

THE NABOKOVIAN

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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

Nabokov Society News

In 2003, the Society had 198 individual members (142 USA, 56 abroad) and 95 institutional members (79 USA, 16 abroad). Society membership/subscription income for the year was \$5,150; expenses were \$6,211. Thanks once again to the generosity of its members, in 2003 the Society forwarded \$470 to The Pennsylvania State University for support of the Zembla website.

The present officers of the Society are Priscilla Meyer (Professor of Russian, Wesleyan University), President and Zoran Kuzmanovich, (Professor of English, editor of *Nabokov Studies*, Davidson College) Vice-President.

Odds and Ends

- On May 5, at the Hotel des Bergues in Geneva, Switzerland, Tajan conducted an auction/sale of inscribed and annotated books by Vladimir Nabokov from the personal library of Dmitri Nabokov.

- The Nabokov Museum, St. Petersburg invites Nabokov students to its fifth annual Nabokov 101 English-language summer school from August 2 - 10. The seminar topics will be "The Poetics of Desire in Nabokov's Fiction," conducted by Maurice Couturier and "After *The Gift*," conducted by Alexander Dolinin.

***ADAonline* announcement**

On April 23, 2004, Brian Boyd's "Annotations to *Ada*" became available on the Internet in revised and expanded form as *ADAonline*, <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/ada/index.htm>. The online version has been designed and digitized by Jeff Edmunds, as part of his award-winning *Zembla* site, with the support of Penn State University Libraries.

ADAonline includes the complete text of *Ada*, and retains the page and line numbers of the first and Vintage editions, with page and line numbers indicated in the margins. Users may move by hyperlink from the text (in a frame at top left) to the annotations (in a frame below), and from the annotations either back to the text or to either the Motif Index or, eventually, illustrations, especially of paintings and flora and fauna (in a frame at top right). Illustrations will be added as copyright clearances are obtained.

ADAonline so far includes only the first three chapters. Other chapters will come online as soon as coded (volunteers welcome). The online version will remain two years behind the latest instalment available in the *Nabokovian*.

It was always recognized that the version in the *Nabokovian* was provisional, and that part of its raison-d'être was to solicit corrections and additions from readers. All contributors are acknowledged on *ADAonline*.

Because the first chapter lacked the Forenote and Afternote that subsequent instalments feature, because it is such a complex chapter, because the methodology of the notes was still being worked out, because some of the Motifs had yet to be identified, and because contributors offered generous additional information, the *ADAonline* version is almost twice the length

of the *Nabokovian* version. In most cases the online version is expected to be about 5-10% ampler than the print version.

But that depends in part on the number of additional contributions received. These are again invited and will all be acknowledged. If substantial enough, they could also be sent to the notes section of the *Nabokovian*.

Please note that prices (posted on the inside cover) have not increased for 2004. Members /subscribers are once 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.

I wish to thank, as I have in each of the issues over the past twenty-five years, Ms. Paula Courtney for her constant, 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. Please 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 EARLY ALLUSION TO MARVELL AND GENESIS IN "THE BLAZON"

"The Blazon" (1925), an early poem by Nabokov, offers an illuminating, if somewhat oblique, example of the author's identification of exile from Russia with the expulsion from Eden. There is surprisingly much to be said about this brief poem, which combines important, multiple subtexts in its attempt to communicate not only the heartache, but also the profound responsibility, of exile:

As soon as my native land had receded
in the briny dark the northeaster struck,
like a sword of diamond revealing
among the clouds a chasm of stars.
My yearning ache, my recollections

I swear to preserve with royal care
ever since I adopted the blazon of exile:
on a field of sable a starry sword. (*Poems and Problems*,
1970, 31)

The experience of exile is described as a terrifying storm, crashing upon the (apparently) sea-borne refugee just as the shore disappears from sight. The primary attribute of this "northeaster," however, is neither howling gales nor heavy rains but, rather, flashes of lightning which threaten "like a sword of diamond." The same flashing sword serves to illuminate the scene, "revealing / among the clouds a chasm of stars"—a sight at once awesome, awful, beautiful, and profound: the firmament itself is rent and the stars are seen clustered in the depths of this heavenly fissure.

The second (and final) stanza indicates the upshot of this quasi-prophetic vision; Nabokov identifies the responsibility of the artist "to preserve with royal care" the details of memory and experience, including especially the "yearning ache" of exile and loss. At the conclusion of Nabokov's poem, in which the poet has explicitly sworn to uphold his solemn charge, the vow is sealed with an heraldic image—"the blazon of exile"—that signifies, among other things, the artist's obligation to provide light and serve justice in the midst of darkness: "on a field of sable a starry sword."

To students of seventeenth-century English literature, this short poem by a young, exiled Russian living (at the time) in Berlin might resonate oddly, but almost unmistakably, as something like a greatly condensed echo of Andrew Marvell's allegorical poem, "The Unfortunate Lover" (published posthumously in 1681). The association is not as outlandish as it might seem, for not only was Nabokov extraordinarily wellread, he had also attended university at Trinity College, Cambridge (1919-1922), where Marvell himself had studied three hundred years earlier (1633-1638). In "The Blazon," the main signal

alerting readers to the possible Marvellian subtext is the poem's final, emblematic line, as rendered in Nabokov's own English translation from the Russian original ("*na chernom pole zvezdny mech*" [Poems 30]). The heraldic image described by Nabokov strongly recalls the conclusion of Marvell's poem, the final stanza of which reads:

This is the only banneret,
That ever Love created yet;
Who, though by the malignant starrs,
Forcèd to live in storms and wars,
Yet dying, leaves a perfume here,
And musick within every ear;
And he in story only rules,
In a field *sable*, a lover *gules*. (57-64)

(The last line of this poem was also famously adopted, in a revised form, by Nathaniel Hawthorne for the concluding sentence of *The Scarlet Letter* [1850]: "On a field, sable, the letter A, gules.")

Thematically and imagistically, "The Unfortunate Lover" is very close to Nabokov's "The Blazon." In both poems, the pain and hardship of an ill-fated life—specifically, the life of one "Forcèd to live in storms and wars"—gives way to the solace of art achieved through that very pain. The wretched life and miserable death of Marvell's unfortunate Lover "leaves a perfume here, / And musick within every ear," though it is only poetic art itself—the transformation of lived tragedy into fictional narrative—that redeems the lover's anguish: "he in story only rules." Similarly, the exiled first-person speaker in Nabokov's poem vows to achieve roughly the same victory by preserving his intimate recollections of lost persons, places, and objects for the poems and stories yet to be written. Marvell's conceit-laden poem does not refer specifically to exile, as Nabokov's does, but his "unfortunate" protagonist is, from the

very start of the allegory, essentially a figure of supreme loss, beginning his life in a violent storm that seems to prefigure Nabokov's "northeaster":

'Twas in a shipwrack, when the seas
Rul'd, and the winds did what they please,
That my poor Lover floting lay,
And, e're brought forth, was cast away;
'Till at the last the master-wave.
Upon the rock his Mother drave;
And there she split against the stone,
In a Cæsarian section. (9-16)
Marvell's devastating storm, like Nabokov's, is also stagelit by apocalyptically charged lightning, the brilliance of which is as terrifying as the deep darkness it cleaves:
No day he saw but that which breaks,
Through frighted clouds in forkèd streaks.
'While round the ratling thunder hurl'd,
As at the fun'ral of the world. (21-24)

In reducing the material of Marvell's sixty-four-line poem to a poem one-eighth its size, Nabokov appears to gloss, in particular, the fierce storm in the first half of "The Unfortunate Lover." This selective allusion has the effect of identifying Marvell's "orphan of the hurricane" (line 31)—rather than the blood-hued, Promethean, proto-Blakean Lover, "Torn into flames, and ragg'd with wounds" (line 54), of the poem's second half—as the key, archetypal figure of the exilic experience: to be ripped from one's mother(land) and cast adrift, never to return, is indeed to witness "the fun'ral of the world" one has most deeply known as one's own. Even so, as in the whole of Marvell's underlying allegory, it is principally the pain of *love*, "tying a rebel to his wretched country by his own twisted heartstrings" (*Bend Sinister*, Vintage, 1990 reprint, xiii), that makes exile so unbearably unremitting, so "unfortunate," in the

extreme sense suggested by Marvell's poem. It is exceedingly likely that Nabokov was well aware of Marvell's "The Unfortunate Lover" and even used it as a direct model for "The Blazon." Furthermore, both poems also incorporate significant, deeply pertinent biblical subtexts. "The Unfortunate Lover," begins with a quasi-Edenic prologue, serving as an idyllic counterpoint to the stormwracked allegory of love's torments that follows:

Alas, how pleasant are their dayes,
With whom the infant Love yet playes!
Sorted by pairs, they still are seen
By fountains cool and shadows green. (1-4)

After this preliminary Arcadian vision, Marvell's strange, highly allegorical poem—which juxtaposes birth, love, and literary creation with bloody terror, watery chaos, and the eschatological "fun'ral of the world"—begins to deploy mythological elements much closer in kind to those that informed the creation account of Genesis 1, rather than anything related to the Edenic narrative of Genesis 2-3. Most notably, Marvell's poem is set in a time "when the seas / Rul'd"—as if taking place in a mythical era antecedent to the Creation, when "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep" (Gen. 1-2).

