* in *Bend Sinister*, a reference is made to "Winnipeg Lake, ripple 585" which is a pun on James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. In this novel's pamphlet on *Anna Livia Plurabelle* we read "and after that she wove a garland for her hair. She pleated it. Of meadowgrass and riverflags, the

bulrush and waterweed, and of fallen grief's of weeping willow."

Flowers and garlands seem indispensable requisites for Nabokov's heroines who drown. In Nabokov's oeuvre "the drowned woman figure," writes Johnson, "is one expression of the theme of the hereafter. None of the women simply dies; all continue to exist and act upon the living." A mermaid is the perfect image to evoke the idea of a lovely creature disappearing into the water and emerging from it, and flowers are the perfect entourage and escort. Girls are honoured with flowers, which match their beauty. And flowers offer solace at moments of immense distress. Flowers wreathed into garlands are part of ancient spring rites that celebrate the rebirth of plants and trees. The circular shape of floral coronets illustrates this seasonal cycle as do the globular flower heads of the burdock and thistle. By coupling flowers with mermaids Nabokov has given the idea of life after death a rich expression well embedded in the culture of the Western world. Although Johnson (as well as Jane Grayson and Priscilla Meyer) has explored this theme exhaustively, there is perhaps one reason to revisit it (apart from adding some flowers to his cornucopia). In his recent book on *Pale Fire* Brian Boyd shows how Hazel, after her suicide, returns to interfere in her parents' life. She emerges from the lake as a wood duck, turns into a Toothwort White and finally into a *Vanessa atalanta*. "Here in *Pale Fire*," writes Boyd, "by means of an exact description of the atalanta's colour and character, Nabokov manages to give the butterfly a powerful charge of resonant implication that we can make full sense of once we join it with the myth of Psyche, the art of Browning, Andersen's fairy tale, Shade's own contrapuntal art in the butterfly-and-shade pattern in his poem..." (145).

Most readers of *Pale Fire* will endorse Shade's conviction that his "darling somewhere is alive" (l. 978), but the very desolate way in which Hazel starts her metempsychosis has always puzzled me. The night she disappears is cold, dark and

wet, the scenery deplorable and desolate except for some "ghostly trees" hardly visible in the inhospitable fog. The contrast with Ophelia's death couldn't be greater: chanting and clothed in rich garments, Ophelia floats mermaid-like on a glassy stream among white and purple flowers, sheltered by the overhanging foliage of willows. For Hazel there is only a "reedy bank" (ll. 477 and 499). Now, to be sure, the reed is not without its merits. The reed has purple flowers. Syrinx is turned into a reed to escape from Pan (who is dismissed as outlived in "Pale Fire," line 326). Reeds have the power to make sounds (cf. the "vocal reed" in Milton's "Lycidas") which may be echoed in the many ghostly voices in *Pale Fire*. In Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, the whispering reed helps Psyche to execute the tasks that Venus has set her. The recreative powers of the reed can be found in line 713 as well: "the reed becomes a bird." In Lermontov's "The Reed," a murdered maiden grows into a living reed. And Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* shows some arundinaceous bulrushes. But all these perspectives cannot make us forget the colourful flowers which, braided into garlands, would help us to recognize the series of transfigurations Hazel undergoes.

Four garlands are presented in *Pale Fire*, but none of them are floral ones: undone garlands of shadows, mirrored garlands of girls (in fact garlands of Fleurs, a nominal *guirlande* of Flowers), the Housmanian garland (*A Shropshire Lad*, XIX) and another garland of shade (l. 52/3; C. 80; C.385-386; C. 433-434). The floral attributes of Ophelia seem so quintessential to the idea of rebirth that the weeping willow is equated with the word "if," which in Canto Three of "Pale Fire" is the *pars pro toto* for the possible existence of an afterlife (C.501).

