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NEWS

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Nabokov Society News

The new Society officers are Zoran Kuzmanovich (Davidson College), President and Julian Connolly (University of Virginia), Vice-President.

In 2005 the Society had 177 individual members (122 USA, 55 abroad) and 88 institutional members (71 USA, 17 abroad). Society membership/subscription income for the year was $5,747; expenses were $5,732. Thanks once again to the generosity of its members, in 2005 the Society forwarded $369 to The Pennsylvania State University for support of the Zembla website.

Membership in the USA appears to be declining thus far in 2006. This unfortunately raises postal costs for the mailing of reminders and the loss of bulk mailing rates for the spring issue. It would be most helpful if members/subscribers paid their dues/subscriptions in a timely manner each year prior to the month of May.

Important - Please Note: Because of printing and postal rate increases over the past seven years, the 2007 membership/subscription rates for *The Nabokovian* must now be modestly raised. Beginning in 2007 the new rates will be: individuals, $19 per year; institutions, $24 per year. For surface postage outside the USA add $10; for airmail add $14. These modest increases will be the first increases in seven years.

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Odds and Ends

– The Third International Conference on Nabokov, "Annotating vs. Interpreting Nabokov," will be held June 21-23 at the Centre Universite Mediterraneen (Nice, France) under the direction of Maurice Couturier.

– The Seventh Vladimir Nabokov International Summer School, to be held at the Nabokov Museum in St. Petersburg, will run from July 24 - August 7. The two series of seminars will be conducted by Maria E. Malikova (Institute of Russian Literature, Pushkin House) and Yuri Leving (Dalhousie University).

– The annual MLA Nabokov Society sessions this year – Philadelphia, Dec. 28-30 – will be (1) "Critical Issues in Nabokov Scholarship," chaired by Ellen Pifer (University of Delaware), and (2) Open Session, any topic, chaired by Julian Connolly (University of Virginia).

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I wish to express my greatest appreciation to Ms. Paula Courtney for her essential, on-going assistance, for more than 25 years, in the production of this publication.

NOTES AND BRIEF COMMENTARIES
By Priscilla Meyer

Submissions, in English, 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 editorial alterations. Please incorporate footnotes 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. Please observe the style (single-spacing, paragraphing, signature, etc.) used in this section.

NABOKOV AND BRET HARTE: AN OVERLOOKED ALLUSION IN *LOLITA*

In chapter 3 of part two of *Lolita*, Humbert reminisces about the movies he and Lolita viewed during their travels. Not only did they see, "oh, I don't know, one hundred and fifty or two hundred programs during that one year," but Lolita's tastes were indiscriminate: "Her favorite kinds were, in this order: musicals, underworlders, westerners." The latter type featured "the mahogany landscape, the florid-faced, blue-eyed roughriders, the prim pretty schoolteacher arriving in Roaring Gulch," etc. This final phrase alludes to the plot of Bret Harte's tale "The Idyl of Red Gulch" (1869), in which a young eastern schoolmarm named Miss Mary arrives in a California mining camp and falls in love with the dissolute miner Sandy Morton. (Nabokov conflates the titles of two Harte stories, "Red Gulch" and "The Luck of Roaring Camp.")

But Nabokov may have had an altogether different source for the plot and title of Harte's story. On 21 June 1955, several months after Nabokov finished a draft of the novel but shortly before he received page proofs (Nabokov, "*Lolita* and Mr. Girodias," *Evergreen Review*, 11 [February 1967], 37-41), an adaptation of Harte's tale was nationally televised on the popular program "The U. S. Steel Hour." The episode, entitled "Red Gulch," featured Teresa Wright as Miss Mary, Franchot Tone as Sandy Morton, and Jayne Meadows, Amy Douglass, and Russell Collins in supporting roles, two of them new to the plot (http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0045449). Nabokov apparently saw the program—after all, he also enjoyed "westerners" (Alfred Appel Jr., "Introduction" to *The Annotated Lolita* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970], p. xliv)—and apparently inserted a reference to it in the proof of his new novel.

—Gary Scharnhorst, Albuquerque NM

DUALITY AND HARMONY: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE VARIANTS IN *PALE FIRE*

It is impossible to fully understand *Pale Fire* without incorporating the variants of Shade's poem into an analysis of the antithetical yet synthesized realms of reality and spirituality. Rather than mere fabrications of Kinbote's fantasy or fragmentary refuse from Shade's mundane realism, the variants form a crucial bridge between the disparate worlds. In doing so, they dramatically alter the work's structure, and—more important—redefine Shade as the ideal Nabokovian figure, a perfect synthesis of fantasy and reality.

Kinbote explicitly and repeatedly identifies the variants as the key to his Zemblan interpretation, causing them to be too readily dismissed as fabrications and fallacious insertions. While Kinbote's hand is apparent in certain places, in most instances evidence reveals Shade's authorship. Therefore, although Kinbote latches onto them to construct an invented

reality, the variants, *independent of Kinbote's projections*, fundamentally alter the nature and significance of the poem by revealing Shade's own fascination with the spiritual afterlife, despite his apparent abandonment of this theme in the final version.

At critical points throughout the poem, the variants diverge sharply from the mundanity of the final version, venturing into the realm of the spiritual and fantastic. Thus, two parallel but distinct poems run through the first three cantos, one incorporating the variants, the other excluding them. In the fourth canto, which is marked by massive revisions, the variants disappear, or more accurately, are inserted into the final poem: Shade finally gains the courage to embrace the spiritual, while retaining his grounding in reality. Thus, the fourth canto is a perfect harmonic synthesis of the actual and spiritual. In this harmony, Shade discovers the true nature of existence.

The variants are, on the most superficial level, the bridge between Shade's poem and Kinbote's Zembla. Kinbote explicitly reveals his reliance upon the variants, claiming:

> but we also find that despite the control exercised upon my poet by a domestic censor and God knows whom else, he has given the royal fugitive a refuge in the vaults of the variants he has preserved; for in his draft as many as thirteen verses, superb singing verses...bear the specific imprint of my theme, a minute but genuine star ghost of my discourse on Zembla and her unfortunate king (492).

Retreating from the notion that his Zemblan theme pervades Shade's entire poem, Kinbote seizes upon the variants as exceptions to the mundanity of Shade's general theme; he recognizes their extraordinariness, and in doing so admits that Zembla can be found only in the variants. Thus Kinbote, having hidden the notecards bearing the variants in his "innermost left-breast pocket" (657) declares: "I was holding all Zembla pressed to my heart" (649).

Given that Kinbote is an exceedingly unreliable narrator, the legitimacy of the variants, individually and collectively, is necessarily suspect, both because he ascribes such a strong Zemblan significance to them and because, as drafts disconnected from the final poem, they are more subject to tampering than the poem itself is. There is undeniably evidence of Kinbote's manipulation in some of the variants. He acknowledges that Sybil would not remember "one or two of the precious variants" (655). This implies, however, that Sybil *would* remember all but one or two of the variants, legitimizing them.

Kinbote actually admits to fabricating one of the variants, which reads: "Ah, I must not forget to say something/That my friend told me of a certain king" (487). In his recantation, however, he insists that this is an isolated incident, and points out that his two lines "do not even scan properly" (603), justifying his self-recrimination as a "miserable rhymester" (649). Kinbote is incapable of producing verse and therefore cannot be the author of the variants which do scan properly.

Assuming that Kinbote did not actually influence Shade in writing the variants as he claims to have done and that Kinbote did not write them himself, the relationship between the variants and Zembla must be reconceived: Shade, in the variants, expresses a worldview which is compatible with the imaginary realm of Zembla in a way in which the final poem is not, causing Kinbote to embrace them as the key to Zembla. Kinbote's fantasy aside, however, this variant worldview creates an alternate poem running parallel to the final version, exploring the spiritual and otherworldly realms instead of mundane Appalachia.

One representative variant referring to Shade's late Aunt Maud replaces the lines:

> She lived to hear the next babe cry. Her room
> We've kept intact. Its trivia create
> A still life in her style: the paperweight
> Of convex glass enclosing a lagoon,
> (90-93)

with

> She lived to hear the next babe cry. Her room
> We've kept intact. Its trivia for us
> Retrace her style: the leaf sarcophagus
> (A Luna's dead and shriveled-up cocoon) (517)

Kinbote exhibits his lepidopteral ignorance in using a dictionary to define "Luna," suggesting that he could not have fabricated this variant. Structurally, the variant presents the other half of Aunt Maud's personality along with her transition into death, two elements which the final poem ignores. Shade claims that Maud possessed "a taste/For realistic objects interlaced/With grotesque growths and images of doom" (87-89). The "convex glass enclosing a lagoon" in the final poem depicts Maud in her purely realistic aspect; "A Luna's dead and shriveled up cocoon" in the variant exposes her otherworldly element. The paperweight, literally a "still life," seeks to preserve Maud as a static memory. She is recreated as if she never passed on. The leaf sarcophagus, conversely, is not a trapped still life, but a retracing of Maud's life and passage into death. The sarcophagus does not preserve the dead body, but dissolves it–sarcophagus literally means flesh-eater–leaving only a trace memory in this world. These variant lines express the otherworldly as grotesque, a demonic realm seen in a goetic mirror. Yet simultaneously, the cocoon image evokes the liberation and beautification of a caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly: there is a victory implied in moving beyond the world. Shade first delves into the otherworldly Maud in the draft, then, in a thematic reversal, chooses to consider only her worldly element in the final version. This variant provides a glimpse into the poem which Shade might have created, but stops short. Shade retreats, not daring to venture into the unknown and perhaps also, as Kinbote suggests, "because his moth's name clashed with "Moon" in the next line" (518). Poetic exigencies–the compelling force of mundanity–destroy this otherworldly link which Kinbote seeks desperately to recreate.

In Canto Two, Shade replaces the lines:

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By feigned remoteness in the windowpane.
I had a brain, five senses (one unique),
But otherwise I was a cloutish freak.
(131-34)

with

As children playing in a castle find
In some old closet full of toys, behind
The animals and masks, a sliding door
[four words heavily crossed out] a secret corridor—
(520)

The seeming direct allusion to Kinbote's story makes the lines suspect, though Kinbote more probably adapted the verses to fit his own story, obscuring four inconvenient monosyllabics in the final verse. Seen thus, Kinbote constructs the critical transition from Zembla to Appalachia around this secret corridor, continuing to build his fantasy through the variants.

More important, these two alternatives are thematic antitheses and create a fundamental bifurcation in the two alternate versions of the poem. The waxwing in the final version is slain by the window–a barrier through which one can see, but never pass. The secret door of the variant, conversely, obscures the tunnel but provides access to it–and through it, the link to another world. Shade in the final version of "Pale Fire" models perfectly his poor waxwing: he firmly believes in the afterlife, but can never link himself to it. After his near-death revelation, he is disillusioned by mundanity: "Life Everlasting—based on a misprint!" (479). His imagined white fountain, "the feigned remoteness," distracts and fascinates him, and then he crashes into a typographical refutation: the windowpane. The variant provides a critical philosophical alternative; Shade's poem need not kill the waxwing.

The variants appear again as otherworldly reflections of the original poem:

But who can teach the thoughts we should roll-call
When morning finds us marching to the wall
Under the stage direction of some goon
Political, some uniformed baboon?
(597-600)

becomes

Should the dead murderer try to embrace
His outraged victim whom he now must face?
Do objects have a soul? Or Perish must
Alike great temples and Tanagra dust?

The final text contemplates the last moments of life, "marching to the wall" to face a firing squad, while the variant considers the immediate otherworldly impact of death. Though it does not provide an explanation of the afterlife, but only asks a series of unanswered questions, at least the variant contends with these questions. The final version retreats to several seconds before the firing squad casts down the final curtain "Under the stage direction of some goon." It fails to address the other shore at all. Shade's poem, in its final version, is a surrender to failure: he backs away from the otherworldy contemplated in the variants and contents himself with his safe, assured, Appalachian world. He remains the waxwing foiled by the windowpane.