Nabokov's poem invokes a similar oceanic void in its "briny dark," into the depths of which his "native land had receded." This image of a threatening, watery abyss makes fully possible a reading of the exilic experience as a kind of reversal of creation, an *uncreation*. Whereas, in the biblical creation account, God subdued the waters "and let the dry land appear" (Gen. 1.9), in Nabokov's poem, the black, briny ocean and enveloping darkness effectively swallow up the homeland from which the speaker must flee. It is at this point in the brief poem—when dry land has vanished from sight and the chaos of the "northeaster" ensues—that the central image of the piece

appears: "a sword of diamond" that will finally be emblazoned on a black field as "a starry sword."

By electing a numinous "starry sword" to stand as the emblem of exile, Nabokov appears, ultimately, to borrow even more substantially from the Bible than from Marvell. His "blazon of exile" turns out to be a striking recapitulation of "the fiery ever-turning sword" (New JPS Tanakh; Gen 3.24) that seals the primordial expulsion from Eden:

Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. (NRSV; Gen 3.22-24)

Implied in Nabokov's poem is a sort of symbolic double vision by which the speaker perceives, in the lightning and constellations that accompany his own exile, the principal symbol of humanity's immemorial banishment from paradise. This double vision—which superimposes actual, lived, political exile and the memorable past upon an essential, scriptural model of *all* exile, metaphysically conceived—is, then, significantly trebled in the poem's last line, through its recourse to the tertiary text of Marvell's poem.

Marvell's text is important because, while "The Blazon" seems clearly to evoke the flaming sword of Genesis 3.24, it lacks any further reference to Eden, ignoring altogether its lush scenery, its undercurrent of sexual guilt, and even any glimmer of its prelapsarian delights. Nevertheless, Nabokov's discreet allusion to "The Unfortunate Lover" does permit, for the knowing or curious reader, an unobstructed association with Marvell's Edenic innocents ("Sorted by pairs, they still are seen

/By fountains cool and shadows green”), thus pointing the way toward much of what is signified by Eden (the paired sexes, delightful greenery, sexual naïveté, etc.). Furthermore, it would seem that Nabokov is able to make his crucial heraldic substitution—supplying “a starry sword” in the place of Marvell’s “lover *gules*”—primarily on the basis of the Edenic subtext that undergirds both poems. This deep-strung network of overlapping allusions serves to broaden the context and meaning of the poem, expanding it from an early private memoir or a mere political rant to a far-reaching, archetypal vision of exile as an existential situation: exiled Adam steps into the role of Marvell’s “Unfortunate Lover” to signal the pain-wrought emergence of *Homo poeticus*.

The apparent, intertwined presence of both Marvell and Genesis in this early poem by Nabokov is quite telling, since, much later, in *Ada*, it is Marvell’s poem “The Garden” that serves as the chief intermediary literary reference occupying the midpoint between Nabokov’s fictional Antiterra and the biblical depiction of Eden. Nabokov’s genuine attraction to Marvell seems to have had, at its core, some vital connection to the Edenic narrative, which both authors repeatedly appropriated to their own ends. In “The Garden”, Marvell famously wrote of the mind’s capacity to return imaginatively to “that happy garden-state, / While man walked there without a mate” (57-58):

The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find
Yet it creates—transcending these—
Far other worlds and other seas;
Annihilating all that’s made
To a green thought in a green shade.
Here at the fountain’s sliding foot,
Or at some fruit-tree’s mossy root,
Casting the bodie’s vest aside,

My soul into the boughs does glide. (43-52)

Marvell’s well-known “green thought in a green shade” is, at once, both a meditative visitation of Eden and a conscious reflection upon the freshness and originality of the human imagination, capable of creating “far other worlds” than those known immediately through the senses. Similarly, what “The Blazon” finally implies—and what is reiterated throughout many of Nabokov’s later works—is that the mind, by means of memory and imagination, trumps exile and succeeds in recovering, through creative thought and artistic labor, aspects of the deep contentment once enjoyed so effortlessly in a paradise (home, childhood, etc.) now lost.

—Christopher A. Link, Boston University

“TRADITIONS OF A RUSSIAN FAMILY” IN NABOKOV’S *ADA*

Pushkin entered his blood. (*The Gift*)

At the age of fourteen Van Veen, the hero and narrator of *Ada*, arrives for the first time at Ardis to meet Marina and Ada. They are actually his mother and sister, though he has been raised to believe them to be his aunt and first cousin.

The first conversation among the three takes place over tea, and Marina casually drops the name of Dostoevsky:

“*Slivok* (some cream)? I hope you speak Russian?” Marina asked Van, as she poured him a cup of tea.

“*Neokhotno, no sovershenno svobodno* (reluctantly but quite fluently),” replied Van, *slegka ulybnuvshis*’ (with a slight smile). “Yes, lots of cream and three lumps of sugar.”

“Ada and I share your extravagant tastes. Dostoevski loved it with raspberry syrup.”

“Pah,” uttered Ada.

It is well known from memoirs of those who knew Dostoevsky that he was a great tea-drinker (and his characters probably drink more tea than those of any other writer) but the idea that he “loved it with raspberry syrup” is a complete fabrication on Marina’s part. Of course, it is altogether possible that the Antiterran Dostoevsky had different tastes than the earthly one, but why should Marina mention Dostoevsky at all?

In Dostoevsky’s last three novels, *The Possessed* (1873), *A Raw Youth* (1875) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), the problem of troubled family relationships between parents and children is an important theme. The problem may arise from the illegitimacy of some children, or their outright abandonment, left by their parents to be raised by others. *A Raw Youth*, in particular, is of interest, beginning as it does when the hero-narrator, Arkadiy Dolgoruki, the illegitimate son of the landowner Versilov and his former serf, comes to Petersburg to visit his family and to meet his sister, Liza for the first time (just as Van meets his sister for the first time at Ardis).

Perhaps Marina has Dostoevsky’s *Raw Youth* in mind when she points out that the three of them share “extravagant tastes”; in any case it seems more than a casual remark. Van would have us believe that Marina is rather stupid—but is she? It would seem that, on the contrary, she wishes to let the well-read Van (whose Russian abilities she has quickly established) know that she is not his aunt, and that Ada is not his cousin. After so many years of denial, she apparently lacks the nerve to tell Van directly what their true relationship is, and tries by the indirect means of literary allusions to hint at the truth. At any rate, it seems to me to be, psychologically, a not unlikely tactic.

However that may be, Van appears oblivious to the allusion, while Ada can barely withhold her disgust with her mother’s

chatty dropping the name of an author who is not among Ada’s favorites, and protests with a disdainful “pah” (the first word Van hears her say). While “pah” is one of Ada’s favorite words, one that she will utter on several occasions in the novel, Dostoevsky’s pet word, which he sprinkles liberally throughout his works, as is well known to readers of Nabokov’s *Despair*, is the Russian word *podnogotnaya* (“the whole subunguality, the secret under the nail,” as Hermann renders it in the novel). Van and Ada will learn the *podnogotnaya*, that is, the whole truth about their parents, Demon and Marina, a few months later when they find Marina’s album during a rummage in the attic of Ardis Hall. But by that time they will already have become lovers.

During their first tea together at Ardis, Van notices that Ada hides her fingernails from him, as they are bitten to the quick. She hides them in her fist, and even turns her hand palm up while reaching for a piece of cake. Certainly there is nothing unnatural in this for a little girl (and Ada here is only twelve) who finds herself for the first time in the company of a young man. But perhaps Ada is hiding not just her nails, but her *podnogotnaya*, what lies beneath them (in other words, all that she knows). At least part of what Ada knows or suspects is that her real father is not Daniel, her mother’s husband, but Daniel’s first cousin Demon, Van’s father. The poor chewed-up fingernails may themselves betray Ada’s anxieties regarding her parentage, about which she probably has heard rumors from her mother’s maid Blanche.

Ada probably understands that her mother’s allusion to Dostoevsky may be a dangerous one for her and she attempts to distract Van’s attention. Evidently, at least initially, she would prefer that Van think that she is his cousin and not his sister—a relationship that would complicate the possibility of physical intimacy between them.

It is likely that the same concern explains her constant attempts to prevent Marina from speaking during the meals that

follow. She is not afraid of being bored by Marina's tales of her theatrical career, as Van believes; she really fears that Marina will say something to let Van know that Ada is in fact his sister. Knowing her mother, Ada realizes that though Marina wouldn't have the nerve to tell Van the truth of his parentage directly, she would be perfectly capable of dropping a fatal innuendo or two at the table.