Although Shade abandons his hope that some "white-scarfed beau" would come and offer a bouquet of "jasmine" to his daughter, it appears that in an altogether different way she finally can claim such an homage (ll. 333/5). Hope is the password in *Pale Fire*. Hazel "always nursed a small made

hope." Shade is convinced that in his quest for the solution of the riddle of the universe, he could grope his way to some "faint hope." And Kinbote hopes fervently that Shade was "composing a poem, a kind of *romaunt*, about the King of Zembla" (l. 383; 834; C. 1000). At the crucial moment when Shade dies and Kinbote gets hold of the poem, the moment when both will realise whether their hopes are justified, a line is quoted from Matthew Arnold's "The Scholar Gypsy": "still clutching the inviolable shade." This is the second line of the twenty-second stanza which starts with: "still nursing the unconquerable hope." According to Ripa's *Iconologia* garlands of flowers symbolize hope, and, as will be seen, this association is beautifully interwoven into *Pale Fire*'s texture ("*La ghirlanda di fiori...significa Speranza*," quoted by Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, 1939, New York: Harper and Row, 1967, 162, note 111.)

"The Scholar Gypsy" is inspired by a 17th century story about a student from Oxford who joined a company of vagabond gypsies in the hope of learning their secret. He hopes to acquire their whole truth. Like Shade, who devotes all his "twisted life to this /one task" (i.e. "the truth/about survival after death") (ll. 180/181 and ll. 168/9), Arnold's scholar has "one aim, one desire" (l. 152). The constancy of his dedications empowers the scholar with an everlasting "spark of hope": "none has hope like thine" (l. 188 and l. 196). He is advised to "plunge deeper in the bowering wood": the "bowers" of Wychwood (l. 207 and l. 79). In this wood he gathers flowers "—the frail-leafed, white anemone—/dark bluebells drenched with dews of summer eves —/ and purple orchises with spotted leaves—" (ll. 87-09), to present them to "maidens who from the distant hamlets come/ to dance around the Fyfield elm in May" (l. 82-3). In "Thyrsis," the sequel to "The Scholar Gypsy," we see how these "purple orchises" are associated with garlands, "the coronals of that forgotten time" (l. 115 and l. 117). These "purple orchises" (*Orchis mascula*), mentioned in *Bend Sinister*

and the "Commentary" to *Eugene Onegin* (II, 621) and highly reminiscent of Pnin's "frog orchises" and *Speak, Memory* 's "fragrant bog orchid" (VI,6) are, of course, Ophelia's "long purples/that liberal shepherds give a grosser name,/ but our cold maids do dead men's finger call them." These three orchids, the *Orchis mascula*, the *Habenaria viridis* and the "*nochnaya fialka* of Russian poets" or *Plantanthera bifolia*, all have the same features: lanceolate leaves from which a stout stem arises, culminating in a spike-like inflorescence with pronouncedly lipped flowers. (*Pale Fire*'s "toothwort" [*Dentaria diphylla* and *Dentaria laciniata*] is a different sort of plant).

The flowers mentioned in "The Scholar Gypsy" are important for sustaining the poet's ideas and give the poem's conclusion a palpable phase. The scholar is urgently advised to rely on his own fresh "powers" and to pursue his "own fair life" in the "pastoral" recesses known to him alone (ll. 161, 224, 216). This counsel culminates in lines 218/9: "Freshen thy flowers, as in former years,/ with dew." These lines refer to those already quoted (ll. 87-9), which contain the names of the bedewed flowers the scholar has gathered in order to give them to the maidens who wreathe them into garlands. As this is the source for the scholar's "unconquerable hope," its transposition to Shade's hope procures for Hazel the most outstanding of Ophelia's flowers, the purple orchises.