Shade's consideration of life and death continues in the variant which replaces

Nor can one help the exile, the old man
Dying in a motel, with the loud fan
Revolving in the torrid prairie night
And, from the outside, bits of colored light
Reaching his bed like dark hands from the past
Offering gems; and death is coming fast.
(609-14)

with

Nor can one help the exile caught by death
In a chance inn exposed to the hot breath
Of this America, this humid night:

> Through slatted blinds the stripes of colored light
> Grope for his bed—magicians from the past
> With philtered gems—and life is ebbing fast. (p.608)

Unlike most variants, the fundamental meaning remains unchanged between these nonetheless strikingly distinct verses. Subtle variations, however, dramatically alter the tone of the two: "the old man / Dying...and death is coming fast" in the final version is "caught by death...and life is ebbing fast" in the variant. While apparently identical, if reciprocal, statements, the variant insinuates that death arrives first ("caught by death") then life fades ("and life is ebbing fast"). The final version implies the opposite, where death has not arrived even at the final line. Like the variant exchanging a corridor for a window pane, these alternate verses suggest that there is no set barrier between life and death, but that some transition exists– that death flows from life, and in some realm, both coexist. The final version admits the exile is dying, but suggests that in this process, death has not yet come: life and death are mutually exclusive. The variant which Shade retreats from allows for communication and interpenetration between the worlds of life and death and hint at the possibility of a synthesis. The lines of the final version leave him with only Middle America to ponder.

Although Shade's retreat into mundane considerations seems to condemn him and render Kinbote his artistic superior for embracing, if incorrectly, the otherworldy implications beneath the surface of the poem, the final lines of "Pale Fire" redeem Shade. The variants disappear and the two worlds converge. As Kinbote claims,

> Canto Four was begun on July 19, and as already noted, the last third of its text (lines 949-999) is supplied by a Corrected Draft. This is extremely rough in appearance, teeming with devastating erasures and cataclysmic insertions, and does not follow the lines of the card as rigidly as the Fair Copy does. Actually, it turns out to be

> beautifully accurate when you once make the plunge and compel yourself to open your eyes in the limpid depths under its confused surface. It contains not one gappy line, not one doubtful reading (443-444).

These anomalous final lines, apparently the product of Shade's shifting convictions resulting in "devastating erasures and cataclysmic insertions," differ markedly from the rest of the poem. First, the simultaneous elimination of the undercurrent of variants and dramatic alterations in the final version suggest that the two levels of meaning traced throughout the poem no longer exist, but have converged into a single entity, "extremely rough in appearance" but "beautifully accurate when you once make the plunge..." Shade has, in the final fifty lines of his poem, achieved a synthesis of the real and the supernatural, the actual and the artistic. Through this, he transcends both his former mundanity and Kinbote's fantasy.

Kinbote is mistaken in claiming that the thousandth line should read: "I was the shadow of a waxwing slain." Shade is definitely not the waxwing at the poem's conclusion. There is a distinct symmetry in this: Shade begins the poem as the shadow of a waxwing. Within the body of the poem, he presents two diverging alternatives: in the final poem he remains the waxwing; in the variant he exposes the secret door to Kinbote's fantasy. At the poem's conclusion, he is neither Kinbote nor the waxwing's shadow; in the synthesis of these opposing values, in the imminent shadow of death, he has become something far greater.

This synthesis, achieved only at the conclusion of his life, is not a fantastic revelation, but simply the achievement of harmony:

> And if my private universe scans right,
> So does the verse of galaxies divine
> Which I suspect is an iambic line.
> I'm reasonably sure that we survive
> And that my darling somewhere is alive,

As I am reasonably sure that I
Shall wake at six tomorrow, on July
The twenty-second, nineteen fifty-nine,
And that the day will probably be fine (974-82).

Shade does not achieve the understanding of the other world which he struggles for throughout the variants, nor does he run from that world, as he does in his final poem. Instead, he finds a middle point between these extremes in which he can live. He cannot know the answers to his questions, but he can be "reasonably certain" of the artistic and rational harmony of the universe. Through equanimity, where his "private universe scans right," he can find a degree of peace within the larger world. He stands between his former agnostic belief that nothing can be known–"a hereafter none can verify" (222) and Kinbote's fanciful invented–and therefore invalid–answer. In this synthesis, Shade finds the truth. It does not matter that his last prediction is mistaken, or even that the others might be; he has found a way to live, and therein lies his apotheosis. His death by gunshot confutes TS Eliot: the world does not end in a whimper, but with a bang.

—James Maguire, Harvard University

ADAKISME, DOLIKISME; THE KIRKALDY CONNECTION

There is a playful but enigmatic passage at a very important point in *Ada*, 1.22: 141.14-16: "There was a well-known microlepidopterist who, having run out of Latin and Greek names, created such nomenclatorial items as Marykisme, Adakisme, Ohkisme. She did."

No specific interpretation was given to this sentence by any of the commentators. Brian Boyd ("Annotations to Ada", *The Nabokovian,* 2004, 52: 62-63) notes that it is a play on "-

kiss me," and that taxonomic names indeed do not have to be based on strictly Latin terms.

However, these three "nomenclatorial items" do have a direct, hidden source. This story, or rather an Edwardian entomological pun, still circulates on the fringes of the taxonomic crowd (see, for example, May R. Berenbaum. *Buzzwords: A Scientist Muses on Sex, Bugs, and Rock 'n' Roll*, National Academies Press, 2000, 159).

The story is that, in 1904, the renowned British-American entomologist named George Willis Kirkaldy (1873-1910) who worked on so-called true bugs, order Hemiptera, created a series of generic names for his beloved bugs, among them: *Ochisme, Dolichisme, Elachisme, Florichisme, Isachisme, Marichisme, Nanichisme, Peggichisme*, and *Polychisme*. "-chisme" of course is pronounced "KISS-me."

Kirkaldy died in 1910 in San Francisco, aged only 36. In 1912, he was posthumously criticized for frivolity by the Zoological Society of London. "Presumably, eight years elapsed before anyone in the Zoological Society actually pronounced these names out loud and realized that the series provided a plea for osculatory adventures" (Berenbaum, 2000). All these bug names, however, were, and are, perfectly available according to zoological nomenclature, although some of them were synonymized since 1904.

I do not know where in his entomological career Nabokov picked up George Kirkaldy's precious pun. It has been known to many; it is still around, now mostly on the trivia websites. However, the original Kirkaldy paper, "Bibliographical and nomenclatorial notes on the Hemiptera. No. 3," appeared in the famous British journal, *The Entomologist* (1904, 37: 279-283). Nabokov's own first publication in English, "A Few Notes on Crimean Lepidoptera" (1920), appeared in the same journal, one of his favorites, as Johnson and Coates remind us in their wonderful *Nabokov's Blues* (McGraw-Hill, 2001). Nabokov read this journal for decades: he wrote to his wife from Prague in 1930 how he "..gnawed into old numbers of *The Entomologist*" (Boyd & Pyle, *Nabokov's Butterflies*, Beacon Press, 2000);

those were "lovingly stacked ... on the table beside his bed" by his mother (Johnson & Coates). Nabokov published two more papers in *The Entomologist*, in 1931 and 1948.

Would it be too much to assume that Nabokov had in fact seen the original Kirkaldy publication in his young years in Russia? Already by 1910, he was "voraciously reading entomological periodicals, especially English and Russian ones" (*Speak, Memory*, 6.2), among which the English "were then the best in the world" (*Drugie berega*, 6.2, in Russian). In a 1962 interview, Nabokov said "In my early boyhood all the notes I made on the butterflies I collected were in English, with various terms borrowed from that most delightful magazine *The Entomologist*" (*Strong Opinions*, 5).

Nabokov used three names in *Ada*: one is Adakisme; two others, Ohkisme and Marykisme, are original Kirkaldy names, *Ochisme* and *Marichisme*. What is a Mary doing in *Ada*? Is it another eruption of the "marigold" (marybud) motif, or also a reference to Nabokov's own first novel and first love, "Mary"?

Among the original Kirkaldy names not present in *Ada*, on the same page as *Ochisme* and *Marichisme*, is *Dolichisme*, and Dolly is Lolita, referenced in *Ada* many times. Ada of course plays "Dolores, a dancing girl" in *Don Juan's Last Fling*. One has indeed to solve the puzzle of Kirkaldy, and jump back to the 1904 pages of *The Entomologist* to see the 1955 "Dolly" once again, reflected in Ardis of 1884. (Note that "chisme" also means "gossip" in Spanish, a strange coincidence? Do we hear also a tinge of "kismet" here?).

Kirkaldy created many other whimsical generic names such as *Apache, Geisha, Nirvana, Peregrinator*, and *Texas*; one of his 1902 names even honored the Hawaiian king, *Kamehameha*. Amazingly, in 1906 Kirkaldy also authored the hemipteran name *Lucinda* (!). I am tempted to think that, of all people, Nabokov would check his *Nomenclator Zoologicus* (Neave, 1939), the standard reference list of all generic names in zoology, for Lucette's full name: too many coincidences. Quite incidentally, "Neave" and "Veen" make a nice phonetic palindrome. Sheffield Airey Neave (1879-1961) was a famous

British entomologist, and several butterfly species are named by him and after him.

In addition, long before Neave (1939) became available, one of the standard reference books in zoology was an earlier *Nomenclator Zoologicus* authored by Scudder (1882). Samuel Hubbard Scudder (1837-1911) was the most famous American lepidopterist, whose *Butterflies of the Eastern United States and Canada, with Special Reference to New England* (1889) Nabokov read as a child and called "stupendous" (*Speak, Memory*). Scudder worked in the same Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, where also all Scudder's collections are deposited. Among many other insect species, *Lycaeides scudderi* (now *Plebejas idas scudderi*) (Lycaenidae) was named after Scudder, as well as the famous Karner Blue, *Lycaeides* (now *Plebejus*) *melissa samuelis* Nabokov, 1943; its holotype was collected by Scudder. The story of Karner Blue is told in Zimmer's *A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths* and detailed in Johnson & Coates' *Nabokov's Blues*.

The fact that in *Ada* Nabokov ascribes Kirkaldy-style names to "a well-known microlepidopterist" (while Kirkaldy was a well-known *hemipterist*) appears to be an intentional hoax, designed to confuse a future Nabokovian who would search in vain for these names among Microlepidoptera (the suborder of Lepidoptera that includes small moths), and after not finding any would shrug these names off as another unexplained quirk of Nabokov's ebullient fantasy. Indeed, by the time of *Ada*'s writing, the multitude of lepidopteran motifs in Nabokov's *ouevre* was already so well-known and overinterpreted that planting a *fake* lepidopteran reference among many real ones seems very much fitting in *Ada*'s deceptive antiworld.

Otherwise, one has to assume that Nabokov used Kirkaldy's names following a second-hand entomological rumor without even checking their source or taxonomy, and indeed thought that the "-chisme" names were authored by a microlepidopterist. This strikes me as impossible, especially since *Ochisme* and

Marichisme are easily found in the alphabetical listing of Neave (1939), and checking a generic name and its author is a routine procedure, which, however, Nabokov failed to do at least once. In 1945, he created the generic name *Pseudothecla*, not realizing that this name was already used by Embrik Strand in 1910 for another taxon; and Strand's name is indeed listed in Neave (1939, 3: 1007). This error led Francis Hemming in 1960 to approach Nabokov and suggest a valid "replacement name" *Nabokovia* (Zimmer, *A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths*, 204, 246).

I have no doubt that Nabokov's names listed in *Ada* have a Kirkaldy origin. So far it is not clear, however, whether Nabokov had indeed seen the original Kirkaldy (1904) paper, or whether he checked Kirkaldy's names (including the hidden *Dolichisme)* against Neave (1939) or other available sources when writing *Ada*. I think that at least the latter was quite possible, especially after the Hemming incident.

The final rewarding discovery awaits the ardent researcher who notices which taxonomic group (family) of Hemiptera Kirkaldy's names belong to. At least two of them, *Ochisme* and *Dolichisme*, are proud members of Cimicidae, the bedbug family, which includes that most infamous creature, the bedbug (*Cimex lectularius*). The cimicids are ectoparasites that feed on the blood of mammals and birds. It is beyond this note to explore the rich bedbug motif in Russian literature (not even mentioning Mayakovsky's play *The Bedbug*); it ranges from the roadside hotels where *klopy da blohi zasnut' minuty ne dayut* ("bedbugs and fleas don't give one a minute's sleep") (*Eugene Onegin*, 7, XXXIV, Nabokov's translation) to a "mature bedbug" that pre-tortures the hero of "Cloud, castle, lake." Even some places in Ardis (the shooting gallery) "crawled with bedbugs" (1.34: 212.11). It is, however, a mild shock to discover the "kiss" motif crossing the "blood" motif so prominent in Ada (Chateaubriand's mosquito, etc.) in the image of that classical synanthrope.