Ada senses danger whenever her mother attempts "to trot out her troika of hobby horses." At the slightest lull in the conversation Marina attempts to lead the subject around to Stanislavsky, under whose direction she played the role of Sofia in Griboedov's great classic of the Russian theater, *Gore ot uma* (Woe from Wit).

Interesting parallels can be drawn between the early meeting of Arkady and Versilov and the encounter that takes place between Marina and Van as a small boy, about ten years before Van's first visit to Ardis. Marina tells the little boy that if his father wishes, she could take his mother's place (her twin sister Aqua is by this time committed to one asylum or another). It would seem that Marina sees life as an extension of the stage, where there is always an understudy to replace the main actor in case of illness or accident.

Van recognizes this attitude of Marina's and at Ardis sees that when she takes pride in Ada's charm and wit or fusses over Lucette's health, she is only playing the role of the doting mother. He has personal reasons for believing this, but he doesn't know, or doesn't wish to see, that as she ages a real tinge of guilt creeps into Marina's attitude toward her children, especially in her attitude to Van, the one she gave up. But having become Ada's lover, he is no longer interested in her belated attempts to recognize him as her son: he has long known her secrets and has forgiven her. He no longer needs her apologies.

It is in this that Van differs from Arkady, who comes to St Petersburg with the express purpose of exacting recognition and an apology from Versilov. Both young men idolize their

fathers on the one hand, but on the other hand Arkady deeply resents it that, like Marina, his father gave him up and forgot about his existence for many years. In Petersburg, Arkady reminds his father of the theatrical circumstances of their only earlier meeting which took place about nine years earlier in Moscow. Versilov had to substitute for a professional actor who had fallen ill in an amateur performance of *Gore ot uma*. The boy entered his father's study while his father was practicing Chatsky's concluding monologue. When he finished, his little son showed off his own abilities with a recitation of Krylov's fable of the overfastidious husband-hunter, *Razborchivaia nevesta* ("*Nevesta-devushka smyshliala zhenikha*"). This fable tells the tale of a young woman whose suitors are never good enough for her. Although they start out being rich and handsome, they soon enough are replaced by poorer and poorer ones, until she finally has to content herself with a crippled husband ("*i rada uzh byla, chto vyshla za kaleku*").

In the context of *Podrostok* the Krylov fable is completely harmless, but in the context of the Marina-Demon relationship it may be interpreted as a chastisement to both. Before marrying Daniel Veen, Marina had first rejected his more brilliant cousin Demon, and had also rejected Daniel's first proposal. The real victim is her twin sister Aqua, whose life is crippled in consequence of Marina's *razborchivost'*. Following Marina's rejection of him, Demon marries Aqua out of pity and spite ("a not unusual blend," according to Van). Similarly motivated, Nikolai Stavrogin, hero of *Besy (the Possessed)* marries beneath his station Marya Lebyadkina. The unfortunate Marya is not only nearly as mad as Aqua—she is also lame, a cripple, like the bridegroom in Krylov's fable.

If Demon's name links him to the novel *Besy*, the unlikely name Aqua may have resonance in *Podrostok*, in which women are compared to water. The young hero Arkady is obsessed with the notion of becoming "a Rothschild," a man of

incomparable wealth who would not only lord it over the world, but who would be irresistibly attractive to women: "I won't be the one to chase women, they will run to me like water and offer me everything they have." The romantic aura that surrounds the dashing and fabulously wealthy Demon makes him similarly irresistible to women. No surprise, then, that following the break between Demon and Marina (who is also associated, in Demon's mind, with a "young body of water" [1.2]), Aqua rushes to console him. On the other hand, one of the symptoms of Aqua's madness (revealing itself when she is left by her husband) is her ability to understand the language of water and to distinguish the disturbing voices in the running tap-water (1.3). So Aqua's namesake becomes her torturer, because, whether she is aware of it or not, in her absence other women were running to her husband, offering him everything they have.

The two marriages—Demon and Aqua's, Stavrogin and Marya's—are also similar in their unhappy outcomes, in both cases the ultimate sacrifice of the bride. Shortly after their wedding, Demon sends Aqua to the first of many private Swiss clinics for the mentally disturbed. Stavrogin too soon gets rid of his wife by sending her to a distant monastery. Then he goes off on his own to see Switzerland. Following an unfortunate skiing accident, the pregnant Aqua goes into premature labor and gives birth to Demon's stillborn child. Marina takes advantage of her sister's confused state of mind to substitute her own newly born illegitimate son, Van, whom Aqua accepts as her own. Similarly Marya believes that she has given birth to Stavrogin's child and that she subsequently drowned the child in a pond. Although Stavrogin affirms that his wife is a virgin, nothing can convince her to give up her delusion. The outcome for both women is tragic, and the husbands are largely to blame. Aqua, unable to endure the torturing doubts that beset her, commits suicide about a year before Van's first visit to Ardis, and the defenseless Marya is stabbed to death by an escaped

convict who is sure that he has obtained Stavrogin's blessing for that murder.

Dostoevsky and his tea with raspberry syrup (*malinovy sirop*) with which we began this discussion perhaps came to Marina accidentally (she only wanted an excuse to mention Dostoevsky), but in spite of her intentions, it has led us to a consideration of *Besy*, and the murder of Stavrogin's wife. Apart from the 'Gory Mary' spilled at the Demon-d'Onsky duel in 1.2 (the phrase itself may refer to the bloody end of both Marya and her brother, the drunken wretch of a poet Ignat Lebiadkin), there seems to lurk in *Ada* another euphemism for blood: the pseudo-latin phrase *aqua malina* which plays on the twin sisters' names. As to the word *sirop*, it only occurs in Dostoevsky's novel *Besy*. The scene is at tea at the home of the holy man (*yurodivy*) Semion Iakovlevich, who attracts all sorts of curiosity seekers who have come to listen to his prophecies. It was the holy man's habit to serve tea to his visitors, but in this he only distinguished those he felt worthy to share this meal with him. "Each was given his tea in a certain hierarchy—those whose tea was sweetened, those who got a lump of sugar on the side and those who were made to drink their tea unsweetened." On this occasion Semion wishes to grant sweetened tea to a rich businessman while ignoring the rest of his guests. To this end he orders four spoonfuls of sugar to be dissolved in the favored guest's tea. "The businessman meekly sipped his syrup." Now the holy man turns his attention to a poor widow who has come to complain about her children and their abuse of her and threats to take her to court. "'Give *that* to her,' declared Semion, indicating a whole sugar loaf." This strikes the others as having the force of prophecy and they attempt to construe the meaning of the fact that the widow is in all given four sugar loaves (although one is taken back). "She took away three of them, at any rate."

It would be difficult to say whether the widow's three sugar loaves relate to the three sugar cubes that dissolve in Van's tea.

Still it is interesting that Van recalls Aqua just at this moment and is overcome with the odd feeling of something mysterious “as if the commentators of his destiny had gone into a huddle.” It would seem that Van’s memory of the recently deceased Aqua had allowed him a glancing contact with the other world, which in some mysterious way was to decide his fate. And indeed, had he been quick enough to catch the intention behind Marina’s allusion to Dostoevsky, then his visit to Ardis and his whole subsequent life would have developed along completely different lines. This was not to be. But who could these secret deciders of his fate be? From the point of view of Antiterra, they would seem to be otherworldly spirits, beings from another world, perhaps even Terra. But it seems to me that on Terra, a planet which owes so much to the oeuvre of Dostoevsky, these are the same people trying to find omens in the sugar doled out to an unhappy widow by the holy man in *Besy*. This is just one example of how Nabokov makes use of situations that occur in Dostoevsky’s novels, stories and journalistic writings. These originally prosaic events are transformed, fairy-tale like, acquiring a magical dimension in their new context.

As he often does, Nabokov uses the springboard of parody to create his new artistic realities, in this case, the colorful Antiterra. The objects of his parody in *Ada* are less science fiction fables from Jules Verne to H. G. Wells and Kingsley Amis as much as the works of an author of the realist school who wrote only one tale of fantasy, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (see my article on Terra and Antiterra in *The Nabokovian* #51). But what might have suggested to Nabokov the idea of using one of the twin planets described in Dostoevsky’s story, as the setting for his largest novel *Ada or Ardor, a Family Chronicle*? I think the answer is to be found in the epilogue to *Podrostok*.