As Kinbote's hope seems justified because he discovered in "Pale Fire" a "long ripplewake" of his glory (C. 1000), the reference to Arnold's poem suggests that the Scholar Gypsy has likewise discovered the key to the fullfilment of his hope, that is the gathering of flowers to be presented to maidens. Another poetical reference, to Comus (C949), points to the same conclusion. The fate of Milton's heroine, Sabrina, is similar to Hazel's. Sabrina, too, "in hard-besetting need," "commended her fair innocence to the flood" and "underwent a quick immortal change" (l.857, 831, 841). Like Hazel, she

interferes with the lives of mortals for which she is rewarded with songs and "sweet garland wreaths." If we analogously transfer these floral tributes to Hazel, she is at last copiously and duly awarded with flowers and garlands which were so lamentably absent at the moment of her death.

In *Look at the Harlequins!* the wreathing together of Botticelli's *Primavera* and Shakespeare's Ophelia has been explained by the "blue cockles in blond corn" which encompasses the shell on which Venus drifted to the shore, the blue cornflowers embroidered on the garb of the nymph awaiting her and interlaced in Flora's hair, and the cockleshell in the hat of Ophelia's song. In *Pale Fire* another illustration of this statement can be found in the phrase "the geranium bar of a scalloped wing" (C. 470). As Boyd has explained, this "can refer only to the wing of a *Vanessa atalanta*, as the Index confirms under 'Vanessa' " (144).

The "geranium bar" perfectly matches the orange-red colour of the stripes on the butterfly's wing. But what about its scalloped form? A scallop is, like a cockle, a fan-shaped shell. (Unlike a cockle, a scallop has two ears which form a hinge. Venus's shell was one half of a scallop as is clear from Botticelli's painting. There is, however, some uncertainty about St. James's shell. The *coquille de Saint Jacques*—the model for Proust's *madeleine*, as Nabokov notices in *L.o.L.*, 300—is a scallop, but Shakespeare mentions a cockle. It is not known why a shell became the badge for pilgrims to Compostella.) Given the floral, bivalve and mermaid-like links between Venus, Ophelia and Hazel and the latter's metamorphoses into wood duck, Toothworth White and *Vanessa atalanta*, this phrase connects Venus with the butterfly. Of course, as a naturalist, Nabokov cannot have selected this adjective simply for the sake of establishing this relationship. The shape of a butterfly's outer wing is often similar to that of a scallop or cockle, while it's venation shows the same pattern as the ribs of these shells (as Nabokov's drawings show, see Plates 26 and 27 of *Nabokov's*

Butterflies). Furthermore the Red Admirable's wings have an undulating edge just as a scallop has.

That the "geranium bar of a scalloped wing" frames Hazel's afterlife from drowning to soaring, can be based on close observation, needed to unravel the relevant implications of the pictorial and poetical references. The clarity and precision of Botticelli's art contributes greatly towards making this small addition to Boyd's artistic discovery.

—Gerard de Vries, Voorschoten, The Netherlands

ON THE EVANESCENT INCANDESCENCE OF DAN'S CIGAR (*ADA*, CHAPTER 19)

« Van, kneeling at the picture window, watched the inflamed eye of the cigar recede and vanish. That multiple departure…Take over. »

Ada or Ardor, chapter 19

"One finds quite a bit of eroticism in the work of any novelist one can talk about without laughing. What one calls eroticism is just one of the arabesques of the art of the novel."

Apostrophes, 30 May 1975

"Yesterday I read the *Aspern Papers* …The style is artistic but it is not the style of an artist. For instance: the man is smoking a cigar in the dark and another person sees the *red tip* from the window. *Red tip* makes one think of a red pencil or a dog licking itself, it is quite wrong when applied to the glow of a cigar in pitch darkness because there is no "tip"; in fact the glow is blunt."