Kirkaldy's tradition was recently revived by the American entomologist Neal Evenhuis who named a new genus and

species of a fossil fly from amber *Carmenelectra shechisme* (*Zootaxa*, 2002, 100: 1-15). The description says: "The genus-group name is named for television, film, and magazine personality, Carmen Elektra [*sic*]. Both namesakes exemplify splendid somal structure for their respective taxa. The species-group epithet is an arbitrary combination of letters (13)." The species-group epithet of course is none of that. An extra pun on the pop celebrity's (Carmen Electra) pseudonym is not lost on amber researchers, who often incorporate "electro-" (signifying amber in Greek) into new taxonomic names.

I thank Dr. Brian Boyd for his suggestions on this note, and Dr. Neal Evenhuis for his help.

—Victor Fet, Department of Biological Sciences, Marshall University

FROST AND SHADE, AND QUESTIONS OF DESIGN

In his article in the July 1, 2005 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement (TLS*), Abraham P. Socher brings long overdue attention to the poem that forms the core of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Although the novel itself has been analyzed often and extensively, few have focused on the poem "Pale Fire," composed by John Shade, except to dismiss the fictional poet with the words of his own verses as being an "oozy footstep" behind Robert Frost. Even fewer venture to analyze the relationship between the two poets. I propose that the poem "Pale Fire" is Nabokov's homage to Frost and also his take on some of the issues raised by Robert Frost throughout the volume of his poetry. The poems I find to be the most important to this discourse between Frost and Shade, which I shall analyze below, are "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Birches," and "Design." I will also address Robert Frost's "Questioning Faces" as it relates to Abraham Socher's argument about the Frostian source for "Pale Fire."

The impressive investigation Mr. Socher conducted in his search for the source of "Pale Fire" among Frost's works leads him to reject the conventional rivals and conclude that Shade's poem was inspired by the short and little known "Questioning Faces," published originally in *The Saturday Review* under the title "Of a Winter Evening:"

"The winter owl banked just in time to pass
And save herself from breaking window glass.
And her wide wings strained suddenly at spread
Caught color from the last of evening red
In a display of underdown and quill
To glassed-in children at the window sill."

Socher argues that the first stanza of "Pale Fire" describes a similar scenario when Shade begins the poem:

"I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff – and I
Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky." (1-4)

I am not convinced that the source of "Pale Fire" can be linked to just one poem by Robert Frost, and also that that poem should be "Questioning Faces," which is much less a poem depicting "the near collision of a bird with a sky-reflecting window" (Socher, *Shades of Frost: a Hidden Source for Nabokov's 'Pale Fire,' http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/zembla.htm*) than the feeling of an intimate connection with another being through the sudden realization of their vulnerability. Unlike Shade's waxwing in the first stanza of "Pale Fire," which is "slain by the false azure in the windowpane" (lines 1-2), Frost's owl is a great big bird that has to save herself from breaking the same window glass. The image of her wide wings reflecting the red of the setting sun makes the bird appear even stronger and more powerful, as the children behind the glass stare at her in awe, but then, maneuvering to escape the

collision, the owl suddenly reveals her soft underbelly of down and quill. It seems to me that it is this juxtaposition of greatness and vulnerability that Frost is getting at, both in the poem and when he describes the incident that might have inspired it. As Frost says,

> Once sitting in the kitchen in the last of a sunset, a great owl darkened the room. For a minute in the last sunlight, he showed the whole underside–the quills clear. The sight of that bird right close to you is just like a favor, something you did not expect–as if someone were on your side... You feel flattered when something is vouchsafed you like that. (Jeffrey S. Cramer, *Robert Frost Among His Poems*, McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996, 172)

And yet, there are definitely some similarities between "Questioning Faces" and "Pale Fire": as Abraham Socher points out, both are written in heroic couplets and are rich in avian imagery. I agree that Nabokov alludes to "Questioning Faces" in his poem–he does so, however, in the end of the poem, and not in the lines that Socher quotes. Although I do not see the connection between Frost's owl and Shade's waxwing, the image of the owl's wings catching the "color from the last of evening red" reminds me of the butterfly "dark Vanessa with a crimson band" that "wheels in the low sun" (993-994) following Shade in the last few lines of his poem. Shade's description of this butterfly as it "shows its ink-blue wingtips flecked with white" (995) parallels the owl's "display of underdown and quill" and we can hear a note of tenderness similar to Frost's feeling of intimate connection, especially if we remember that elsewhere in the poem Shade addresses his wife as his "dark Vanessa" (270). Unlike Frost, however, Shade contrasts this vulnerability not with the greatness of the owl (or nature, or another human being), but with the image of "A man, unheedful of the butterfly —/ Some neighbor's gardener" who "goes by/ Trundling an empty barrow up the lane" (997-999).

This juxtaposition becomes even more powerful when we remember Shade's first encounter with death, at the age of eleven, when he is "tugged at by playful death" (140) and the last thing he sees before he loses consciousness is "a clockwork toy —/ A tin wheelbarrow pushed by a tin boy" (143-144). The boy with the wheelbarrow becomes for Shade an image of death that does not heed the beautiful and vulnerable butterfly, nor cares for the intimacy we share with another being. These last lines of course are prophetic–just moments after completing the poem Shade dies at the hand of another man.

However by itself this poem offers only one insight–and perhaps not even the most prominent one–into the connection between the two poets, one out of many that Nabokov's allusions to Frost's other poems can provide. In Canto One of "Pale Fire" we find this description of a snowy evening:

> "Retake the falling snow: each drifting flake
> Shapeless and slow, unsteady and opaque,
> A dull dark white against the day's pale white
> And abstract larches in the neutral light.
> And then the gradual and dual blue
> As night unites the viewer and the view." (13-18)

Socher may argue that "the imagery, meter and mood of 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' are glaringly absent from Shade's poem" (*Shades of Frost*), but these almost perfect iambic lines with their sweeping "o" alliterations (snow/slow/opaque) and hissing "s" sounds (snow/shapeless/slow/unsteady) cannot help but remind us of Frost's lines: "The only other sound's the sweep/Of easy wind and downy flake." In Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods" the rhyme and rhythm of the poem repeat the movements of the falling snow, while the alliterations of "o" and "s" sounds remind of the wind blowing through the branches of the forest. The scene looks mesmerizing as the woods on a winter evening come alive with a wistful horseman riding through the snow and we can almost hear the ring of the harness bells. But upon a closer look we see that the

snowstorm is a reflection of the horseman's inner struggle. The same iambic rhythm that reminded us of the falling snow is also the hypnotic rhythm of a mantra meditation that carries the narrator away from life and the world of reality through the first part of the poem, and brings him back in the last three lines: "But I have promises to keep,/ And miles to go before I sleep,/ And miles to go before I sleep." Notice the chant-like repetition of the last line–it is as if the horseman has to talk himself into returning to reality from the journey of his meditation, because it is not his time to "sleep" yet, in either the physical or metaphysical way (*Pale Fire*, 203). Even the scene of a horse shaking his harness bells contrasts the animal desire to live with the human desire for escape from life, however momentary.

Similar to Frost's poem, in the above quoted lines of "Pale Fire" the meditation of watching the snow fall also takes the viewer away from reality and unites him with the view, even if this unity is just the narrator's image being projected onto the snow outside by the windowpane darkened by night, in the same way that in the previous projection his "chair and bed" were made to "exactly stand/ Upon that snow, out in that crystal land!" (11-12). And if we have followed this similarity so far, the next line makes us stop in our tracks as we read that "diamonds of frost/ Express amazement." It is such an obvious and yet unimposing reference to the poet that we begin to wonder if John Shade is toying with us: is this an unintentional coincidence which we notice only because we want to see it or were we set up to read it as a reference to Frost by the preceding lines of the poem which clearly allude to him? I believe that this reference is intentional and along with Kinbote's comment that "Frost is the author of one of the greatest short poems in the English language, [...] about the wintry woods, and the dreary dusk, and the little horsebells of gentle remonstration in the dull darkening air" (*Pale Fire*, 203), it underlines the importance of Shade's earlier allusion to "Stopping by Woods." In the center of Frost's poem is the narrator's struggle between his desire to escape life and his fear of death, the permanent escape. In "Pale Fire" Shade solves this dilemma by showing that death is not an end,

but a point of transition. From the very beginning of his poem, Shade establishes an afterlife: in verse one, the waxwing after crashing against the windowpane goes straight from life into afterlife, lives on, flies on "in the reflected sky," leaving only a "smudge of ashen fluff" for death; death and afterlife are shown to be a reflection of life, and the rest of the poem is spent wondering exactly how they reflect it. For one as sure of the afterlife as Shade is, death becomes only a moment of transition, too brief and unimportant to even contemplate.

There is a popular assumption made by Shade's critics, including his original critic Kinbote, that the poem is missing one last line, which should have been a repetition of the first one "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain." These critics point to the structure of the poem and say that line 999 (the actual last line of the poem) calls for a rhyme; they also say that such a finale would make the most sense, since Shade is killed just moments after completing the poem. But the poem can not end with Shade's death because he does not die, but "lives on" in the design of his poem, in his afterlife. And most importantly, if death to Shade is a barely existent moment of transition, why would he dedicate a whole line to it, especially the last line of his poem? On the contrary, omitting such a finale and leaving the last line of his poem without a rhyme on this side of life (we do not know, he may continue the poem after death; in fact this omission seems to suggest it) underlines Shade's disdain for death and his complete belief in the afterlife. With this gesture he simply makes death disappear.

The "diamonds of frost" may also allude to another well known poem by Frost. Besides being a winter poem, "Birches" has some "brilliant" imagery: "Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away/ You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen." And more importantly, this poem as well juxtaposes the narrator's desire for an escape with his fear of death. After following the imaginary boy through his swinging on birches, Frost reveals that he too would like to be a swinger of birches, especially when he is "weary of considerations" and life, so that he could "get away from earth awhile." The poet wants to escape, to get

away from life, but only if he could then "come back to it and begin over." The way he is so quick to modify his desire for escape, and then his words: "May no fate willfully misunderstand me/ And half grant what I wish and snatch me away/ Not to return," shows that Frost sees death as something finite and fears it.

Another important allusion to Frost comes in Canto Three of "Pale Fire" after Shade's meeting with Mrs. Z and the white mountain/fountain fiasco. As he's driving home, he has an epiphany: "all at once it dawned on me that *this*/ Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme;/ Just this: not text, but texture; not the dream/ But topsy-turvical coincidence,/ Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense" (806-810). Upon the words "web of sense" in this particular context, Robert Frost's poem "Design" comes to mind. In Frost's poem, a white heal-all flower, a white spider and a white moth are brought together to stage the moth's death as if by some design, and although a web is not mentioned, it is implied–because how else would the spider have caught the moth? If read literally, this implied web is the design that has brought the three unlikely creations together, and it is also the only thing that can make any sense of this coincidence–heal-all flowers are usually blue, spiders are usually black, but it makes sense that a white spider would choose a white flower for a disguise to build his web upon, and not pay much attention to the fact that a white heal-all is a rarity. This design does not come together, however, without the help of a poet who dresses it in powerful images of white: his spider is "snow-drop," the flower "like a froth," and even the "design of darkness" is there to "appall," which also means to make pale, or white (this should also remind us of the white mountain of Shade's afterlife). Frost chooses to make his poem a sonnet, one of the more complex poetic forms, and ultimately he's the one who designs a web on the page that brings about the death of the moth. In the end, his design is beautiful but harsh, and the only playfulness that Frost finds is that which he as a poet brings into it. We can see this perhaps more clearly in "Birches." The poem begins with the depiction of trees that have suffered through ice-storms and

have been bent down by them; the consequences of these storms are severe and even violent: the trees are "dragged to the withered bracken by the load," and once they are bent they "never right themselves," but can be found years later "trailing their leaves on the ground." At the same time Frost finds beautiful comparisons for these victimized trees when he likens them to "girls on hands and knees that throw their hair/ Before them over their heads to dry in the sun," and the process itself of the storms damaging the trees is described in a dazzling arrangement of violence and beauty:

> "...Often you must have seen them
> Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
> After a rain. They click upon themselves
> As the breeze rises, and turn many colored
> As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
> Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
> Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust –
> Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
> You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen."