This epilogue is written not by the narrator of the rest of the novel, Arkady Dolgoruky, but takes the form of a critique by

Arkady’s former teacher to whom he sends his notes for comment. In the final paragraph this critic writes:

“Notes such as yours, however, could, I believe, serve as raw material for some future literary work, for a future picture of the present disorder, but written when the period is already in the past. Oh, when the anger has gone and the future is the present, the artist of that future will discover appropriate beautiful forms to convey the chaos and disorder of the past.” [translated by Andrew MacAndrew]

Nabokov accepts the challenge thrown down by Dostoevsky, and in *Ada*, creates the grand portrayal “of a disordered past epoch” out of the material provided by *Podrostok*.

There are other aspects of the epilogue that Nabokov takes for his own novel. For example, the editor writes:

If I were a talented Russian writer, I would pick my characters from the hereditary gentry because only among that species of educated Russians can be found at least a semblance of harmonious order that could be used to produce an aesthetic effect of beauty so essential to a novel. . . . Long ago, speaking of “the traditions of the Russian family,” Pushkin pointed out the legitimate themes for the Russian novel, and I assure you, these traditions are the only things of beauty we have had until now. . . (translated by Andrew MacAndrew)

“Traditions of a Russian family” is a direct quote from *Eugene Onegin*. This underscores Don Johnson’s idea that Nabokov’s novel “seems to echo and develop the scenario in Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (D. B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*, 1985, pp. 117-118). He is referring to the “scenario” which Pushkin sketches in the following strophe, which details just what Pushkin meant by “traditions of a Russian family.” It will be

worth our while to read the two stanzas (III, xiii-xiv) as translated by Nabokov:

My friends, what sense is there in this?
Perhaps, by heaven's will,
I'll cease to be a poet;
a new fiend will inhabit me;
and having scorned the threats of Phoebus,
I shall descend to humble prose:
a novel in the old mood then
will occupy my gay decline.
Not secret pangs of villainy
shall I grimly depict in it,
but simply shall detail to you
traditions of a Russian family,
love's captivating dreams,
and manners of our ancients.

I shall detail the simple speeches
of a father or aged uncle,
the children's assigned meetings
by the old limes, by the small brook;
torments of hapless jealousy,
parting, reconciliation's tears;
once more I'll have them quarrel, and at last
conduct them to the altar.
I shall recall the accents of impassioned sensuousness,
the words of aching love,
which in bygone days
at the feet of a fair mistress
came to my tongue;
from which I now have grown disused.

Johnson shows quite persuasively that Nabokov, in writing *Ada*, attempted to brighten his own "gay decline" by drawing

precisely on these lines from *Eugene Onegin* for the basis of his novel. Nabokov does seem to be following the outlines of Pushkin's scenario, writing the novel that Pushkin never took up himself.

However *Ada* became not a mere spinning out of Pushkin's sketch, but somehow weaves into itself a parody of Dostoevsky's coming-of-age novel, *Podrostok*. But why would Nabokov feel the need to do another parody of Dostoevsky? He had already done this in his earlier work, *Despair* (1934).

The reason lies in the fact that Dostoevsky held to the conceit that he was himself following in Pushkin's footsteps. The epilogue to *Podrostok*, for example, argues that the novel should be read in the context of the line of Russian literary development that leads from Pushkin through Tolstoy. It is not surprising that Van makes direct reference to Tolstoy's *Detstvo i otrochestvo* in the concluding pages of *Ada*.

It would be interesting in this same context, to look at an extended passage from *Podrostok*'s epilogue, as it could certainly serve as appropriately to criticize Van as it does Arkady:

A member of a third generation in a three-generation saga of a cultured upper-middle-class family in proper historical setting could be portrayed in his contemporary aspect only as a rather misanthropic and lonely type and certainly a sad sight to behold. Indeed, he'd strike the reader as some sort of freak, a deviation from the line of his forebears, someone doomed without a future. Very soon this misanthropic descendant would also vanish and new, different, and as yet unknown characters would appear on the scene, and in his wake would come a new illusion. But what sort of faces would these characters have? If they were ugly, there would be no future for the Russian novel. And, alas, it wouldn't be just the novel that would be impossible then! (translation by Andrew MacAndrew)

The characters of Nabokov's "Family Chronicle" come from the upper echelons of a highly cultivated class who are shown in a rather unflattering light. And yet a beautiful, if no longer purely Russian, novel now becomes possible.

With his usual lack of modesty Van writes at the conclusion of *Ada* "nothing in world literature, save maybe Count Tolstoy's reminiscences, can vie in pure joyousness and Arcadian innocence with the 'Ardis' part of the book." (Note the play on the "Raw Youth's" name.) Despite Van's ironical tone, Nabokov also attempts to place his American novel into the literary history of his own patrimony. Although Nabokov's cultural forebears are Pushkin and Tolstoy, he does this by entering into a hidden polemical dialogue with another Russian writer, Dostoevsky.

One of Dostoevsky's last writings was an article on Pushkin (1880). According to Dostoevsky, only a Russian poet of Pushkin's genius could have the sensibility to bridge the gap between the two characteristics—universality and nationality. In a whole range of his works, Pushkin demonstrated his ability—a near-miraculous one, because no other poet seems to have ever had it—to transform his spirit into that of other nations. On the other hand, in his Tatiana, Pushkin created the quintessential image of unattainably beautiful Russian womanhood.

"Had he lived longer," wrote Dostoevsky, "he would have revealed to our European brethren the great, immortal Russian soul, which would have brought us closer than we now are. Perhaps he could have shown them our great aspirations so that they would have understood us better than they do now, and not look down on us any more. Pushkin undoubtedly took a great secret with him to his grave. Our task now is to discover the nature of that great secret."

Nabokov devoted some ten years to the task of making Pushkin more accessible to non-Russian readers with his translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* into the English

language, along with his extensive commentary. A year after finishing this great task, late in 1965, he began work on his novel *Ada*. In this work he attempts to continue Pushkin's unfinished task and to propose his own solution to the mystery of Pushkin. My belief is that Nabokov's solution is the following: having transformed himself into an American writer and having created in *Lolita* the immortal image of the American teenager, Nabokov still remained essentially a Russian writer, the heir of Pushkin, Tolstoy and the manqué Dostoevsky.

The way I envision it, through the complex and deceptive family tree that precedes *Ada*, can be made out the outlines of a simpler and thoroughly certifiable one:

Pushkin (Krylov, Griboedov, Lermontov)

|
Tolstoy (Dostoevsky)

|
Nabokov

Before fully throwing himself into work on *Ada*, Nabokov returned to his autobiography *Speak Memory*, in which much is made of his family's ancestry. He traced his family tree back to its founder, the fourteenth century Tatar Prince Nabok. The legendary prince appears in *Ada* along with his historical contemporary Tammerlane (*Ada*, I.39).

In *Speak Memory* Nabokov delved into his personal origins. But surely he was at least as concerned with his artistic pedigree. Tracing this second genealogy back through Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to Pushkin appears to me to be Nabokov's major task in writing *Ada*. It remains for us to recognize how brilliantly his genius succeeded in this difficult endeavor.

—Alexey Sklyarenko, St. Petersburg

SEVERAL COMMENTS ON *INVITATION TO A
BEHEADING*

1. **Rostopchin** [also spelled Rastopchin]. The intonation of the deputy city director, “a master of relaxed eloquence” (*IB* 220), specifically in the phrase: “I/. ./hope, townspeople, that you are all in good health and lack nothing” (*IB* 221), evokes the proclamations of Count Fedor Rostopchin (1763-1826), the Moscow General-Governor during the Napoleonic War of 1812. Here is, for example, the beginning of one of his proclamations: “Slava Bogu, vse u nas v Moskve khorosho i spokoino! Khleb ne dorozhaet i miaso desheveet” (“Thank God, all in our Moscow is nice and quiet! Bread is not getting more expensive and meat is getting cheaper”). (See F. V. Rostopchin, *Okh, frantsuzy! [Oh, Frenchmen!]*, Moscow: “Russkaia kniga,” 1992, 212.) We may recall that Nabokov mentions Rostopchin’s proclamations in *The Gift*: the appeal “To the Serfs of Landowners,” attributed to Chernyshevski, is deemed stylistically “very reminiscent of Count Rastopchin’s corny little placards against Napoleon’s invasion” (*Gift* 262).

2. **Strop’**. Vladimir Dal’s dictionary, Nabokov’s main and most favorite Russian language reference tool, provides clues for the etymology of the river’s name that apparently stems from the Church Slavonic *stropota*. On the one hand, *stropota* means “falsehood, mendacity” that aptly defines the world surrounding Cincinnatus; on the other hand, it connotes “stubbornness, unyieldingness, obstinacy” that well describe the protagonist’s ultimate resistance to his oppressors (cf. the Russian adjective *stroptivyi* [“obstinate, refractory, shrewish”]) (see Vladimir Dal’, *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, 4 vols., Moscow: “Vysshiaia shkola,” 1980; rept. 1882, 4: 342).