The Nabokov-Wilson Letters.
November 28, 1941

On November 28, 1941 in a letter to Edmund Wilson, Nabokov chose this scene of a cigar in the darkness (*The Aspern Papers*, Chapter VIII) to criticize Henry James's style, whose mannerisms he detested. In James's novel, which is a sort of allegory on the "voyeurism" of reading, an unscrupulous young literary critic tries by all means to get his hands on the intimate documents belonging to the poet Jeffrey Aspern. In Chapter VIII the critic walks in the garden while Aspern's lover, Miss Bordereau, is grieving in her room. He looks for her niece, Miss Tita, thinking vaguely that she might appear at the window and give him a sign. And it is during this nocturnal walk that the protagonist wonders how Miss Tita could not see the "red tip" of his cigar moving about in the dark.Careful painterly detail as well as scientific precision are, we know, a constant in Nabokov's work: he could not let pass James's visual approximation with his impossible "red tip."

Nabokov again takes up a nocturnal incandescence in the form of a poetic glow worm in *Mary* (Chapter 9), mocking the comic ambiguity of this passage of James's, where the protagonist hopes that someone will see the "red tip" of his cigar in the dark and later reveals that the valet, whose homosexual tastes the reader has already become aware of in Chapter 4, had seen his cigar from the window. In effect, this red tip destined to be seen is reminiscent of a dog licking himself, or of an exhibitionist in a Venetian garden, and this sexual evocation, quite intentional on James's part, surprises the reader of James's very proper prose. In this context, it is not surprising that Nabokov writes that "Henry James is without doubt made for non-smokers," since to speak of the extremity implies that one can see the cigar in its entirety in the dark.

Twenty years later in composing chapter 19 of *Ada* in which one finds both the torrid scene where Van and Ada make

love and the "multiple departure" from Ardis manor by the last "belated ignicolists" who have gone off to see the no less ardent fire at the grange three miles away, Nabokov perhaps recalled this scene in James whence he probably takes the idea, taking care to transform the clumsy "red tip" of James's improbable cigar into "the inflamed eye of the cigar" which recedes and vanishes. "[It] is not the style of an artist," Nabokov wrote of the author of *The Turn of the Screw* . Borges (who appears in the anagram Osberg in *Ada*) does not share the judgment. The Argentinian author wrote in the preface to *The Humiliation of the Northmores* that "...James, before showing what he is, a resigned and ironic inhabitant of the Inferno, runs the risk of seeming a mere worldly novelist, more colorless than others."

Nabokov disliked precisely the colorless aspect of James's style, calling him an impostor and an impotent writer (August 10, 1952, November 21, 1948, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*). Further on in *Ada* there is a deliberate allusion to James's style when Van sees Lucette for the last time on board the Tobakoff: "He understood her condition, or at least believed, in despair, that he *had* understood it, retrospectively, by the time no remedy except Dr. Henry's oil of Atlantic prose could be found in the medicine chest of the past with its banging door and toppling toothbrush." This phrase takes a tragic turn when Lucette commits suicide at the end of the chapter, after Van refuses her advances, going to far as to "vigorously [get] rid of the prurient pressure" to endure the temptation more easily (Part III, Chapter V).

The scene in which Van sees Dan's glowing cigar through the window in *Ada* is written by Van (as suggested by "Oh Van, that night..." that follows), who relinquishes the pen to Ada right after "that multiple departure." One could conjecture that Nabokov voluntarily attributes the composition of the scene of Uncle Dan's cigar disappearing into the darkness to Van to mock the artistic capability of the adolescent. "I hate Van

Veen," Nabokov wrote in an interview published in the *New York Times* on 23 May 1969 (*Strong Opinions*).

It is amusing to assert that Nabokov made Van the author of this parody, attributing to him this allusion to the American author he called impotent, while making him play the role of the homosexual valet who sees the red tip of the cigar in *The Aspern Papers*. The sexual aspect of James's red tip which made him think of a dog licking himself reappears here, when Uncle Dan, cigar between his teeth, and the dog Dack in Marina's arms, set off in the Torpedo as red as a fire engine!

Does Van suddenly realize that his creator (VN) is making fun of him? Perhaps. The fact that he suddenly cedes the pen to Ada in the middle of his narration seems to corroborate this hypothesis.