Nature is not at all playful; on the contrary, it is the "Truth" that "[breaks] in/With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm." But Frost juxtaposes his own playful design to this pattern of beauty and severity when he says he'd "prefer to have some boy bend them," and starts dreaming about this imagined character who rides birches for amusement. As Robert Pack sums it up: "The play of the poem–the poet's power to create a design–is what Frost summons to contend with darkness and confusion" (Robert Pack, "Frost's Enigmatical Reserve: The Poet as Teacher and Preacher," *Robert Frost*, ed. by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, 10).

It is not a mere coincidence that we find a reference to Frost's "Design" in this particular part of "Pale Fire," when Shade finds the "correlated pattern in the game" (813) and becomes conscious of being a pawn in the "game of worlds" (819) played by those who create the pattern. Shade

acknowledges Frost's poetic design that governs life and death; he agrees that as a poet he can have a hand in it. But Shade's response to this idea of design differs from Frost's in one way: for him the design is not one of darkness, but of sense, a game which fills the world with playfulness and provides him some certainty; it is not the enemy he has to fight with his poetry, but something he can work with. In his analysis of the poem in *The Magic of Artistic Discovery,* Brian Boyd comments that Shade "derives a sense of playfulness hidden deep in things, and feels that he can perhaps understand and participate a little inn this playfulness, if only obliquely, through the pleasure of shaping his own world in verse, through playing his own game of worlds, through sensing and adding to the design in and behind his world" (Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's 'Pale Fire': The Magic of Artistic Discovery*, Princeton University Press, 1999, 31).

There are many more references to Frost's poetry scattered throughout Shade's poem, but the ones discussed above hold the key to "Pale Fire:" although they do not influence it, they provide yet another source for the poem, a basis Shade can respond to as he opens up a dialogue with Frost. These allusions give us a better understanding of both "Pale Fire" and a number of Frost's poems, and create an important discourse on the driving forces of life and death, and the artistic design that governs them both.

—Anna Morlan, New York

ODS BOD(T)KINS!

Critics have already discussed a possible connection between Nabokov's kingdom of Zembla in *Pale Fire* and Anthony Hope's once popular romance *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1884). It seems, though, that the two texts are connected through an overlooked link: O.Henry's humoristic short story entitled, with a parodic nod at the well-known book, "The Prisoner of Zembla" (collected in his *Rolling Stones,*

New York: Doubleday, 1912). In this rather silly lampoon of medievalism, there are the king of Zembla, his daughter, "Princess Ostla, looking very pale and beautiful," and the following conversation:
"Sir Knight, prithee tell me of what that marvellous shacky and rusty-looking armor of thine is made?"

> "Oh, king," said the young knight, "seeing that we are about to engage in a big fight, I would call it scrap iron, wouldn't you?"
>
> "Ods Bodkins!" said the king. "The youth hath a pretty wit."

(The Complete Writings of O. Henry, vol. XII. Rolling Stones. *Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1917, 209)*

The combination of the fictitious kingdom of Zembla and "Ods Bodkins" leaves no doubt that the story served Nabokov as a source for names in *Pale Fire.* Since in the 1910's and 1920's O.Henry was the most popular foreign author in Russia, Nabokov would certainly know his stories well. He could read "The Prisoner of Zembla" either in English in his youth or, later, in a Russian translation first published as "Plennik Zembly (skazka)" in a Leningrad collection of O. Henry's stories *Marionetki* in 1924 and reprinted again in 1925. Jokes from light reading of this kind often stick in one's memory for a very long time and may come of use many years later, especially to a "pretty wit" like Nabokov's.

—Alexander Dolinin, Madison, Wisconsin

ON NABOKOV'S DEFINITION OF ART

In an oft-quoted sentence from his afterword to *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov wrote: "For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm." That last, parenthetical definition intrigues me, as it has intrigued many others; its four nouns appear at first glance to be a casual list, a list of four states Nabokov cherished, each appealing in its way but here arranged in an odd alignment, as if meant to be read as synonyms for "art" and one another. Read instead as ingredients, a kind of recipe for art, they make a bit more sense, but remain a strangely idiosyncratic selection. This eccentricity, however, draws one in, to puzzle over the elusiveness of a more solid, logical link between "art" and "curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy."

Nabokov's vision of the world as filled with hidden treasures, surprises waiting to reward the individual who places a high value on curiosity and exploration (the naturalist studying the tricky designs of nature, the good re-reader studying the tricky designs of literature) is well known, and has been superbly articulated by his foremost biographer and explicator Brian Boyd. I believe that, in perfect accordance with such a vision, "curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy" may be read not simply as a list but as a *sequence*, four stages in a process, one that suggests a "way"—a path, as, for example, Buddhism is a path—that is for Nabokov the secret of joy.

Curiosity is the prerequisite, the necessary prelude and first step. Oddness often piques it, as the oddness of Nabokov's description of art piqued mine, because that which is odd or different may reveal new information or new perspectives, lead to discoveries, serve as a catalyst for growth. The old saying "opposites attract" might be modified to a more accurate "otherness attracts"—in matters of intellect, culture, and learning as well as in love. Tenderness and kindness follow, and they are not identical: although both words can mean gentleness,

"tenderness" suggests a fond emotional or intellectual caress, whereas "kindness" suggests a deliberate act of compassion. If we find, in our curiosity, that we are drawn to a person or thing that inspires feelings of tenderness, we react with kindness. Just as friendship leads one to behave with greater sympathy and tolerance toward the friend than one might toward a total stranger, a fondness for a particular author, book, or idea leads one to devote greater time, care, and attention to the object of interest; and here, taken to an enviable extreme, the devotion of the passionate student may segue into a series of ascending steps, noble and invigorating. Climbed well, these steps can lead to a state of grace, even if only a fleeting one; a sense of having touched or entered a higher realm of feeling and being, a rapturous or divine moment: ecstasy. I imagine this "ecstasy" as comparable to, or compatible with, the Greek *enthousiasmos*, which traces back etymologically to roots that literally mean "to be in God" (and lead to the Greek word *enthousiazein*—"to be inspired"—before evolving into *enthousiasmos* and our own "enthusiasm").

In his best works, Nabokov's prose, marked by an extraordinarily heightened cross-referencing of details, wordplay, and hidden patterns, and designed to provide infinite rewards for re-reading (or should I say "provide rewards for infinite re-reading"?), serves as an elaborately prepared field of practice, and an endless workout, for readers interested in this "way." Nabokov's ideal reader is an amalgam of polymath detective, doting lover, wise constructor, and intellectual-sensualist, likely to yell "Eureka!" on the way to euphoria. Such an explorer canvases the landscapes of Nabokov's "unreal estate" with pleasure, to coordinate the fictional details strewn there and coo over the myriad insights and intrigues that arise from sly combinations, as when a peculiar set of particulars implies that a character who died in an early chapter may be exerting a subtle spectral influence in a later one, as a ghost invisible not only to the other characters but also to the uninitiated, casual, or first-time reader. The good re-reader discovers that in a Nabokov work, and in life, reality reveals further layers of depth

and complexity in direct proportion to one's willingness, one's efforts, to continue seeking them—ecstatically.

But, of course, to describe this as a "path" or "way" demands the placement of tongue in cheek, for Nabokov, the passionate individualist, could abide no groups, movements, or schools of thought. Consider it, then, a lesson from an ingenious professor, distilled into four nouns and placed, quietly, between parentheses—a literary aside, given as a mere clue to his priorities, which only incidentally doubles as the key to a mode of thinking and living that might entirely transform one's vision, point the way to an ongoing process of revelation and inspiration, and lead to an endless series of sublime delights.

—Robert Pranzatelli, New Haven, Connecticut

"BRITVA" AND ABSTRACT ART

Nabokov disliked the rigidity and exaggerated shapes of cubist paintings (see Christine Raguet-Bouvart, "European Art: A Framing Device?" *Nabokov at the Limits: Redrawing Critical Boundaries*, ed. Lisa Zunshine, New York: Garland, 1999, 203, 200) as well as their blunt, simple colors. In contrast, he appreciated the "stunning application of pigments" (Ralph A. Ciancio, "Nabokov's Painted Parchments," *Nabokov at the Limits* 241) found in Impressionist paintings; the use of all shades of the spectrum fascinated him. At the same time, he rejected the vagueness of Impressionist representations of the world (246) and preferred Leonardo da Vinci's interest in precision (248).

How, then, does Nabokov convey his dislike of cubism and of other forms of abstract painting? In his 1970 interview with Alfred Appel, he stated: "Malevich and Kandinsky mean nothing to me . . ." (Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, New York: Vintage, 1990, 170) He confirmed his preference for Alexander Benois, that is, for an artist who also rejected Kazimir Malevich's ideas about abstract art. As is the case with

Nabokov's other statements on artists, the reader will be tempted to find out whether Nabokov's works bear out the wholesale dismissal found in an interview.

I would like to propose that Nabokov's 1926 story "Britva" or "The Razor" can be read as a tale in which the author contemplates the shortcomings of cubism and especially the impossibility to transcend objects in the visual arts. I am going to use Malevich's paintings and ideas as a point of departure for Nabokov's rejection of abstract art.

Malevich's artistic work can be divided into various time periods (see Hans-Peter Riese, *Kasimir Malewitsch*, Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999). In the first phase, Russian folk art inspired his naturalist paintings. In the second phase, he turned towards Impressionism. The third phase represents a partial return to peasant art and Russian icons, as Malevich began to feel that artistic reality consisted of emotions which should be represented through idealized aesthetic forms. In the fourth phase, which lasted from 1910 through 1913, Malevich experimented with cubism, cubofuturism, and alogical paintings. His cubofuturistic paintings are based on geometrical forms such as the triangle, the cylinder, and the cube. Color assumes primary importance, and the strong pigments often assume a metallic hue which contributes to transforming angular shapes and figures into machine-like entities. To Malevich, these paintings aim at

depicting the metaphysical and the transrational. Eventually, he developed a school of thought entitled "suprematism." His painting of a black square on a white background (first exhibited in Petrograd in 1915) was meant to represent a new kind of icon. The denial of a relationship between the visual arts and the natural world became a prerequisite for Malevich's goal of depicting elementary shapes expressive of absolute truths. Before 1927, Malevich was a leading figure in the Soviet art world, and this—along with his claims concerning the absolute truths expressed in suprematist paintings—certainly did not endear him to Nabokov.

Having said this, it is not surprising that Nabokov parodies principles of abstract art in his fiction of the 1920s. The emblematic use of white, black, and primary colors, as well as the search for a generalized "new man" contradict Nabokov's interest in individuality, in natural science, and in details of shape and color.

In his story "Britva" / "Razor," which first appeared in *Rul'* on 16 September 1926 and was first published in English in 1995 (*The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, New York: Knopf, 1995, 179-82), Nabokov undermines the idea that moving away from objects into abstraction necessarily offers access to a higher or even to absolute truth. He uses geometrical forms and the contrast between white, black, and red in order to reveal the deceptiveness of supposedly *spiritual* simplicity. Furthermore, the inclusion of a character who turns into an automaton and—finally—into an eyeless marble sculpture implies the anti-individualistic and ultimately non-human quality of any claims to absolute and general truth.

Set in Berlin on a hot summer day in the 1920s, the story presents Ivanov, a Russian émigré and former army Captain who is currently a barber. Business is slow. A man enters the barbershop. Ivanov recognizes the man as a former Soviet interrogator who, it seems, signed Ivanov's death sentence or tortured him to the extent that his death appeared imminent. The details of Ivanov's ordeal remain untold, as the narrative merely

describes how he shaves his customer and how he instills in him the fear of death, until he finally lets the man escape.