3. **Casanova**. Nabokov recurrently mentions Giacomo Casanova (1725-98) in his oeuvre. Casanova is referred to in

The Eye (*Eye* 73) and twice alluded to in *Ada* (*Ada* 208 and 443). Although the first time in *Ada* Casanova is merely dubbed “a certain Venetian,” the whole phrase, by way of the anagram, leaves no doubt about his identity: “I’ve paid you eight compliments, as a certain Venetian”—Giacomo Casanova.). In *Invitation to a Beheading*, the Venetian adventurer is suggested in the following passage: “There is nothing more pleasant, for example, than to surround oneself with mirrors and watch the good work going on there—wonderful!” (*IB* 145). Here M’sieur Pierre ‘borrowed’ the description from Casanova’s *Memoirs*. In the oft-quoted episode of his love affair with the nun M. M., Casanova describes the mansion that he rented for this purpose. One of its chambers “was an octagonal room, the walls, the ceiling, and the floor of which were entirely covered with splendid Venetian glass, arranged in such a manner as to reflect on all sides every position of the amorous couple enjoying the pleasures of love” (Giacomo Girolamo Casanova, *The Memoirs*, 6 vols., trans. Arthur Machen, New York: Putnam’s, 1959-61, 2: 368). Although M’sieur Pierre tries to present himself as a true Casanova, we later learn that he is impotent. During Marthe’s last visit to Cincinnatus’s cell, she admits that she received the permission in return for “a little concession” (*IB* 195) to the prison director. Later on, she was asked and eventually agrees to “do it” with someone else, undoubtedly with the executioner. Upon her return to the cell, she says “with a sneer”: “All for nothing,” and later adds: “Shouldn’t try if you can’t manage it” (*IB* 199).

4. **Sharf**. In Russian, the word stands for “a scarf,” whereas its German homonym—*scharf*—means “sharp.” The *sharf / scharf* double-entendre becomes evident in the episode describing the first meeting between Cincinnatus and M’sieur Pierre. To please M’sieur Pierre, who has been showing card tricks to Cincinnatus, the obsequious Rodrig asks the librarian to confirm the hangman’s skill by admitting he has seen the

same card at the end of the trick that he thought of in the beginning. The librarian, however, flatly denying M'sieur Pierre's skill, leaves the cell. For this act of disobedience, Rodrig harshly disciplines the librarian. The prison director follows him into the corridor; his off-stage violence toward the librarian is suggested by his exhaling "noisily like a horse" upon his return to Cincinnatus's cell. "In his tightly clenched fist [there] was a woolen scarf" that the librarian used to cover his neck (*IB* 87). Furthermore, in this act of violence the prison director has broken his thumbnail that "protruded like a sickle" (*ibid.*). This neck-baring scarf-stripping, together with the implication of the execution tool's sharpness by means of the sickle image, serve as a death warning to the librarian and, more importantly, as a reminder to Cincinnatus, whose 'disobedience' is much more serious, of the impending beheading.

The *sharf* reference reemerges later in the novel in Rodion's tirade directed at Cincinnatus: "Vy by luchshe nachilis', kak drugie, viazat', —provorchal Rodion, —i sviazali by mne farshik" ("You'd do better to learn to knit like everybody else," grumbled Rodion, "so you could knit me a cache-knee") (4: 133 / 143). Along with the above-mentioned *sharf* / *scharf* connotations, Nabokov employs additional world play here: in Russian, "viazat'" means both "to knit" and "to bind, or tie up" (as, for example, hands before the execution). No less ominous is Rodion's 'dyslexic' slip ("farshik" instead of "sharfik"), the former being a diminutive of *farsh* ("force-meat processed through a meat grinder")—another implication of violence and murder. The Russian word apparently derives from the Latin *farcio* ("to fill with" or "to stuff with"). Curiously, in French, in which Nabokov was completely fluent, *farce* means both "force-meat" as well as, very appropriately for the novel, "farce" and "buffoonery." (In the English translation, Nabokov employs "cache-knee" [catch knee?] the distorted form of the French "cache-nez." While in French "cache-nez" denotes "a

muffler, a comforter," in Russian, this borrowed word, spelled *kashne*, is used synonymously with *sharf*.)

Scharf also invokes the early twentieth-century Munich cabarets, such as *Die Elf Scharfrichter* ("The Eleven Executioners"), known for their glorification of criminal acts and for their gallows humor. These cabaret performances, referred to as *Hinrichtungen* (executions), that took place three times a week, contained striking gory details. They reenacted and somewhat parodied the not-too-long-ago abolished (1851 in Berlin, 1861 in Munich) executions that were traditionally held on market days on public squares. The cabaret dramatizations of the executions at "The Eleven Executioners" reflected the constraints imposed by the authorities that moved the executions to prison yards and required special admission cards for their attendance. The cabarets, too, charged an admission fee and required a membership card for those who wanted to be present at these reenactments. (See Jennifer Ham, "Galgenlieder und Tantenmörder: Criminal Acts as Entertainment in Early Munich Cabaret," in *Literarisches und politisches Kabarett von 1901 bis 1999*, ed. Sigrid Bauschinger, 39-58, Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 2000.) In the novel's dystopian world, the execution is presented as a public entertainment event with a touch of the bizarre: to attend the execution, admission tickets are required but "circus subscription stubs will be honored" (*IB* 176).

—Gavriel Shapiro, Cornell University

"A LIKABLE LITTLE CREATURE":
KINBOTE'S CAT AND FLEUR DE FYLER

Pale Fire opens in enigmatic fashion, offering as epigraph lines culled from Boswell's *Life of Johnson*:

This reminds me of the ludicrous account which he gave Mr. Langton, of the despicable state of a young gentleman of good family. "Sir, when I heard of him last, he was running about town shooting cats." And then in a sort of kindly reverie, he bethought himself of his own favourite cat, and said, "But Hodge shan't be shot: no, no, Hodge shall not be shot." (PF 7)

In its original context this passage is unproblematic. Discussing Dr. Johnson's benevolence, and having touched in turn on his friend's love of children, kindness to servants, and affection for animals, Boswell ends by recalling an incident indicative of Johnson's fondness for his cat, Hodge. In its new context, though, as epigraph to *Pale Fire*, the passage is perplexing. While it does, in its depiction of a man troubled by a distant event only insofar as it could affect his own situation, anticipate what is to come, Johnson's mild egoism is hardly comparable to Kinbote's crack-brained solipsism. The "cat-shooting" epigraph, although vaguely applicable to *Pale Fire*, must strike a reader familiar with the novel as provocatively irrelevant—which raises a question: have we missed the point of *Pale Fire*'s epigraph?

The cat-shooting passage, as its opening indicates, advances an ongoing discussion. "This reminds me. . .," the passage begins, prompting one to ask *what* reminds you? It turns out that Boswell's memory is prompted by recollection of another incident involving Hodge:

Nor would it be just under this head, to omit the fondness which [Johnson] shewed for animals which he had taken under his protection. I never shall forget the indulgence with which he treated Hodge, his cat; for whom he himself used to go out and buy oysters, lest the servants, having that trouble, should take a dislike to the poor creature. I am, unluckily, one of those who have an antipathy to a cat, so

that I am uneasy when in the room with one; and I own, I frequently suffered a great deal from the presence of this same Hodge. I recollect him one day scrambling up Dr. Johnson's breast, apparently with much satisfaction, while my friend smiling and half-whistling, rubbed down his back, and pulled him by the tail; and when I observed he was a fine cat, saying "why, yes, Sir, but I have had cats whom I liked better than this;" and then as if perceiving Hodge to be out of countenance, adding "but he is a very fine cat, a very fine cat indeed." (*Boswell's Life of Johnson*, J.M. Dent, 1958, 451)

Does this passage ready us—in a way the cat-shooting passage does not—for *Pale Fire*? As we shall see, this pleasing passage, in which Boswell endures and then overcomes an aversion to Hodge, highlights issues central to *Pale Fire*.

At the heart of *Pale Fire* is a wide-ranging exploration of rejection. Hazel Shade is spurned by her peers; Charles Kinbote is rebuffed by his colleagues; Queen Disa is banished by her husband. As these key examples hint, *Pale Fire* is in large measure about the causes and consequences of rejection. Acknowledging that rejection is central to *Pale Fire*, how does the novel treat the subject of human incompatibility? Is shunning presented as a reasoned response to offensive behavior? Or is it shown as an irrational reaction to unsettling characteristics?

One instance of rejection in *Pale Fire* involves not mismatched humans but a human and a cat. First mentioned in a note recalling Kinbote's arrival in New Wye, the cat in question belongs to fussy Judge Goldsworth.