"Une pointe de parodie apparait par ci par là dans le paradis," Nabokov says in French (*Apostrophes,* interview with Bernard Pivot, 30 May 1975) apropos *Ada*, showing by the alliteration of the letter p his perfect mastery of that language. No doubt chapter 19 of *Ada* contains several "pointes de parodie."

Thanks to Priscilla Meyer for helpful discussions.

—Alain Andreu, Papeete, Tahiti

ANNA KARENINA IN *THE GIFT*

When Nabokov suggested that Russian literature was the heroine of *The Gift*, he was telling a half-truth. There is, after all, a level of the novel on which characters dwell and act, as if oblivious to the fabric of Russian letters that weaves through it. But with each new revelation of a literary allusion, we gain a deeper sense of why Nabokov was incorporating such a rich array of others' texts into what at times seems like his most

realistic and most autobiographical novel. The most explicit and pronounced presence is of course that of Pushkin, whose "Onegin stanza" lends its form to the novel's conclusion; in addition, hidden and explicit references have been found to nearly every literary figure in the Russian tradition up to the time of the novel's action (1925), as well as to several non-Russian authors. All this is perhaps to be expected in a novel which serves as its author's claim for prominence within that great tradition. What is surprising is that for all the Pushkins, Gogols, Dostoevskys, Belys and Bloks, precious little so far has been has been found to connect Nabokov's favorite 19th century novel, *Anna Karenina*, to Nabokov's Russian culmination; so far, only a small handful of apparent allusions have been presented by Alexander Dolinin and Vladimir E. Alexandrov, along with some references in other novels identified by John Burt Foster and Thomas Seifrid. There are sound structural and thematic reasons to expect Tolstoy to occupy a greater place than has yet been discovered for him within *The Gift*. One such indication appears in hints of Boris Eikhenbaum's *Young Tolstoy* in chapter four, discovered by Marina Kostalevsky; she also notes that part of the novel's epigraph may refer covertly to the great Tolstoy scholar ("The Young Godunov-Cherdyntsev or How To Write a Literary Biography," *Russian Literature* XIII.III [1998]: 283-95). But it seems to me that this is not quite enough in Tolstoy's case; after all, when dealing with "the supreme masterpiece of nineteenth-century literature" (*SO* 147)—*Anna Karenina*—one expects the literary reference to say something particular about why the work or author in question is meaningful to Nabokov and his protagonist, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev. If *Eugene Onegin* provides one sort of structural model for *The Gift*, then *Anna Karenina* should occupy more than a peripheral afterthought. Close examination of a cluster of references reveals that, indeed, Tolstoy's great novel is tightly connected to one of *The Gift*'s main themes: that

of Fyodor's father and his scientific explorations, and related discussions of nature and evolution.

Most appropriately and fortuitously, this chain begins with Pushkin, and it ends with epiphanic moments for both novels' heroes. In 1928, the early diaries of Sofia Tolstoy were published in the Soviet Union to much fanfare. In the entry for March 19, 1873, she describes the genesis of Tolstoy's work on *Anna Karenina*: " 'I have learned, and am still learning so much from Pushkin! Pushkin is my father and my teacher.' ... In the evening he read some other fragments and, still under the influence of Pushkin, began to write [*Anna Karenina*]." (*The diary of Tolstoy's wife, 1860-1891*, Alexander Werth, trans. [London: V. Gollancz ltd., 1928], 60-61; in Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoy in the Seventies*, trans. Albert Kaspin [Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982], 127; Eikhenbaum notes as well that Tolstoy looked to Pushkin's fragments for abandoned ideas that might be developed in his own work [ibid., 129]; Fyodor, in the abandoned "Dar II," engages with Pushkin's unfinished texts, in his case composing a completion of "Rusalka"; see Jane Grayson, "Washington's Gift," *Nabokov Studies* 1 [1994]: 21-68, esp. 30-32). As readers of *The Gift* know well, Fyodor's work on his father's biography was preceded by extensive reading of Pushkin's prose and especially those texts that tend to be skipped or overlooked during a youthful trip through the poet's work. Fyodor's relationship to Pushkin the prose writer becomes the training ground for his own transition from poetry to prose—and his writing about *his* father; the physiological metaphors surrounding the scene in chapter two suggest almost that Pushkin engenders Fyodor in his new guise. He writes, "With Pushkin's voice merged the voice of his father. He kissed Pushkin's hot little hand, taking it for another, larger hand smelling of the breakfast kalach" (*G* 98). A direct parallel arises between the beginning of Fyodor's prose work and that of Tolstoy's work on his major novel. That Fyodor is writing about his father (who read Pushkin almost exclusively) also