The story opens with a discussion of two-dimensional contours as visible indicators of specific human characteristics. (I need to acknowledge that I discussed this story in more detail in a conference paper focusing on the role of exile in Nabokov's short stories ["Erzählerfahrung in den Erzählungen Nabokovs," *Russische Emigration im 20. Jahrhundert: Literatur—Sprache—Kultur*, ed. Frank Göbler in cooperation with Ulrike Lange, München: Sagner, 2005, 225-40]; during the subsequent discussion, Professor Michaela Böhmig [University of Naples, Italy] suggested a possible allusion to Malevich, and I am grateful for her remarks, which encouraged me to pursue the line of inquiry described in this brief essay.) The protagonist, Ivanov, bears the nickname "Razor" because his pointed profile consists mainly of his triangular nose and sharp-edged chin. In contrast, his eyelashes are exceedingly long and softly curved. According to the narrator, such eyelashes denote "certain very obstinate, very cruel people" ("Razor" 179). The angularity of Ivanov's nose and chin resemble the barber's scissors and razors, and these objects can easily be recognized as "weapons" (180). The dangerous potential of his curved eyelashes, however, is less obvious. In order to drive home the narrator's reference to violence, a variant recurs in the image for Ivanov's pent-up rage at having lost Russia: "Like a tightly coiled spring, vengeance lurked, biding its time, within his soul" (180). The narrator thus confirms the deceptiveness of curved and pliable lashes through this image of pressure waiting to be released. In other words, the narrator parodies the notion that specific shapes—such as rectangles and circles—denote one specific immaterial truth. The characteristics of their bearers determine their significance; the forms as such are not filled with metaphysical meaning.

Ivanov's method of clipping someone's hair strikes his German colleagues as typically Russian because it entails the especially noisy and exaggerated handling of scissors. The narrator relishes these unnecessary motions and sounds in a description abounding in onomatopoetic effects in imitation of,

as the text says, "a lot of superfluous scissor-clicking" (179). Interestingly enough, the scissors appear to dissociate themselves from Ivanov since they "keep their blades going lickety-split in the air as if impelled by inertia" (179). And the narrator adds: "This deft, gratuitous whirring was the very thing that earned him the respect of his colleagues."

This description of scissors which seem to move in space by themselves brings to mind Malevich's cubofuturistic rendering of a person working with a grindstone: *The Knife Grinder: Principle of Scintillation* (1912/1913). Here Malevich tries to break out of immobile cubist forms by indicating movement on the canvas. At the same time, the futuristic style makes the knife grinder look as if he were part of his machinery. Applied to Nabokov's story, one may understand the narrator's reflection on Ivanov's inner world as an ironic commentary on Malevich's search for a generic human being: "there was something about this metallic chirr that gratified Ivanov's warlike soul" (180). At the end, the reader's expectation is thwarted when Ivanov—despite his angular facial features and his deceptive eyelashes—lets his victim go rather than taking physical revenge.

Let me now move on from shapes to colors. A weak reminder of Malevich's brief Impressionist period may be seen in the narrator's references to the hot summer air which is not whitish but rather bluish, as in Impressionist representations of the spectrum found in white light. More importantly, the story thrives on the contrast between white and black, complemented by an imagined dash of red. The color scheme of the story confirms Nabokov's implicit criticism of abstract art such as Malevich's works painted between approximately 1912 and the mid-1920s. As a barber, Ivanov is dressed in white; the shop sparkles with mirrors and marble; and he uses white shaving foam. In contrast, the customer is "a short, thickset gentleman in black suit and bowler, with a black briefcase" (180). (He seems to have escaped from a painting by the Belgian artist René Magritte [1898–1967]—such as *The Threatened Murderer*, which Magritte created in 1926, that is, in the same year during which Nabokov published "Razor.")

The white/black contrast at first seems to indicate clear distinctions between the two characters. The narrator stresses, however, that the numerous mirrors in the sun-flooded barbershop create confusion and overwhelm Ivanov's senses for a moment (180). Following the simultaneous multiplication of partial views of the customer in the mirrors, all of the black features of this man gradually disappear. His black suit and briefcase vanish underneath the white barbershop cloak, and shaving foam covers his face. In addition to these reversible physical changes, he turns from a human being into a machine-like entity. At first, the man's eyes "glittered like the tiny wheels of a watch movement" (180). As such, they first move nervously, when their owner recognizes Ivanov; then they freeze into the immobility of fear and denial. Eventually they close as if to protect themselves from perceiving reality, and the narrator stresses that the face assumes the aspect of being eyeless. Reminiscent of his entry into the barbershop, at the end, the customer's "shut-eyed face flashed in all the mirrors. He stepped like an automaton through the door that Ivanov was holding open, and, with the same mechanical gait, clutching his briefcase with an outstretched petrified hand, gazing into the sunny blur of the street with the glazed eyes of a Greek statue, he was gone" (182). In other words, he grotesquely pays for his dehumanizing treatment of Ivanov by becoming blind and insensible.

The color "red" enters this world only implicitly when Ivanov says in a soft voice: "One little slip of the razor, and right away there will be a good deal of blood. Here is where the carotid throbs. So there will be a good deal, even a great deal of blood" (181). This threat merely *evokes* redness and thus counteracts the necessity of representing the color itself, as it will flare up in the reader's imagination at the mention of the possible shedding of blood.

With the ironic depiction of a simple and changeable color scheme, Nabokov dismantles Malevich's notions of the heightened metaphysical content of visual representation reduced to black, white, and primary colors and to iconic geometrical

shapes. The petrification or mechanization process that Ivanov's undisclosed narrative triggers in his unsuspecting customer reads like poetic justice. The statue-like antagonist cannot perceive his environment any more. He becomes an unnaturally clear-cut and rigid object in a world bathed in a decidedly confusing "sunny blur" (182), as the last sentence of the story says.

This interpretation of "Britva" as a critique of abstract art, especially of the early postrevolutionary period, fits into Nabokov's concern with reality as unfathomable rather than as graspable by any art form which claims to possess or express absolute truths. The story "Uzhas" / "Terror" (The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov, 173-78), which Nabokov also wrote in 1926, confirms his rejection of the ideas that the essence of reality is a pleasant phenomenon and that abstraction can convey its essence. The protagonist of "Uzhas" is a poet who is terrified by an experience that he identifies as seeing "the world such as it really *is*" (176). This experience is terrifying because he loses his sense of the links between perceived objects and what they represent. Instead of appreciating this dissociation as an achievement in the sense of the cubofuturist goal of striving for a "transmental" or "transrational" reality, the narrator feels that the experience implies solitude and madness, especially because it leads to dehumanization: "I understood the horror of the human face. Anatomy, sexual distinction, the notion of 'legs,' 'arms,' 'clothes'—all that was abolished, and there remained in front of me a mere *something*—not even a creature, for that too is a human concept, but merely *something* moving past" (177). With horror, the narrator remembers that as a half-asleep child he once perceived his mother as if she were an abstract painting: "an incomprehensible face, noseless, with a hussar's black mustache just below its octopus eyes, and with teeth set in its forehead" (177). The narrator only regains a sense of reality when he is called to his girlfriend's deathbed. He believes that her memory of him, which is not identical with himself in his earthly existence, passed away with her (178). The conviction that the relationship to another human being and the same

deceased person's memory of him saved him from madness implies the rejection of solitary insights into the essence of things. The protagonist rather favors human relationships and even grief at a loved one's death. It also confirms Nabokov's focus on human consciousness. Malevich strove for what he called "transmental realism," as embodied in his portrait of Ivan Vasilevich Klyun (1913). For Nabokov, overcoming the mind and reality in earthly life necessarily leads to isolation and lunacy. Abstraction threatens the delight in detail and the search for beauty as defined by the lepidopterist and lover of all shades of individual colors, shapes, and truths.

—Nassim W. Balestrini, Mainz

LOLITA: WELLSPRINGS AND INFLUENCES

It has not been previously proposed that H. G. Wells's novel *Apropos of Dolores*, published in 1938 (Cape), might be a precursor, source or influence on Nabokov's *Lolita* (first published in 1955). It is not *a priori* unlikely that Nabokov should have "imitated" Wells, in the renaissance sense of "*imitatio*," for he admired his novels greatly. And in fact, though reluctant to acknowledge predecessors of any kind, Nabokov worked into one of his carefully prepared interviews a subtle hint of a connection between his work and that of H. G. Wells.

The kind of connection in question is far from plagiarism or cribbing: it is creative or "re-creative," weaving in themes – sometimes barely recognizable – from an earlier work by another. There is abundant textual evidence in Nabokov's notorious novel completed in 1954 for higher cribbing from the now obscure 1938 novel.

Wells's *Apropos of Dolores* is told in the first person by Stephen Wilbeck, an Englishman living in France and married to an "impossible" wife, Dolores. It is set in 1934. Stephen was previously married, and has an English daughter named Lettice,

who is quite unaware of her true paternity. Her father does not see her until she is sixteen, at which point, we learn in a "flashback," he becomes concerned about how she is doing in life, visits his ex-wife, meets his daughter and offers to finance her through college. Dolores has become jealous of every aspect of Stephen's life and over the three years following his meeting with Lettice, has been insinuating that he has an unnatural interest in his daughter.

Stephen takes a trip driving about Brittany, partly to get away from Dolores, but also to settle on a convenient hotel to which to bring her for a break from Paris. He finds one at Torquéstol. During their stay there, marital relations reach crisis point. Dolores dies of an overdose, most probably administered by Stephen, who, though he is not completely sure he put all her pills into one sleeping-draught, believes he did, and is sure he would do the same again were she still alive.

Having dealt with the obsequies for Dolores, Stephen summons his daughter to Brittany to join him, admitting to himself that Dolores' instinct about her, while crazy, had a glimmer of truth in it. He does yearn for a kind of intimacy with a compatible member of the female sex—Dolores and he had been totally incompatible—and he had indeed treated Dolores as though there were another woman in his life. He and Lettice continue to drive about, visiting hotels in the region. But the supposed companionship evaporates. Lettice returns to England to her fiancé; and Stephen ends, ruminating at length on the subject he frequently claims is the book's chief aim—an inquiry into human happiness, the fate of the human race in general, and his own happiness and future in particular.

There are a number of features in Wells's tale similar to items in Nabokov's *Lolita*, though the particles that make up the kaleidoscopic picture have shifted. In Wells, the Dolores figure is wife, not child; the culpability of the protagonist for the death of the unwanted wife is unequal in degree; the degree of intimacy between the daughter figure and the protagonist is different. Yet the similarities are disturbing; and there are

further parallels to be noted, some perhaps banal, some rather startling.

One that may be architectonic, structuring Nabokov's conception of his whole novel, concerns apes in captivity. The protagonist Stephen describes, early in Wells's story (39-40), a visit he made to the Jardin d'Acclimatation in Paris shortly before the trip that culminates in Dolores' death. There he observed an orang-outang whose look of "patient resignation" causes Stephen to speculate that the animal is not strictly speaking unhappy. Much later in the novel (for Wells is very good at subtly tying up the trailing ends of his images), Stephen feels "like a menagerie animal that is being poked at with a stick" when a woman is trying to fathom the mystery of his relationship with Lettice. This middle-aged woman suspects that Lettice's confused replies when pressed on the relationship indicate a romantic involvement. She is wrong—but her mistake highlights the difficulty of distinguishing fatherly from sexual love.

In his own brief account of *Lolita*, "On a book entitled *Lolita*," written in 1956 and appended to the first American edition of 1958 (313-19), Nabokov claimed that the "initial shiver of inspiration" for the book came from a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, when he was in Paris in 1939 or 1940. The ape, recalled Nabokov, was said to have produced the first drawing ever composed by an animal, and what it showed was the bars of the creature's cage. The "shiver" led directly to his composing a short story in Russian called *The Enchanter*, a prototype of *Lolita*. He goes on to say that the image had no textual connection with the train of thought that led to *The Enchanter*. This appears to be true: there is no ape or ape imagery in the short story, which was written during October and November of 1939, according to Dmitri Nabokov (postscript to *The Enchanter* in the English translation, Picador, 1986).