Among various detailed notices affixed to a special board in the pantry, such as plumbing instructions, dissertations on electricity, discourses on cactuses and so forth, I found the diet of the black cat that came with the house:

Mon, Wed, Fri: Liver
Tue, Thu, Sat: Fish
Sun: Ground meat

(All it got from me was milk and sardines; it was a likable little creature but after a while its movements began to grate on my nerves and I farmed it out to Mrs. Finley, the cleaning woman.) (84)

Why is Kinbote's rejection of his cat—a rejection treated in a parenthesis—of note? Because it reappears, transposed to a human key, as an important episode in Zemblan history.

With Queen Blenda dead, Charles Xavier awaits his coronation. Ensnared in a sumptuous bedroom, he endures the attentions of Fleur de Fyler, friend turned (at the behest of an ambitious mother) would-be seducer. Fleur's appearance is described in some detail:

She had a small pale face with prominent cheekbones, luminous eyes, and curly dark hair [. . .]. Otar, her lover, said that when you walked behind her, and she knew you were walking behind her, the swing and play of those slim haunches was something intensely artistic, something Arab girls were taught in special schools by special Parisian panders who were afterwards strangled. Her fragile ankles, he said, which she placed very close together in her dainty and wavy walk, were the "careful jewels" in Arnor's poem about a *miragarl* (108).

Arrayed in this passage are a number of details presenting Fleur as cat-like. Her face is small with "prominent cheekbones" and "luminous eyes;" her "haunches" are "slim" and her ankles "fragile," while her way of walking "dainty and wavy." A later passage, detailing the Prince's testy relations with Fleur, underscores her resemblance to a cat:

Sometimes, upon returning to the comfortable old chair he would find her in it contemplating sorrowfully the picture of a *bogtur* (ancient warrior) in the history book. He would sweep her out of his chair, his eyes still on his writing pad, and stretching herself she would move over to the window seat and its dusty sunbeam; but after a while she tried to cuddle up to him, and he had to push away her burrowing dark curly head with one hand while writing with the other or detach one by one her little pink claws from his sleeve or sash. (111)

If the details stressed so far depict Fleur as vaguely cat-like, other details link her to a particular cat—that banished by Kinbote. For instance, both cat and Fleur are associated with music. At one point Kinbote's cat appears "on the threshold of the music room, in the middle of my insomnia and a Wagner record" (97); Fleur, too, is attracted by music, not only playing several instruments ("viola d'amore. . . ancient flutes" (110)) but appearing in musical milieux, "illuminating a concert program by the diagonal light of an ogival window [. . .] making tinny music in Bower B" (113). Moreover, both cat and Fleur are linked with periods of anxiety. If the cat appears in the music room during a sleepless night of incapacitating terror—"neither wine, nor music, nor prayer could allay my fears" (97), Fleur is present as the Prince confronts a "sickly physical fear of [the Queen's] phantom" (109). Finally, both cat and Fleur are rejected, with the former "farmed out" to Mrs. Finley, and the latter returned (in a tellingly worded passage) to her mother: "That was the end of Charles Xavier's chaste romance with Fleur, who was pretty yet not repellent (as some cats are less repugnant than others to the good-natured dog told to endure the bitter effluvium of an alien genus)" (112).

Precisely why is Fleur rejected? In part because an annoyance: "cuddling up to" and "burrowing" into the Prince,

she continually interrupts his writing of a coronation speech. Yet there is another, and more important, reason for her rejection. Because so womanly (“Arnor [. . .] used her breasts and feet for his *Lilith Calling Back Adam*” (108)), Fleur offends the mind and senses of the homosexual Prince, provoking in him an acute visceral unease.

She wore on the second day of their ridiculous cohabitation nothing except a kind of buttonless and sleeveless pajama top. The sight of her four bare limbs and three mousepits (Zemblan anatomy) irritated him, and while pacing about and pondering his coronation speech, he would toss towards her, without looking, her shorts or a terrycloth robe. (110)

We now understand why Kinbote banishes his cat. On the one hand, the cat is a nuisance. Needful of attention, it rubs against and claws at Kinbote. On the other—and more important—hand, the cat is physically repellent. Moving in a way evocative of a lithesome and graceful woman—“rippling” down a staircase, for example (97)—it provokes in misogynist Kinbote a visceral unease. In the case of the cat, then, rejection emerges in part from irritation but mostly from a sense of the animal as unpleasantly feminine. Predisposed to dislike all cats, Kinbote, annoyed by the “movements” of a particular cat, banishes the animal from his (its!) house.

Exemplified by the cat episode and reiterated in the Fleur sequence is a model of rejection in which visceral discomfort justifies banishment. In short, both Kinbote and the Prince refuse to confront and overcome an instinctive unease, banishing a companion because unable to see beyond noisome surface features. Consider in this context Boswell’s treatment of Johnson’s cat, Hodge. Boswell’s feelings about Hodge are much like Kinbote’s feelings about *his* cat. Boswell, though, confronts his own unease, recognizing that Hodge—although a source of discomfort—is a “fine cat” (*Life*, 452). Unlike

Kinbote (and others in *Pale Fire*), Boswell subordinates the visceral to the rational, taking a second look at an initially unsettling being. Given the extent to which Boswell’s treatment of Hodge represents a counter-model to Kinbote’s treatment of his cat, the true import of *Pale Fire*’s cryptic epigraph may lie less in its suggesting we look at a particular feature of human life (solipsism) in a particular way (as comical) than in its guiding us to a vastly more suggestive passage.

I wish to thank Priscilla Meyer and Brian Boyd for comments and suggestions.

—Matthew Brillinger, University of Auckland

Enchanters, Artists, Madmen
The Influence of Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha*
on Nabokov's *Lolita*

By Miriam Gottfried

"He, *mon cher petit papa*, took me out boating and biking, taught me to swim and dive and water-ski, read to me *Don Quixote*..." (*The Annotated Lolita* 11). So Humbert Humbert recalls in *Lolita*, mentioning the Spanish novel as one among the hundreds of books he has read. But Humbert is not the only one who has read Cervantes' work; Nabokov reread and did extensive research on *Don Quixote* in order to prepare a series of Harvard lectures during the spring of 1952. Within the six lectures, Nabokov criticizes *Quixote*, calling it "a crude and cruel old book" (*Lectures on Don Quixote* xiii). The majority of Cervantistas accuse Nabokov—who had little prior knowledge of the Spanish culture, literature, or language—of misunderstanding Cervantine irony by failing to recognize that *Quixote* was, on one level, a critique of exactly those "cruelties and crudities" represented in the hero's society ("La lección del disparatario nabokoviano [Clare Quilty-Avellaneda]." *Desviaciones lúcidas en la crítica cervantina*. 348). Nevertheless, it is the sense of Quixote's pain and the cruelty of his world that Nabokov takes away from his study of the novel, and it is this element that is evidenced in his own work of the period. Brian Boyd points out that Nabokov wrote the first chapter of *Pnin* and the beginnings of *Lolita* during the preparation for his lectures on *Quixote*. According to Boyd, *Pnin* is "Nabokov's reply to Cervantes" (*Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* 272). Strong echoes of *Quixote*, however, are also present in *Lolita*. Instead of creating a parallel Quixotesque character as he does in *Pnin*, in *Lolita*, Nabokov toys with his perception of Cervantes' use of the "crude and cruel" by creating Humbert Humbert, a character who

internalizes and embodies both characteristics. Nabokov thus expands the structure of *Quixote*; he exchanges a protagonist who is called insane by "cruel and crude" spectators with one who is undeniably insane, but is viewed internally through the lens of his first person narrative, specifically designed to mask the "cruel and the crude" within him. Though both seek immortality through a literary legacy, Quixote is placed at the mercy of the judgment of his own society, his multiple layers of recorders, and ultimately of his reader. Humbert can be seen as an inversion of Quixote through his internalization of traditional chivalrous literature and of the primary female figure in his narrative. But of the two protagonists, only Humbert is given the power to make his most vile actions and thoughts seem justified, as the artist and author of his own story.

The parallel chivalrous worlds of Humbert and Quixote suggest a direct link between Nabokov's reading of *Quixote* and his creation of *Lolita*. Nabokov identifies the "chivalry theme" as among the primary structural devices employed by Cervantes. In this category, he includes "allusions to books of chivalry, parodies of various situations and devices in them; in a word, a continuous awareness of romances of knight-errantry" (*LDQ* 30). Nabokov asserts that Cervantes "didn't give a hoot" whether or not the influence of books of chivalry was destructive: "Although he makes a great show of being morally concerned with these matters, the only thing about this chivalry or antichivalry affair that interests him is firstly... its use as a literary device to propel, shift, and otherwise direct his story; and secondly its... use as a righteous attitude... which in his pious, utilitarian, and dangerous day a writer had better take care of" (*LDQ* 31). Whether or not this demonstrates the misunderstanding of *Quixote* for which Nabokov has been criticized, it is a fitting description of Humbert Humbert's designs in applying the chivalry theme to his own life. As his own author, Humbert has the same literary motivations that Nabokov points to in Cervantes' representation of Quixote. Just as Humbert places his story in

a magical and fictionalized world through parody of chivalrous romance and courtly love, Quixote's world is based on a his reading of the chivalric romance of *Amadis of Gaul*. Like Cervantes, the creator of a fictionalized world, Humbert uses "literary devices" to "shift his story" into a justification of his actions that he considers necessary to convince the "ladies and gentleman of the jury" (*TAL* 9).