echoes Tolstoy's remark about Pushkin's role as *his* literary father (and Nabokov's own later remark about his "fathers" in Russian literature [*SO* 119]). Konstantin Kirillovich is a pivotal figure in a great number of *The Gift*'s themes, but the most important of these concern the natural world, evolution, and the idea of life as a "gift" (in which connection he also echoes Pushkin's "Dar naprasnyi, dar sluchainyi" in the "Father's Butterflies" supplement, as others have noted); Fyodor recalls him reciting Pushkin's lines about lepidoptera, while two pagers earlier, Fyodor's mother reminds him of the rhymes about butterflies and mimicry he and his father used to create together. As the one who travels into the unexplored world and "name[s] the nameless," (*G* 119) Fyodor's father represents the human capacity to notice and appreciate nature's ever expanding nuances and details. He also represents a struggle with certain aspects of Darwin's theory of natural selection, a theme that links *The Gift* and *Anna Karenina* in important ways. In *Anna Karenina*, we find a similar mix of attention to natural detail, resistance to the "struggle for existence," and reverence for Pushkin.

In *The Gift*, discussion of evolution is limited to a smallish portion of Fyodor's biography of Konstantin Kirillovich, although that discussion is greatly expanded in the recently published "addendum" to the novel, "Father's Butterflies." In the novel itself, we read of Konstantin Kirillovich's fascination with mimicry of all kinds, and it is this phenomenon that forms the basis for his disagreement with Darwin; he is particularly drawn to the kind of mimicry that seems to go beyond the utilitarian: "He told me about the incredible artistic wit of mimetic disguise, which was not explainable by the struggle for existence...., was too refined for the mere deceiving of accidental predators, feathered, scaled and otherwise" (*G* 110). There follows a list of a few such devices, which are taken to prove that whatever its merits as a theory, "natural selection" does not explain butterflies' precise and apparently artistic mimicry. Instead,

Konstantin Kirillovich views nature as full of artistry and deceit (kin words in Nabokov's lexicon), a view that emphasizes the unexplainable and mysterious in the natural world, and one which hints at possible supernatural causes. To be sure, it does not sound like the most rigorously scientific attitude, but that is a discussion for another forum. What is interesting in the present context is that there is a similar conflict in *Anna Karenina* between the Darwinian position and a more metaphysical one; and in Tolstoy's novel, the conflict resolves itself in a manner of which Nabokov, or at least Konstantin Kirillovich, would certainly approve. The Darwinian side of the equation, first connected to Stiva Oblonsky's pragmatic liberalism, is enacted through Anna's inner monologue in the scene leading up to her death. In her despair and its consequent bitterness toward all humanity, Anna draws upon a paraphrase of Darwin introduced by Vronsky's friend Yashvin: " 'the struggle for existence and hatred are the only things that unite people. No, you are going in vain,' she mentally addressed a company of people in a caleche with four horses, who were evidently going out of town on a spree. 'And the dog you have with you won't help you! You can't escape from yourselves.' " [...] " 'And in the houses are people, and more people.... There is no end to them, and they all hate one another.' " " 'A beggar woman with a baby. She thinks I pity her. Are we not all flung into the world only to hate each other, and therefore to torment ourselves and others?' " (*AK* Book 7, chapter 30; , chapter 30; Trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995], 754-756). What Anna perceives as truth—struggle, competition, the survival of the fittest—validates her own sense of misery and disgust with all around her. But of course Tolstoy is not endorsing her point of view: struggle and competition breed hatred, and the logic of her attitude leads her to her self-destruction. (In *The Gift*, the materialistic aims of the struggle for survival become the undoing, if not the self-destruction, of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, manifest in his legacy leading ultimately