The "newspaper story" may, however, have had a strong textual connection with the *novel*, the idea having again taken possession of Nabokov in 1949, to emerge after five years'

work as *Lolita* and achieve publication in the sixth year, 1955. There is a great deal of simian imagery in *Lolita*; and there are a few details evocative of Wells's ape (which could well have been the real trigger) in the foreword to *Lolita*, which is ostensibly by John D. Ray Jr. Actually, of course, the foreword is an integral part of the novel.

Humbert Humbert, the narrator of the tale supposedly entrusted to John D. Ray, died a few days before his trial was scheduled, in "legal captivity." "Captivity" is not quite the *mot juste*. We should normally use it of animals (and indeed Wells does so repeatedly in the passage described above). "Incarceration" or "imprisonment" would be more apt for imprisoned humans. Humbert has been quietly assimilated to the ape.

In "John Ray's" foreword, Nabokov reflects on his protagonist "H.H.'s" strange cognomen, which he says was H.H.'s own invention. "This mask," he says of the chosen name, "through which two hypnotic eyes seem to glow—had to remain unlifted in accordance with its wearer's wish." Nabokov's notion of two hypnotic eyes staring through two "H"s is somewhat odd. Two eyes could be said to stare through two "O"s, but hardly through two "H"s. Two "O"s as in "Orang-Outang," perhaps, a name which is almost as repetitious as "Humbert Humbert?" The "masked" aspect is shared with Wells's ape, which is described as the kind that has "a flat expansion of the cheeks on either side so that its face, so far as its lower parts are concerned, looks like a mask. It seems to wear those huge jaws and lips like something that has been imposed upon it, and over them very intelligent light-brown eyes look out . . . .'" Stephen Wilbeck's reflections on the happiness of his ape are a brilliant "figura" for the novel-long reflection on his own happiness.

Sporadic simian imagery occurs throughout *Lolita*. There is firstly the surreal picture of Humbert's first wife (like Stephen, he marries twice) and her lover Maximovich being "used" in an experiment conducted by an ethnologist.

> The experiment dealt with human and racial reactions to a diet of bananas and dates in a constant position on all fours. My informant, a doctor, swore he had seen with his own eyes obese Valechka and her colonel, by then gray-haired and also quite corpulent, diligently crawling about the well-swept floors of a brightly lit set of rooms (fruit in one, water in another, mats in a third and so on) in the company of several other hired quadrupeds, selected from indigent and helpless groups. (32)

Further, Humbert is described as having "aging ape eyes" (41); an ape-ear (50); and an ape paw (260). Lolita is frequently "monkeyish" (60): she has "monkeyish feet" (53), and "yellowish soles" and "long-toed feet" (229). In Kasbeam, Humbert buys a "bunch of bananas for [his] monkey" Lolita (215). Her mother Charlotte is not above "monkeying" to find the key to Humbert's secret drawer (95). Quilty calls Humbert "you ape, you" (300). The café Deux Magots appears fleetingly in a resumé of Humbert's early adult life: a "magot" is a kind of monkey (18).

Wells is not necessarily the source for the simian imagery. R. L. Stevenson's Mr. Hyde with his hairy hand is alluded to by Humbert; and one could argue that a fear of reversion to the sub-human formed part of the post-Darwinian zeit-geist. But it is not easy to banish the spirit of Wells entirely. Take the way Ray draws attention to the heroine's names: "While 'Haze' only rhymes with the heroine's real surname, her first name is too closely interwound with the inmost fiber of this book to allow one to alter it." Such is the allure of the famous first sentence of the novel: "Lolita, light of my life . . ." that we tend to assume that he means her *nick-name* is too closely woven in to be abandoned. But her first name is strictly speaking "Dolores," and it may well be that Nabokov is double-bluffing here, and offering a concealed clue to an unnoticed precursor—*Apropos of Dolores.*

In the body of the text of *Lolita* itself are echoes of Wells's *Apropos* that range from the possibly fortuitous to the highly unlikely "coincidence."

Dentists and perfume traders appear in both novels. In Wells, Dolores suffers from her teeth and blames her dentist for poor treatment and her husband for his refusal to sue the dentist. In Nabokov, Quilty's uncle the dentist plays a role, finally revealing where Quilty can be found. Stephen Wilbeck imagines, when he first sees Dolores, that she could be "something between an artist's model and, let us say, the niece or partner-daughter of a perfume or antiquity dealer" (88). Humbert leaves Europe for America partly to take a (minimal) interest in his uncle's perfume business.

Car journeys and temporary stops at hotels are an important feature of both novels. Indeed, the whole of *Apropos* is in the form of a diary account, with flashbacks, of Stephen Wilbeck's wanderings in his car from Paris to small towns in Brittany, ending in Alençon on the way back to Paris. Each entry is dated precisely. The early part of Humbert's account is likewise supposedly based on his diary, and Part I, Chapter 11 actually drops into diary format. As to Humbert's car journeys and motel stops with Lolita, they are too well-known to need commentary. Yet it is possible that Nabokov actually draws attention to the similarity of his own to the earlier novel in exactly this respect, not once but twice.

Firstly, Humbert falls incongruously into French when describing his and Lolita's itinerary in their aimless travel from one motel to another (156). "*Ce qu'on appelle* Dixieland;" "*partie de plaisir;*" "*raison d'être*" occur in quick succession, only to be tossed aside with an aside: "(these French clichés are symptomatic)." Symptomatic of what? Of the fact that his novel alludes obliquely to another in which the meandering car journeys of a man and his perhaps inappropriately-loved daughter are set in France?

And secondly: "This book is about Lolita; and now that I have reached the part which (had I not been forestalled by another internal combustion martyr) might be called 'Dolorès Disparue,' there would be little sense in analyzing the three empty years that followed" (255). Here Alfred Appel's notes in *The Annotated Lolita* (Penguin, 1991, 430) refer the reader

to Proust, since the next-to-last volume of *A La Recherche* was originally called "Albertine Disparue." The "martyr" to the car could well be Proust's protagonist, for whom his beloved Albertine will always be associated, he thinks, with the smell of petrol because of the period when he used to trail down the roads near Balbec, looking for her. Albertine, like Lolita, was effectively a prisoner of the man who adored her. The volume preceding "Albertine Disparue" is in fact called "La Prisonnière."

But Stephen Wilbeck too was a martyr to the internal combustion engine. And in Wells's novel too, the narrative continues for two sections beyond the moment of Dolores's "disparition," which is the common word for "death" in French. It could be that Nabokov had both authors in mind, and is being mischievously ambiguous, knowing his readership is far more likely to scent Proust as a source than the much ignored Wells.

Some narrative devices in the two novels bear comparison, and it is interesting to reflect on why that might be so. Humbert often imagines himself addressing the "ladies and gentlemen of the jury," either the jury he actually expected to face, or the judgment of posterity. Stephen likewise sometimes describes his narrative as the "*case of Stephen Wilbeck contra Dolores.*" He recognizes the unreliability of his own evidence in the case (94), and he ends condemning both parties, himself for his "deadly self-protection" and cold, light heart. At the end of *Lolita*, Humbert awards himself thirty-five years for rape, and nothing for murder.

Both authors know how to plant tiny indices foretelling the murder their protagonists will commit before the book has ended. "Incidentally: if I ever commit a serious murder . . . Mark the 'if,'" says Humbert as early as page 49 of the book, before evoking a dream he sometimes has, which in fact prefigures the slow-motion, botched way he does finally kill Quilty. But in *Lolita*, we are kept in suspense as to who it is that Humbert will kill – Charlotte, Lolita (whom he often figures as Carmen) or Quilty. In Wells, there is only one possible candidate for murder—Dolores—and her murder is sign-posted well in advance. "Kill or cure" is stated to be the only solution to animal

and human unhappiness (42). An apparently abstract discussion about "superfluous people" has sinister undertones when Stephen's companion ends with mention of the "superfluous dissatisfied woman," and Stephen wonders for an instant "whether [he] had ever talked to him about Dolores" (51-52). And more specifically: "'If ever there was a born murderee,' I said, 'Dolores is the woman'" (167). The "if" is present, ominously, in both narratives.

Wells chooses poison as the instrument, while Nabokov tantalizes the reader with an expectation that he will do the same. We are encouraged to believe that Humbert might actually poison Charlotte Haze in order to have her daughter to himself. He denies any such intent early in the book (72-3), but in an ambiguous manner. "I did not plan to marry poor Charlotte in order to eliminate her in some vulgar, gruesome and dangerous manner such as killing her by placing five bichloride-of-mercury tablets in her preprandial sherry" . . . but in some other way, less "vulgar, gruesome and dangerous," perhaps? A little later, he makes his doctor quite suspicious with his demands for ever-stronger sleeping pills, ostensibly for himself, actually to pursue a fantasy of (so he tells himself) drugging mother and daughter in order to fondle the latter.

Intriguingly, and counter-intuitively in both cases, on ridding themselves or being rid of these "superfluous" wives both Stephen and Humbert find themselves actually weeping. In the course of a near-farcical funeral cortège, in which Stephen is always on the verge of hysterical laughter, "[t]enderness followed pity. To my utmost amazement, I wept. I wept simply and genuinely for that intolerable woman!" (268-9). Nabokov surprises his readers in exactly the same way, even as to the repetition. The fellow who clumsily caused Charlotte's death calls to explain how it happened. "In result of that weird interview, the numbness of my soul was for a moment resolved . . . . I wept. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury—I wept" (105).

One particularly clever narrative device is employed by both authors in the context of the "death of the wife" event or non-event. Wells has Stephen almost give himself away on the

discovery of the corpse of Dolores. He checks himself from acquiescing in the maid's suggestion that he had not come to say goodnight to Dolores in her room, only to discover that had he not contradicted that assumption, the hotel proprietress would have known he was being duplicitous, because she had heard him visit his wife's room. Similarly, Humbert cannot bring himself to drag Charlotte underwater when they are swimming together, only to discover that had he done so, he would have been observed by Jean Farlow, who had been trying to paint the lake in which they were swimming, and had been able to see them so clearly that she could subsequently tell Humbert he had been wearing his wrist watch (I. 20).

Nabokov himself feeds the idea of a Wells influence, or something like it, into the interview he gave to Herbert Gold for *Paris Match* in 1967. (*Strong Opinions,* McGraw-Hill, 1973, 93-107).The interview starts and ends with *Lolita*, but touches on other matters, of which his relation to previous writers forms the longest section. Nabokov denies having learned from any one of a number of writers suggested by Gold. (Following his usual practice, Nabokov had the questions sent in advance, and wrote down the answers. Some questions and answers were added after the meeting and before the printing of the exchange.) Thwarted in his search for "influences," Gold asks "Anyone else?" Nabokov answers "H. G. Wells, a great artist, was my favorite writer when I was a boy." He lists some early Wells novels, claiming they are "far better than anything Bennett, or Conrad, or, in fact, any of Wells's contemporaries could produce." And in his 1964 interview with Alvin Toffler for *Playboy*, he puts Wells at the head of his own list of writers he relished between the ages of ten and fifteen (*SO*, 42-3). Brian Boyd records the amazing recall Nabokov had at the age of seventy-seven of a single detail from Wells's *The Passionate Friends,* a book he had not read for more than six decades. The detail turns out to be something one would call quintessentially Nabokovian. "[T]he hero, in deep distress, just to do *something,* points out the white covers on the furniture, and explains

casually to someone else: 'Because of the flies'" (Boyd, *The Russian Years*, 91).

Apropos of Dolores was not an early Wells novel. It appeared just before Nabokov had the "shiver" that launched *The Enchanter.* Yet we know the kernel of that story existed in Nabokov's head earlier than that. He was writing *The Gift* between 1935 and 1937, and there Boris Ivanovich imagines a novel he might write, in which an "old dog" gets to know a widow with a young daughter who drives him crazy, marries the widow, and . . . "Here you can go on indefinitely" (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963, 179). Therefore it would be wrong to claim that Wells's *Apropos* "suggested" or "was a source for" Nabokov's *Lolita*. However, the reverberations of the word "apropos" in both books add weight to the evidence already presented for a certain studied derivation or adaptation of motifs on Nabokov's part.