Both Humbert and Quixote are given to "solipsizing" the world around them (*TAL* 60). Humbert, who consistently interweaves the story of his life with unacknowledged literary references, directly mentions having read *Quixote* during his formative years, suggesting this literary world as a source for his mania. Quixote's solipsism of the chivalrous novel also involves putting himself on the plane of fictional literary characters. His primary influence, *Amadis of Gaul*, is cited regularly as if it were a history of a real person. Quixote tells Sancho that the "famous Amadis of Gaul was one of the most perfect of the knights-errant" and then adds that he "was the sole and only one, the very first, the lord of all those in the world in his time." Quixote vehemently follows this assertion by wishing "a plague on Don Belianís and all the others who claimed to equal him in anything, for they are wrong, I swear they are" (*Don Quixote* 198). The people Quixote meets on his journey recognize his solipsism in a way that he cannot. When Quixote explains the meaning and history of the knight-errant to the shepherds in the story of Marcela, they are "able to perceive the peculiar nature of his madness" and they are eager to "give him a further opportunity of displaying his absurdities" (*DQ* 93). Cervantes shows that Quixote has solipsized the art that is the literary creation of the chivalrous novels, but the art that Quixote believes he is imitating is that of the practice of knighthood. In contrast with Humbert who, as the writer of his own tale, uses the interweaving of literary language and imagery as a technique to beautify and shroud the base and vulgar nature of his existence, Quixote is not aware of his act of solipsism because

his story is in the hands of the narrator, who presents him as laughable to both his readers and fellow countrymen.

To fuel their parallel literary solipsism, both Humbert and Quixote are portrayed as voracious readers, and much attention is devoted to their respective libraries. Nabokov calls the scene in Quixote's library an instance where Cervantes "confuses" his condemnation of chivalrous novels "by having his curate, his man of common sense, or supposed common sense, praise or exempt from destruction half a dozen chivalry books—among these the very book *Amadis of Gaul* that is constantly in the limelight throughout Don Quixote's adventures and seems to be the main source of his madness" (*LDQ* 40). Though Nabokov's interpretation that Cervantes condemns romances because of their lack of historical truth is perhaps a misinterpretation of Cervantes' intentions, the censorship of Quixote's library by the priest is echoed in Humbert's world in the form of the limited prison library. Humbert is aware that his sources of literary inspiration in prison are inherently limited; he says it "is not very likely that a prison library will harbor such erudite works" (*TAL* 31). In neither protagonist, however, does the censorship of the reading material affect the mania because the process of solipsism is already underway.

The reviews of the libraries of both Humbert and Quixote lay the groundwork for their subsequent experiences, demonstrating their thorough solipsism of the literature therein. Nabokov's use of the word "limelight" to describe the central point in Quixote's adventures is also carried over into Humbert's world with *Who's Who in the Limelight* (*TAL* 31). The entries in *Who's Who* keep appearing throughout Humbert's account. Likewise, most of the works reviewed by the priest and the barber in Quixote's library appear either directly or indirectly throughout Quixote's adventures. One such example is the *Shepard of Iberia*, which prefigures Quixote's meeting with Marcela. Another is *The Disenchantment of Jealousy*, which

evokes both Dulcinea's enchantment and the jealousy of Altisidora.

Humbert's library also references to Quixote's adventures. One of the *Who's Who* titles for which Alfred Appel provides no explanation is *The Girl in Green* (TAL 348-352). Nabokov calls attention to Cervantes' frequent use of green: "Green seems to be the author's favorite color, and the beautiful huntress they now meet is dressed in green and rides a horse caparisoned in green" (LDQ 62). Cervantes' "girl in green" is the character whom Nabokov calls "the Diabolical Duchess" because she represents the essence of the cruelty in *Quixote* that so affected him. The duchess disguises her cruelty toward Quixote beneath an almost theatrical presentation, in which she tricks him into performing ridiculous tasks. Her presence in *Who's Who* may thus be a sign of the deep pain and cruelty lying beneath the surface of Humbert's account. In Quixote's library, the priest finds a book entitled *The Nymphs of Henares*, which links it to Nabokov's creation of the mythical nymphet (DQ 56). Quixote also has the *History of the Famous Knight, Tirant lo Blanch* in his library, which through the use of the word "blanch" or "white," recalls the alternate title to Humbert's work "Lolita," "The Confession of a White Widowed Male" (TAL 3). Nabokov's self-reference with Vivian Darkbloom appearance in *Who's Who* is also a technique used in Quixote's library when the priest picks up a copy of *Galatea*, one of Cervantes' earlier works, and says: "Ah, that fellow Cervantes and I have been friends these many years, but to my knowledge he is better versed in misfortune than he is in verse..." (DQ 57).

The solipsism of the female figure and the parody of courtly love are central in both works. In his foreword to Nabokov's lectures, Guy Davenport asserts that Lolita's "Grandmama was Dulcinea del Toboso" (LDQ xviii). In his brief explanation of *Pnin* as the product of Nabokov's study of *Quixote*, Boyd says that it "is no accident that the book's risible name, that 'preposterous little explosion,' almost spells out pain" (Boyd

272). Boyd ends this line of reasoning here, neglecting the equally important point that Lolita's birth-given name, "Dolores" also means pains, though this time, it is not in Russian, but, significantly, as Francisco Márquez Villanueva notes, in Spanish (Villanueva 352). It is clear that Nabokov intended a connection between the painful significance of the name and the meaning of the girl in Humbert's world as suggested by John Ray, Jr.'s statement that the name Dolores is "too closely interwound with the inmost fiber of the book" (TAL 4). In contrast, the name "Dulcinea" comes from the Spanish *dulce*, meaning sweet. The juxtaposition between these two meanings reflects Humbert's internalization of the "cruel and crude," as opposed to the purity and idealism of Quixote's untainted image of Dulcinea.

Both Humbert and Quixote take the solipsism of their respective females to such lengths that the women cease to exist except in their ideal form. Nabokov describes the process of Quixote's solipsism, from his initial perception of Dulcinea as her "real" self, Aldonza Lorenzo, the farm girl and pig tender, to the point when he decides to make her his the lady of his patronage, giving her the name of Dulcinea, despite never having spoken to her. Nabokov traces this process to Quixote's testy comment to Sancho: "'Look, you heretic, have I not told you any number of times that I have never in all my life laid eyes on the peerless Dulcinea, that I have never crossed the threshold of her palace but am enamored of her only by hearsay, as she is famous far and wide for her beauty and her wit?'" (DQ 563). Nabokov points out that Dulcinea has become nothing more than an ideal: "In the course of the knight's mad adventures something happens to his recollection of Aldonza Lorenzo and the background of the particular fades, Aldonza is swallowed up by the romantic generalization represented by Dulcinea" (LDQ 83). This "swallowing up" is strongly echoed in Humbert's assurance that "Lolita had been safely solipsized" (TAL 60). Only the ideal Lolita survives, and unlike in the case of Quixote,

where the reader is aware of the discrepancy between the knight's vision and the "reality" that is Aldonza Lorenzo, Humbert's reader only catches glimpses of the true brutality of his actions behind his literary disguise. Through such glimmers of truth, Humbert reveals his attempt to convince readers that Lolita is oblivious to his abuse. This oblivion is parallel to Cervantes' portrayal of Don Quixote's unfulfilled love for Dulcinea, which "it is generally believed that she never knew or suspected" (*DQ* 29). Quixote lives the illusion that Dulcinea knows of his love and loves him in return, while his "cruel" society and the reader understand that he has developed his own conception of a woman whom he hardly knows. As Catherine Kuncze points out, "while Don Quixote's inability to see the 'real' Dulcinea does no harm to Aldonza Lorenzo, Humbert's disregard of the 'real' Dolores enslaves a vulnerable and lonely pre-pubescent child" ("Cruel and Crude": Nabokov Reading Cervantes." *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*. Vol.13: 93). Through his literary craftsmanship, however, Humbert distracts the reader from his cruelty, again becoming a twisted Quixote.