to the Bolshevik revolution.) It is not surprising that an antithetical argument appears at the moment of Levin's key revelation.

In his bouts with existential despair, Levin, himself a scientist of sorts, also contemplates Darwin's idea and looks toward what seems to be its logical consequence: "In an infinity of time, and in infinity of matter, in infinite space, a bubble, a bubble organism, separates itself, and that bubble maintains itself awhile and then bursts, and that bubble is—I!" (*AK* 782; Book 8, chapter 9). But he does not kill himself, and shortly after this crisis comes the moment when, conversing with some peasants, he literally "sees the light." As he ponders his new sensibility, Levin lies down in the grass among some trees and contemplates the world in his new vision of it, and his discussion is intertwined with the progress of an insect:

> "Yes, I must clear it up and understand it," he thought, gazing intently at the untrodden grass before him, and following the movements of a green insect that was crawling up a stalk of couch grass and was hindered in its ascent by a leaf of goutwort. "What have I discovered?" he asked himself, turning back the leaf that it should not hinder the insect and bending another blade for the creature to pass on to. ... "I used to say that in my body, in this grass, in this insect... (There! It did not want to get onto that grass, but has spread its wings and flown away) there takes place, according to physical, chemical and physiological laws, a change of matter. And in all of us, including the aspens and the clouds and nebulae, evolution is proceeding. Evolution from what, into what? Unending evolution and struggle.... As if there could be any direction and struggle in infinity!" (*AK* 8.12, 790)

In this passage, Levin explores his own journey from a positivistic, scientific attitude toward life and the world to one which is fundamentally devoid of discernable purpose: "As if there could be any direction and struggle in infinity!" The centrality of this purposelessness becomes clearer as he continues, bringing into question the very idea of progress: "'Now we've thought of putting raspberries in a cup and cooking them over a candle, and of pouring milk into each other's mouths like fountains. That is amusing and new, and not at all worse than drinking out of cups." This reveling in pleasant but useless games of the imagination, mimed also by his insect's rejection of the "utilitarian" blade of grass, brings Levin to a new sense of innate goodness and meaning in his and others' lives. He summarizes his discovery by rejecting reason as the fundamental method by which one may know the world: "'Reason has discovered the struggle for existence and the law that I must throttle all those who hinder the satisfaction of my desires. But the law of loving others could not be discovered by reason, because it is unreasonable' " (*AK* 8.12, 791).

Although Fyodor in *The Gift* never experiences the doubts that Levin and Anna do, he does feel compelled to acknowledge and offer thanks for the wonderful abundance and variety of material provided not just by nature, but by life in general. His appreciative moments are many, but the most important of them occurs while he, like Levin, is lying in the grass among the trees. During his visit to the Grunewald forest in Berlin, Fyodor drinks in the surrounding scenery; as he lies by a tree, a group of nuns walks by with a particular harmony, so that "it all looked so much like a staged scene—and how much skill there was in everything, what an infinity of grace and art, what a director lurked behind the pines, how well everything was calculated...." (*G* 344). Fyodor takes note of a particular motion and is reminded of something, as "fingers sought a stalk of grass (but the latter, merely swaying, remained to gleam in the sun... where had this happened before—what had straightened up and started to