Wells brilliantly manipulates the possible meanings of the word. On first noting the title, one takes the preposition to mean "concerning," "about," without reflecting that convention allows one to assume that a book is about a protagonist whose name constitutes the title. The "apropos" looks strangely redundant. But gradually one comes to perceive how appropriate (apropos) its presence is. Wilbeck stresses that his narrative is *about* happiness, thus side-lining cruelly the suffering woman who prompts the meditation: it is only apropos of her that the "real" topic is raised. He draws attention to a verbal mannerism of his friend Foxfield, but we the readers notice that Wilbeck has a mannerism too, the frequent interjection of the phrase "by the by" or "by the way"—"à propos." In another sense, the expression means "to the point" or "fitting," and this is the sense intimated when Wilbeck thinks his so-called memory of having tipped all Dolores' tablets into her sleeping draught might have been a vivid dream—a result of wishful thinking and therefore "very apropos" (249).His final reflections on human nature and where it is heading harp on "incidentalness," the contingency inherent in the "by the by." Our personalities are "incidental:" our "superficiality and incidentalness seem to be inescapable"

(345). It might be "better if men and women never met except incidentally, and were not obliged by all sorts of secondary considerations to pursue and enslave each other" (348). In another world, he and Dolores "might even come to condone one another. In passing, that is" (352). That is, if meeting incidentally. "If we went into particulars, the old sores would reopen."

Nabokov echoes and adapts these French "à propos" in *Lolita*. Part I, Chapter 6 begins "A propos: I have often wondered what became of those nymphets later?" Although the phrase serves to continue the thought at the end of the previous chapter, it is somewhat aberrant to start a chapter with "A propos." He uses the pedantic "pertaining to" (71) and "anent" (163), both translatable by "à propos de." "[A] propos de rien," Lolita puts a bitter question to Humbert (160). Finally, he brings the "apropos" into close conjunction with Lolita/ Dolores. "This book is about Lolita" he states somewhat superfluously, though he quickly adds a suitable context for the remark, as seen above. "Mission Dolores: good title for book," Humbert notes (160). Alfred Appel comments "This book, of course" (*AL*, 391). Not necessarily. Mission—project—intention—propos: Nabokov is perhaps referring, tongue-in-cheek, to the most unnoticed of *Lolita's* precursors.

—Penny McCarthy, London

RUSSIAN POETS AND POTENTATES AS SCOTS AND SCANDINAVIANS IN *ADA*; THREE "TARTAR" POETS. PART ONE.

by Alexey Sklyarenko

> For never was a history of more terror and madness,
> Than that of Russia.
>
> Bovine, bovine, bovine, bovine
> Name, that of a Bolshevik.

In several earlier articles ("*Ada* as a Triple Dream," "Aleksandr Blok's Dreams as Enacted in *Ada* by Van Veen and Vice Versa"), I tried to show the important role that the Antiterran land poetically named Palermontovia plays in *Ada*. This land is mentioned in the novel only twice: in the chapter that deals with the destiny of poor Aqua (1.3) and in the chapter on floramors (2.3). Three other invented lands whose names also have something vaguely Russian about them are mentioned along with it:

"A small map of the European part of the British Commonwealth–say, from Scoto-Scandinavia to the Riviera, Altar and Palermontovia–as well as most of the U.S.A., from Estoty and Canady to Argentina, might be quite thickly prickled with enameled red-cross-flag pins, marking, in her War of the Worlds, Aqua's bivouacs."

What makes Scoto-Scandinavia, the Riviera and Altar sound as if they were names of some Russian provinces? Isn't there a

secret connection between them and the otherworldly Palermontovia?

Let's first consider the most northern of the three lands–Scoto-Scandinavia. An obvious connection exists between it and southern Palermontovia. According to a legend, Lermontov (whose name is present in "Palermontovia") comes from an old Scottish family. The poet himself believed in that legend and thought of Scotland as of his second native land. As he puts it in his poem *Grob Ossiana* ("The Grave of Ossian"), 1830:

In my beloved Scottish highlands,
Under a curtain of cold mists,
Between the sky of storms and dry sands,
The grave of Ossian exists.
My dreaming heart flies to its stone
To breathe in native air puffs
And take from it the priceless loan –
The treasure of the second life.

(Translated by Yevgeny Bonver)

In 1613, in the so-called Time of Troubles (1605-1613), George Leirmont, a Scotsman in the Lithuanian service, was taken as a prisoner of war by the Russians, adopted Orthodoxy and continued his career as a subject of the tsar. He is believed to be the originator of the Russian Lermontov family. In his turn, he could be a descendant of the Learmonths–and the most famous of them, Thomas Learmonth, or Thomas of Erceldoune, or Thomas the Rhymer (1220-1297), a soothsayer and a poet, possible author of the metrical romance *Sir Tristrem* (a version of the Tristan legend). In the beginning of the nineteenth century (1804) its text was published by Walter Scott, who earlier had included his ballad *Thomas the Rhymer* in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802). The ballad tells the story of Thomas spirited away to the kingdom of fairies where he received his

prophetic gift. And, at the close of that century, the legend about Lermontov's descent from the ancient Scottish poet and prophet Thomas Learmonth was told (as if it were an established fact) by the Russian philosopher and poet (and a prophet in his own right) Vladimir Soloviov (1853-1900) in one of his last articles, "Lermontov" (1899). He analyzed in it for the first time (in his foreword to his translation, in collaboration with Dmitri Nabokov, of "The Hero of Our Time," Nabokov only repeats Soloviov's analysis) Lermontov's poem "The Dream" (1841), calling it "prophetic" and classifying it as "a triple dream." It is on the prophetic ("superhuman") aspect of Lermontov's personality and poetry that Soloviov dwells in his article.

Lermontov's legendary family tree links thus the poet to Scotland. But why is this insular land in *Ada* connected by a hyphen, as if by a bridge, to Scandinavia? Or did Lermontov here, too, have an ancestor? Perhaps he did (even Russian tsars can trace their origins back to the Varangian Ryurik), but, more likely, "Scandinavia" hints here at another Russian poet–Alexander Blok, of whom K. Chukovsky has said that he was the Lermontov of our time ("Alexander Blok as a man and a poet," Petrograd, 1924, 136). His poem *Vstrechnoi* ("To a Female Passerby," but the title "To Another's Wife" would probably have been more appropriate), from the cycle "Harps and Violins" (1908-1916), five stanzas each consisting of five lines–begins as follows:

I am but a knight and a poet,
An offspring of a northern skald,
But your husband wears a colored waistcoat,
Carries with him a little volume of Wilde, a Scottish tartan robe…
Your husband is a contemptuous aesthete.

That poem (a tiny piece of Scotland is also there) was addressed to Anna Gorodetsky, the wife of the poet Sergey Gorodetsky,

Blok's friend. (Blok was married to L. D. Mendeleev, the daughter of the scientist, which didn't prevent his many romances with other, often married, women; he didn't require from his wife fidelity either, though.) A Scandinavian forefather, a northern skald, was invented by our poet (who, according to Georgiy Ivanov, himself "looked like a skald": see Ivanov's "St. Petersburg Winters," chapter XVII), but he had a right to do so. For, as another poet (Osip Mandelstam, who, like Blok, plays a very important role in *Ada*) put it, "we are free to disdain deliberately our kinship and tedious neighborhood." The poem (from Mandelstam's first book "The Stone," 1915), in which these lines occur, is so interesting that it should be quoted here in full:

I have not heard the tales of Ossian
I have not tasted age-old wine –
why then do I seem to see a field
and Scotland's murderous moon?

And in the sinister silence I seem to hear
the roll-call of the raven and the harp,
and, streaming in the wind, the scarves of men-at-arms
are glimpsed by the light of the moon.

I received a blissful inheritance:
the wandering dreams of foreign bards;
we are free to disdain deliberately
our kinship and tedious neighborhood.

And perhaps not one treasure alone will pass
grandchildren by and go on to great-grandchildren,
and again a skald will compose a foreign song
and will utter it as his own.

(Translated by R. H. Morrison)

A poet's kinship (i. e., nationality) and neighborhood (proximity in time, rather than in space) are not so important to him. What he inherits is not movable and immovable property, but "the wandering dreams of foreign bards." He makes those dreams his own by giving them a new life in his works. The most vivid example of such a poet in Russian literature was, of course, Pushkin, who was strongly influenced by foreign bards (including Ossian) and created in his own language a number of immortal works penetrated by the spirit of Western culture. Now, in his *Ada*, Nabokov does exactly the opposite of what Pushkin did in his "Mini-dramas:" he takes classical dreams in Russian literature (first of all, in Lermontov, Dostoevsky and Blok), to which he as a Russian writer is rightfully entitled, and gives them a new, unexpected, life in a foreign, English, language.

One important peculiarity of those dreams is their oracular nature. All great dreams of Russian literature are prophetic. Lermontov wasn't yet sixteen when he wrote his famous *Predskazanie* ("Prediction"):

A year will come for Russia, a dark year
When royalty no more his crown will wear,
The rabble who loved him once will love forget,
For Blood and Death will richest feast be set;
The fallen law no more will shield the weak,
And maid and guiltless child in vain will seek
For justice. Plague will ride
Where stinking corpses fill the countryside,
And flapping rags from cottages demand
Help none can give, while Famine rules the land.
Dawn on thy streams will shed a crimson light;
That day will be revealed the Man of Might
Whom thou wilt know. And thou wilt understand
Wherefore a naked blade is in his hand.

Bitter will be thy lot; tears flood thine eyes,
And he will laugh at all thy tears and sighs.
And like his cloak and high-browed head,
About him all will be horrific, dread.

(This anonymous English translation that omitted the two closing lines was found at http://molchanova.com/LearmonthLermontovProphets.html; the translation of the final couplet is by S. Karpukhin)

Neither Lenin, nor Stalin resembles the romantic murderer with a high brow and wearing a cloak as imagined by young Lermontov. But, as to the rest, his prediction came true eighty-seven years later, when the Tsars lost their crown and the richest feast was set for Blood and Death. True, Lermontov had the example of French Revolution which had also spilled seas of blood, but still we can only wonder at Lermontov's amazing prophetic power. And one involuntarily gives credence to the legend told by Vladimir Soloviov (who didn't yet know what would happen to Russia in the twentieth century)–that Lermontov's distant forefather was the Scottish poet and prophet Thomas the Rhymer (who had predicted sudden death to King Alfred III).

One of Lermontov's last poems, written shortly before his tragic early death, was *Prorok* ("The Prophet"), 1841. But he himself was a prophet, who predicted imminent death to himself in a Dagestan valley and, to Russia, her greatest disaster in a distant future. At the beginning of the next, twentieth, century, it was Aleksandr Blok ("the Lermontov of our time") who had a strong presentiment of the impending catastrophe. Greatly indebted to Soloviov's philosophy, with its cult of Eternal Femininity, and to Lermontov's poetry, with its Demon, Blok like his teachers had a prophetic gift which manifested itself in his best poems. Here are the lines from his wonderful poem

Rossiia ("Russia") written in 1908 and included in the collection *Rodina* ("Motherland"), 1907-1916:

O Russia, half-starved, beggarly Russia,
Your humble cabins, mean and grey,
Your songs, wild as the wind and wayward,
Are like first tears of love to me!

I cannot give to you my pity,
And I must duly bear my cross...
Bestow your fierce and untamed beauty
On any charmer of your choice!

Let him seduce you, then deceive you,
You shall not vanish, nor yet fade,
Your loveliness shall never leave you,
Though care in time may cast its shade...

What of it? One more care, one tear
To swell the river's murmuring flow;
But you are timeless–forest, meadow,
The embroidered kerchief on the brow...

(Translated by Alex Miller)

The poet *slovno v vodu gliadel* (must have had second sight), for it happened exactly as he had said: Russia soon gave her beauty to a charmer whose name at first sounded like "Lenin" and then imperceptibly began to sound like "Stalin." Alas, Blok himself failed to notice that (or noticed when it was already too late, after he had written "The Twelve," 1918). Russia for more than seventy years plunged into the Zoorlandic night. And although in the nineteen sixties, when Nabokov wrote *Ada*, Stalin–the greatest, along with Hitler, villain of the

twentieth century–was no longer alive, the charmer's spell wasn't yet broken. Russia continued to languish under it.