In being solipsized, both Dulcinea and Lolita are given religious significance by their admirers. Within the lectures, Nabokov notes that Quixote's "attitude toward Dulcinea is religious," and religious language is indeed prevalent in descriptions of the idealized Dulcinea (*LDQ* 16). In response to Quixote's praise of his lady Sancho says: "That, is the kind of love I have heard the preacher say we ought to give to Our Lord, for Himself alone, without being moved by any hope of eternal glory or fear of Hell" (*DQ* 270-271). The religious attitude leads Quixote to imitate Amadis and do penance in the Sierra Morena mountains for his imagined failings in service to Dulcinea. Humbert parodies Quixote's penance, as is suggested with the parenthetical alias "Donald Quix" that Quilty leaves in the Sierra Nevadas, a location that shares the name of one of the Spanish mountain ranges where Quixote's chivalrous models

would go to be deprived of physical comforts (*TAL* 251). In his references to "a Protestant's drab atheism" and "an old-fashioned popish cure" Humbert tries to establish his search for redemption in traditional religions (*TAL* 282). Still, Humbert's concern is ultimately to convince the reader of his repentance, where Quixote, though mocked by his society and by the reader, is interested only in convincing Dulcinea of his devotion.

The theme of enchantment creates another parallel between the worlds of Humbert and Quixote. Nabokov discusses the importance of the enchantment of Dulcinea in sustaining Quixote's own adopted identity, lauding the almost complete absence of the physical Dulcinea throughout the story as "a device of genius" on the part of Cervantes because it allows Quixote's ideal to remain intact (*LDQ* 57). When Sancho begins to play along with Quixote's princess-like ideal of Dulcinea, Quixote, in a classic example of Cervantine role reversal begins to see the original ugly peasant girl (*DQ* 570). From this point onward, Quixote's goal becomes saving Dulcinea from the enchanters he believes have been following him by disenchanting her and returning her to her state of ideal beauty. In focusing Quixote's energy on defeating his "enchanters," Cervantes calls attention to the powers of the narrators and author, who, as the creators of his world and existence, are responsible for the tricks that are played on him. Quilty could be seen as Humbert's enchanter, but unlike Quixote, who sees himself solely as a victim, Humbert, the writer, has the power to "enchant" Lolita in order to disguise his deeds and maintain his ideal in the eyes of the reader. Nabokov thus allows Humbert to employ Cervantes' "device of genius" by taking the physical presence of Lolita out of the picture. Humbert parallels Quixote's attempts to disenchant Dulcinea when he "[breaks Annabel's] spell by incarnating her in another" (*TAL* 15). Like Quixote he maintains his solipsized world through enchantment, but unlike Quixote, the power to enchant is in his own hands.

At the climax of their exploits, both Humbert and Quixote combat a double figure that has been trailing them throughout the story. Nabokov comments on the introduction of Sansón Carrasco, Quixote's double, who disguises himself as the Knight of Mirrors, noting parenthetically: "Reflections, and reflections of reflections, shimmer through the book" (*LDQ* 78). The Knight of Mirrors claims to "have overcome in a single combat... that famous gentleman, Don Quixote de la Mancha" by making him "confess that [his lady, Casildea de Vandalia] is more beautiful than his Dulcinea." He adds that when he "vanquished [Quixote], his fame, glory, and honor passed over and were transferred to [his] person" and now "the innumerable exploits of the said Don Quixote are set down to [his] account and are indeed [his] own" (*DQ* 591). Nabokov concludes that the Knight of Mirrors "might have added, since a knight's glory is his identity, I am Don Quixote," meaning that "the fight that our real Don Quixote has with his reflected Don Quixote is, in a way, a fight with his own shadow" (*LDQ* 78). The shadow association is echoed in Humbert's conversation with Quilty at the Enchanted Hunters. Humbert never actually sees Quilty, but he is "aware that in the darkness next to me there was somebody sitting in a chair" (*TAL* 126). The "darkness next to" Humbert is his shadow, later becoming the physical Quilty, and like the Knight of Mirrors, Quilty seeks to steal Humbert's "fame, glory, and honor" as they are embodied in the possession of Lolita.

When Carrasco returns, he is disguised as the Knight of the White Moon, a reference to Quixote's lunacy. Nabokov refers to him as the "Knight of the moonlike Mirrors" (*LDQ* 81). In doing so, Nabokov connects Quixote's double to the "a selenian glow, truly mystical in its contrast with the moonless and massive night," which Humbert sees on his way to Pavor Manor (*TAL* 293). The moonlike projection screen that mirrors the killing of Quilty, the "deep mirrors" covering the walls and the mirroring between Quilty's purple bathrobe and Humbert's,

make Quilty into a Knight of Mirrors (*TAL* 294). Nabokov describes the Knight of the White Moon as being "moved by two conflicting forces: one evil, the thirst for revenge; the other good, his initial intention to force Don Quixote to quit, to go home like a good boy and not meddle with knight-errantry for at least a year or until he is cured of his madness" (*LDQ* 81). Humbert the writer creates Quilty's evilness, deliberately invoking the romantic literary tradition of the double. Humbert also recalls the chivalrous tradition, using it to try to convince the reader that he is seeking revenge against Quilty in order to "force him to quit" his abuse of Lolita, just as Quixote's rival ended his knighthood to prevent him from meddling and madness.

Humbert and Quixote are concerned with immortality to the end. When he dictates his will, Quixote renounces his former desire for glory, asking those present that if "they should come to know the author who is said to have composed a history now going the rounds under the title of *Second Part of the Exploits of Don Quixote de la Mancha*, to beg his forgiveness—since it was [he] who unthinkingly led him to set down so many and such great absurdities as are bound to be found in it" (*DQ* 987). He relinquishes having his exploits published, but control over this task is not in his hands, and the reader knows that his final wish is left unfulfilled as the book in which he is immortalized comes to a close, his author's work completed. Humbert expresses his desire to allow "H.H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make [Lolita] live in the minds of later generations" because this "is the only immortality [Lolita] and [he] may share" (*TAL* 309). Appel notes the appropriateness of Humbert's "remoteness of tone" in this last line because "Humbert's love and Nabokov's labors have become one" (*TAL* 452). Unlike Quixote who is left at the mercy of his recorders, the author Nabokov and the writer Humbert achieve unification at the end because, though one is played off as fiction and the other as fact, Humbert's "facts" are ultimately the content of Nabokov's overarching fiction.

Sancho begs Quixote not to die, saying that the “greatest madness that a man can be guilty of in this life is to die without good reason, without anyone’s killing him, slain only by the hands of his own melancholy” (*DQ* 986). Quixote’s world of imitation and acting out chivalrous novels has been the only thing keeping him from his “own melancholy.” During the height of his knighthood he explains his relationship to the “historical” figures from the chivalric romances, telling Sancho that when “a painter wishes to become famous, he strives to imitate the works of the most distinctive practitioners of his art” (*DQ* 198). Though Quixote refers in this remark to the art of knighthood, Cervantes hints at the literary art that Quixote is actually imitating. Humbert also uses art “for the treatment of [his] misery,” but Quixote is not given Humbert’s power to achieve the literary level of his own historian, and he becomes a victim of the artist’s representation of him as he tries to survive as an outcast in his cruel world (*TAL* 283).

Inspired by his reading of *Quixote*, Nabokov takes Cervantes’ work one step further by creating a character who is not only “a madman” and “a creature of infinite melancholy,” but also “an artist” with the power to shape his own world and make others victims of his art (*TAL* 17). Unlike Quixote, a literary creation with no power over his destiny, Humbert represents his own history through a mask that obscures the cruel world within him. Nabokov thus completes another layer of what he sees as a natural progression. As he says himself: “Don Quixote cannot be considered a distortion of . . . romances but rather a logical continuation, with the elements of madness and shame and mystification increased” (*LDQ* 47).

ANNOTATIONS TO *ADA*
22: PART I CHAPTER 22

by Brian Boyd

Forenote

The relentless momentum towards consummation in the first sixteen Ardis chapters slowed down, once consummation had been achieved, in I.21. Now I.22 stresses even more strongly a different attitude to time: time as not relentless advance but as rapturous stasis, as delighted and exuberant repetition, and at the same time as the anticipation of fond recollection. Even as Van and Ada indulge in tireless ardor, they look forward to celebrating together, throughout a shared future, their memories of present happiness. Already they foresee that their love *and* their memories of their present love will last as long as they do.

I.21 was a parodic extravaganza on the theme of the fall from innocence into (sexual) knowledge, including Van and Ada’s awareness of their incest. Whereas the parodic might have seemed an ironic deflation had it followed the romantic, in the order we find here the parody of I.21 precedes the romance of I.22 and therefore seems not an undercutting but an underwriting, a countersignature, of romance.

I.21 was confined to the library. I.22 roams free, taking Van and Ada together, uniquely, even beyond Ardis, and then back at Ardis itself, into the outdoors as the locale for their pastoral erotic idyll. The chapter has its own elements of parody, but always as part of the erotic and romantic. And as always, Van and Ada see their romance as both a new and fresh snatch of life and yet as amplified in the mirrors of art, in poetry (Van’s homage simultaneously to Ada and to Chateaubriand’s *Romance à Hélène*, echoed in French and refracted into English and Russian, which becomes the refrain of their love) and in painting