sway)." The not-quite-recollected occurrence takes place about eleven years earlier, on the day Fyodor's father departs on his last, fateful journey in June 1916: "An already bedraggled but still powerful Swallowtail, minus one spur and flapping its panoply, descended on a camomile, took off as if backing from it, and the flower it left straightened up and started to sway" (*G* 133). That swaying blade of grass harks back to Levin's insect that flew off *his* blade of grass, by means of the swaying flower that Fyodor remembers from his last encounter with his father—a story he tells inspired by Pushkin's prose, just as Tolstoy had been in starting *Anna Karenina*. (It is also worth mentioning that Tolstoy, too, uses the image of an unburdened stem twice: Kitty, at the ball where she hoped to be Vronsky's main partner, "seemed like a butterfly just settled on a blade of grass and ready at any moment to flutter and spread its rainbow wings..." [*AK 81*]. From the very first, Konstantin Kirillovich is associated with rainbows—he even enters the base of one—, and rainbow-winged butterflies frequently adorned Nabokov's inscriptions to Véra). The feelings evoked by the nuns and the grass contribute to Fyodor's sense of loving confidence in the essential goodness of the world around him and his gratitude to "Person Unknown" for the "gifts with which the summer morning rewards [him]": "There really is something, there is something!" (*G* 328), Fyodor exclaims as he drinks in the beauty of the day. At least for the time being Fyodor knows "how to be happy," a secret Levin also learns temporarily during his own grassy reverie, where he, in a similar vein, declares, "But here is a miracle, the one possible, everlasting miracle, all around me, and I did not notice it!" (*AK* 789).

In the end, it is probably the inherent connectedness of Tolstoy and Pushkin that most intrigued Nabokov during his work on *The Gift*; he even imagines, through the fictitious memoirist "Suhoschokov," that had Pushkin lived long enough he "could have read *Anna Karenin*!" (*G* 99). Tolstoy's reliance on Pushkin's prose helps inspire Fyodor's work on his

own father; and *Anna Karenina* concludes with lengthy celebrations of the gift of life. Clearly both authors see themselves as descended from Pushkin (for both he is a "father"), and consequently both indicate that their work represents an evolution of the tradition inaugurated by Pushkin himself. But for Tolstoy and Nabokov, evolution tends toward infinity (another term uttered by both Fyodor and Levin), and so there can be no concrete goal of evolution, no utilitarian aim in the advance of nature's forms. Through *The Gift*, a novel fully devoted to opposing the utilitarian credo, Nabokov revealed in his predecessors their strongest evocations of life as a beautiful, goalless, even artistic process.

—Stephen Blackwell, University of Tennessee

ANNOTATIONS TO *ADA*
20: Part I Chapter 20

by Brian Boyd

Forenote

Ada has been building up in a series of "firsts" at each new stage of Van's love for Ada. Now they have made love, or almost, on the Night of the Burning Barn, and Van wakes up anticipating exhilaration ahead, only to find that there is another awkward and frustrating "first," their first meeting, in the presence of others, after becoming secret lovers.

Nabokov's command of poetry and psychology renders Van's waking confidence with infectious force ("happiness knocking to be let in," "prolong the glow of its incognito," "the tiger of happiness fairly leaped into being," the dream of levitation) while never forgetting the waywardness of the mind even in the midst of overwhelming feeling (the dream not of Ada but of Blanche, and "a heartbreaking nightmare" at that, the comedy of his sly levitation).

Van hopes for "fantastic joy . . . forever," but he thrills with excited apprehension only to discover Uncle Dan at breakfast driving him wild with dislike and implying that first Ada and then Van had been with him at the Burning Barn. When Ada arrives, her distance, her unresponsiveness, her blush, her irritation, all unnerve Van. When he waylays her after she has finished breakfast, she cannot meet him immediately, and he cannot help scorning the translation she must finish before joining him. But they arrange a first tryst in the Baguenaudier Bower, and Van rushes there early, "telling himself that fact could never quite match fancy"—only to find that this time it does, when they retreat together into the larchwood.

There, at last, he fully deflowers his Ada, or comes very close.