Paradoxically as it may seem, *Ada* is not about incest. The novel's actual, deeply hidden, subject matter is the sufferings of Russia (a huge real country in our world, not the Antiterran "Estoty") in the terrible twentieth century. On Antiterra, it was "a placid and prosperous century" (3.7), but, in our world (particularly in Russia), blood in that age was being "spilled like water." It is probably not by chance that water becomes the main torturer of Aqua, Van's putative mother, who thought that she could understand her namesake's tongue. Water filling Aqua's bath also filled her consciousness with heart-rending sounds (Madame Shchemyashchikh-Zvukov, of "Heartrending-Sounds" was Aqua's pseudonym with which she sometimes signed her letters to her husband from various mad houses). As I showed in my article on Blok's "dreams" in *Ada*, the phrase "*shchemyashchie zvuki*" can be traced back to several poems by Blok, for instance to his heart-rending poem "*Priblizhaetsia zvuk...*" ("A sound draws near") that was included, like the poem on Russia, in the collection "Motherland." But what introduced a heart-rending note into the sounds heard by Aqua?

Besides aural–so to speak, "aquatic"–hallucinations, Aqua was obsessed with the idea of Terra, a parallel world closely resembling her own Demonia. In fact, the two planets appear to be as alike as two peas (or, in Russian, "as two drops of water"). A similar relationship between the two earths exists in Dostoevsky's short story *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (1877). At the same time, Aqua herself has a double among the characters of this writer who had a penchant for the insane–Maria Lebyadkin, the hysterical wife of the demoniac Stavrogin, in *The Possessed* (1873). This topical novel was conceived by the author as an anti-revolutionary pamphlet, but it so happened that several preposterous ideas advocated by some of its most odious characters were to be implemented in Russia in the twentieth century. In the Part Two, chapter seven ("At the

Ours'"), of the novel, a secret meeting of some young people who discuss the future organization of the world and methods of political struggle is described. One of its participants, a certain Shigalev, invents a theory, according to which nine tenths of the society should be turned into a dumb herd to be shepherded by the remaining one tenth that will enjoy full freedom and unrestricted rights; and the other–Pyotr Verkhovensky–demands "one hundred millions of heads" (again, as if he spoke of cattle, not men) in order to make the rest of mankind happy. If Dostoevsky had only known that both ideas would be implemented in the Soviet Russia: the vast majority of Russian people would be turned into slaves and the cream of the nation–the intelligentsia–would be partly destroyed and partly made to leave the country forever! Even the fantastical-looking number, one hundred million, will prove not in the least an exaggeration (according to the latest historical data, about one hundred and ten million have perished in Russia in the twentieth century as a result of the Revolution and its disastrous consequences).

Dostoevsky was a mystic who loved all kinds of prophesies and predictions. In the May-June, 1877, issue of "Writer's Journal" he discusses *Prognosticationes*, Johannes von Lichtenberg's book of prophesies (London, 1528), the information of which was provided to him "by one of our young scholars" (Vladimir Solovyov who had found this old book in the British Library):

Exsurget aquila grandis in Oriente, aquicolae occidentales

A great eagle will raise in the East, the Western islanders

moerebunt. Tria regna comportabit. Ipsa est aquila grandis, quae

will cry. It will capture three kingdoms. This is the great eagle that

dormiet annis multis, refutata resurget et contremiscere faciet,

sleeps many years, defeated will resurge and make the

aquicolas occidentales in terra Virginis et alios montes Super-

Western aquatic citizens in the land of the Virgin and other Proudest

bissimos; et volabit ad meridiem recuperando amissa.

Summits tremble; and will fly to the South in order to retrieve what has been lost.

(The English text is an accurate rendering of Dostoevsky's Russian translation, not of the Latin original.)

Dostoevsky tries to apply these prophesies to contemporary events, identifying the Eastern eagle with Russia and "the land of the Virgin" with Britain. But what if those obscure lines predict the events not of the nineteenth (as Dostoevsky believed), but of the twentieth century? Suppose that *terra Virginis* actually hints at England (the country that was never invaded in modern history and can be considered "virginal" in that respect). Then, perhaps, *aquila grandis in Oriente* that will make "the Western aquatic citizens" shiver (with love, rather than fear) is Lenin (who attracted the admiration of H. G. Wells and some other British intellectuals) and, later, Stalin (who, in the days of World War II, attracted the admiration of almost the entire English nation, including even George Orwell's)? Such an exegesis seems more likely in retrospect, particularly as in *The Possessed* (the novel whose prophesies proved so much more accurate than those of Lichtenberg's) the revolutionaries–the early representatives of Russian Communism–meet at the house of a certain *Virginsky*. It seems that *this* is what

Nabokov wants to imply in *Ada* by giving to one of the twin girls the name Aqua and to one of the twin planets the name Terra (both words being present, in this form or that, in Lichtenberg's text). At the same time, he arranges things in such a way that Lichtenberg's obscure prophesies also seem to hint at certain characters and events in *Ada*. One can identify Van Veen, *Ada*'s protagonist, with aquila grandis that makes "western aquatic citizens in the land of the Virgin and other Proudest Summits" tremble. He makes the hearts of his two sisters, the virginal Lucette's (who drowns and thus becomes "an aquatic citizen") and Ada's (the Proudest Summit), thrill with love. At some point in the novel (3.8), after Ada refuses to leave her husband for Van, Van (aquila grandis) flies away *ad meridiem*– more likely, though, out of despair, than in the hopes of regaining what he has lost:

"Van kissed her leaf-cold hand and, letting the Bellevue worry about his car, letting all Swans worry about his effects and Mme Scarlet worry about Eveline's skin trouble, he walked some ten kilometers along soggy roads to Rennaz and thence flew to Nice, Biskra, the Cape, Nairobi, the Basset range –

And oe'r the summits of the Basset – "

This slightly altered line from "The Demon" leads us back to Lermontov, author of the prophetic "Prediction." Instead of the Caucasus, it has the invented mountain range "Basset" (actually, Col Basset is a mountain pass near Sestriere, a ski resort in Piedmont, whose name sounds as if it came from the Russian word for sister, *sestra*). "Basset," in its turn, rhymes with "Tacit" that substitutes "Caucasus" in the four lines from "The Demon" which are paraphrased by Van in the preceding chapter (3.7):

And o'er the summits of the Tacit
He, banned from Paradise, flew on:

Beneath him, like a brilliant's facet,
Mount Peck with snows eternal shone.

The Caucasus seems to be deliberately suppressed in those lines (even a "Mount Peck" stands in them instead of Kazbek). But why should it be hushed up here (the Caucasus is often mentioned in connection with Demon, Van's father, elsewhere in the text of *Ada*, just as Kazbek is in Vivian Darkbloom's "Notes")? Is it not because Nabokov's aim is, on the contrary, to draw the reader's attention to it? The Caucasus is *tacitly* implied here, shining, as it were, with its absence. Nabokov wants the reader to remember that Lermontov's hero flies "over the summits of the Caucasus" and to connect it to the fact that the Caucasus is the native land of Stalin ("the Kremlin highlander," as Mandelstam calls him in his anti-Stalin epigram), who has at least as much claim as Lenin to be called "the Man of Might," whose appearance in Russia has been predicted by Lermontov in another poem.

True, Nabokov never admired Stalin's "greatness" and didn't even acknowledge it (in *Ada*, he ridicules Winston Churchill's words about Stalin: "a great good man"). He would only be amused at the Caucasian Stalin's comparing the Simbirsk-born Lenin to "a mountain eagle" soon after the latter's death (Stalin's reminiscences of Lenin appeared in "Pravda," February 12, 1924). This absurd comparison was taken up by Soviet song-writers. Lenin is compared to a mountain eagle in at least two of the thirty-seven songs, whose texts were published in the collection "Songs about Lenin and Stalin" (Moscow, 1952)–"A Song about Lenin" (words by O. Kolychev) and "The Mountain Eagle" (words by M. Lapirov). Stalin, too, is compared to that same bird in several compositions. And only the Ukrainian "folk" song "Falcons" (translation of words by M. Isakovsky) diversifies slightly the avian imagery:

On a green oak tree

Above the expanses of the steppe
Two bright falcons
Talked to each other.

And all people recognized
These falcons:
The first falcon is Lenin
And the other one Stalin.

No, not all people recognized these falcons! Moreover, some particularly sharp-eyed (Nabokov, for example) noticed, and tried to make others see, that they were not falcons at all, but merely crows in falcons' feathers. (If one must compare Lenin or Stalin to a bird, it is the Black Raven from the well-known Russian folk-song "*Chiornyi Voron*"–which is not a "translation" from the Ukrainian.) But according to a Russian adage, "a word can not be left out from the song." And Nabokov uses this word ("falcon") in *Ada*–to his own end. Nabokov's aim here is to represent Van Veen, the son of Demon (who is known in society as "Raven Veen"), and, along with Van, the odious Soviet leaders, as "false falcons" (similarly, Dostoevsky makes his Stavrogin "the false Prince," as Vyacheslav Ivanov has pointed out in his 1916 article "The Major Myth in *The Possessed*"). In my "*Ada* as a Russian Fairy Tale Spun by the Phoenix and Sung by the Sirin" (The Nabokovian #55), I tried to show that Van, who flies away from his sweetheart *za trideviat' zemel'* (to the other end of the world), turns out to be exactly such a bird. It is a different character of *Ada*, the modest Andrey Vinelander (whose unprepossessing looks resemble those of Alexey Kosygin, a Soviet statesman of a younger generation), who is actually associated with Finist the Bright Falcon, the hero of several Russian fairy tales.

But whoever was associated with Finist, it is Van Veen (and, at the same time, Lenin and Stalin) whom Nabokov links to "aquila grandis in Oriente" from Johannes von Lichtenberg's

text. He makes Lichtenberg's prophecy come true not only with regard to the earthly European powers, but also with regard to certain characters of *Ada*–Van and his poor half-sister Lucette, who takes her life because of her unrequited love for him. Her suicide in Part Three of *Ada* is the culmination point of the whole novel, its central event. In my article on Blok's dreams in *Ada*, I demonstrated that Aqua somehow foresaw the tragedy and tried to prevent it from Terra. But she also seems to have had a vague presentiment of disasters that were to happen on Antiterra's twin planet in the twentieth century (and that she probably witnessed when, after her suicide, she finally reached Terra, that old destination of hers).

Aqua is the only character in *Ada* who has a prophetic gift. From the point of view of "normal" people, she suffered from two obsessions. She believed, on the one hand, in the existence of Terra (which at first seemed to her a more attractive world than her Demonia) and, on the other hand, that she could understand the language of her namesake, water. But, if Terra (be it our world, its portrayal in the novels of "Tolstoevsky," or the "Terrible World" of Blok) actually exists, why not also to assume that water has a language? Like earth and air, water is part of Nature, and Nature is always something different from what it seems to be:

Nature is not what you think it is:
It's not a mould, not a soulless face.
It has a soul. It has freedom.
It has love. It has a tongue.

(the opening quatrain of a 1836 poem by Tyutchev translated by F. Jude)

Aqua thought that she could understand that language. Nature has endowed her with that "prophetically blind sense" described in several poems by Tyutchev (one of them is entitled "Madness"),

which enables those who possess it to "hear, feel waters even in the dark deeps of earth." In Russian we say of people who manage to predict accurately future events: "s/he must have been looking into water." Apparently, on Antiterra, in order to predict future events, one must *hear* water rather than see the future reflected in it. Aqua was able to do it. Even before skyscrapers, she envisaged "a future America of alabaster buildings one hundred stories high," and, even before airplanes, she saw "giant flying sharks with lateral eyes taking barely one night to carry pilgrims through black ether across an entire continent from dark to shining sea" (1.3). How could she know this? Very simple: water must have "told" her. But it also must have been water that told Aqua (who failed to realize this) of blood that was being spilled (as freely as if it were water) in our world, on the terrible Terra (due to the time gap between the two planets, Aqua heard in the nineteenth century what happened on Terra in the twentieth). It was probably this that made sounds heard by Aqua heart-rending and painful.

To be continued in next issue.