

THE NABOKOVIAN

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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

Nabokov Society News

Thus far in 2009, the Society has 113 individual members (75 USA, 38 abroad) and 88 institutional members (73 USA, 15 abroad). This is a significant 20% drop over the past year in individual members, while only a 2% drop in institutional subscribers. Until several years ago, 200 individual members was the norm. The continuing drop most likely follows the cultural shift from paper/book-holding to computer/screen-viewing, and this might foreshadow the demise of *The Nabokovian* and the Vladimir Nabokov Society.

Income from society membership/subscription and purchases of *Nabokovian* past issues in 2008 was \$6,634; expenses were \$6,135. Thanks to the generosity of its continuing members, in 2008 the Society forwarded \$343 to The Pennsylvania State University for support of the Zembla website.

VN's *The Original of Laura*, edited by Dmitri Nabokov, will be published in the USA by Knopf on November 3, 2009. Immediately following this date there will be issues published by Penguin in Great Britain, Adelphi in Italy, Gallimard in France, and Rowohlt in Germany.

Odds & Ends

– Gavriel Shapiro’s *The Sublime Artist’s Studio: Nabokov and Painting* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press) is scheduled to appear this June.

– John Updike, who passed away January 27, was a Nabokovian subscriber (1978-2009). At his request, subscription copies went directly to his home at 675 Hale Street in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts, providing him useful information relevant to many of his writings directly concerned with or carrying reference to VN’s life and works.

– *Verses and Versions*, Three Centuries of Russian Poetry Selected and Translated by Vladimir Nabokov, edited by Brian Boyd and Stanislav Shvabrin, has been selected by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as one of the “Best Books of 2008.”

– Paul Grant and Brian Boyd are writing *Lolita: A Biography* for Harvard University Press. Boyd is covering the early parts (precursors, genesis, composition, publication) while Grant is covering the later stages, the enduring aftershocks all the way to the Gothic Lolita craze in Japan.

– Brian Boyd is editing *Think, Write, Speak*, a kind of second volume of *Strong Opinions*, which will include uncollected VN prose, reviews, and interviews. Boyd is also engaged in co-editing, with Stanislav Shvabrin, VN’s unpublished lectures on Russian literature from the beginnings to Khodasevich, which will appear in one or two volumes.

I wish once again to express my greatest appreciation to Ms. Paula Courtney for her essential on-going assistance in the production of this publication.

“BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE”: NABOKOV’S *HOMO POETICUS*

by Sabine Metzger

“I have ransacked my oldest dreams for keys and clues,” Vladimir Nabokov states in the first chapter of his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, “and let me say at once that I reject completely the shabby, fundamentally medieval world of Freud, with its crankish quest for sexual symbols (something like searching for Baconian acrostics in Shakespeare’s works) and its bitter little embryos, spying, from their natural nooks, upon the love life of their parents” (G. Putnam’s Sons, 1966, 20). Nabokov’s contempt for Freud and psychoanalysis is well-known and has been the subject of numerous studies. Freud seems to be omnipresent in Nabokov’s oeuvre: his “active if hostile interest in psychoanalysis” which Phylis Roth observes (“Toward the Man behind the Mystification” *Nabokov’s Fifth Arc*. Ed. J. E. Rivers and Charles Nichol. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982, 43) appears in the shape of vehement verbal attacks in his autobiographical writings and his prefaces, or takes the form of a parody of psychoanalysis, ridiculing it by making excessive use of Freudian symbolism in his novels and stories. “In his tireless battle with Freud,” Jeffrey Berman writes, “Nabokov has created a new art form, psychiatry baiting, and elevated the parody of the psychiatric case study to new heights in his masterpiece, *Lolita*” (*The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis*. New York, London: New York U P, 1985, 211). Nabokov’s open and relentless assault on psychoanalysis caused critics to point out a “link” between Freud and Nabokov. By his constant attacks on psychoanalysis, Geoffrey Green argues, Nabokov gave Freud “substance, thingness” (“Splitting of the Ego: Freudian doubles, Nabokovian double” *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Daniel Rancour-Laferrriere, 374) in his oeuvre and “achieved a link with Freud:

he ensured that whenever the name Nabokov was mentioned, it would conjure up the epithet ‘he who hated Freud’” (373). Berman comes to the conclusion that Freud “is the central figure in Nabokov’s life, always shadowing the novelist” (213), that Freud is “Nabokov’s alter ego, a hated part of the self that the novelist had to defeat again and again” (*ibid.*).

But what stands behind Nabokov’s – often simplistic – contemptuous remarks on psychoanalysis is not the aim of establishing a link between himself and Freud, nor do they or the omnipresence of Freudian thinking in his work reveal Freud as Nabokov’s *alter ego* or Nabokov himself as a Freudian *malgré lui*, as Green attempts to show in his study *Nabokov and Freud* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988). As this essay will argue, Nabokov attacks psychoanalysis because of the concept of man inherent in it. It is true that for Nabokov psychoanalysis and artistic creation are incompatible; this, however, is not only due to the fact that psychoanalysis “subordinates artistic creation to psychological processes,” as John O. Stark suggests in his chapter on Nabokov (*The Literature of Exhaustion. Borges, Nabokov, and Barth*. Durham, N. C.: Duke U P, 1974, 76), but to psychoanalysis’ underlying concept of man, which is the precondition of this subordination: Freud’s notion of *homo natura*. As will be shown, Nabokov’s rejection of Freudian psychoanalysis arises from an understanding of man radically opposed to Freud’s. Nabokov’s emphasis on being “wide awake” implies an understanding of man as existence or *Dasein* which, constituting and disclosing itself in what Ludwig Binswanger phrases as a “labouring dealing” with the world as *koinos kosmos* (“Freuds Auffassung des Menschen im Lichte der Anthropologie” *Vorträge und Aufsätze I. Zur phänomenologischen Anthropologie*. Bern: A. Francke, 1947, 187), situates Nabokov’s aesthetics “beyond” the pleasure principle. What Nabokov finally opposes to Freud’s *homo natura* is *homo poeticus* (*Speak, Memory*, 298) as the artist’s mode of existence.

“Sentient Life”: the *koinos kosmos*

In their endeavour to prove either that Nabokov was a Freudian *malgré lui* or – quite the reverse, following his warning “Freudians, Keep Out” (*Bend Sinister*. New York: Vintage, 1990, xviii) – that for Nabokov, as Morris Dickstein claims, “fiction was neither moral, social, nor psychological but a sensuous exercise in style” (*Leopards in the Temple: The Transformations of American Fiction 1945-1970*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 2002, 124), critics generally ignore the fact that, with his objections to Freud and psychoanalysis, Nabokov does not stand alone. He shares them with Ludwig Binswanger and Erwin Straus, two other contemporaries of his, who equally diverge from Freud and point out the shortcomings of psychoanalysis, and whose approaches will serve to elucidate Nabokov’s vehement rejection of psychoanalysis.

Ludwig Binswanger, who – in contrast to Nabokov – never fails to praise Freud’s achievements in psychiatry, reproaches psychoanalysis for a “tremendous simplification and reinterpretation of human existence (*Dasein*)” by “reducing it to the categories of objectifying knowledge” (“Daseinsanalytik und Psychiatrie” *Ausgewählte Vorträge und Aufsätze II. Zur Problematik der psychiatrischen Forschung und zum Problem der Psychiatrie*. Bern: A. Francke, 1955, 297). At the center of Binswanger’s criticism is the Freudian notion of *homo natura* which locates man between drive and illusion (“Freuds Auffassung des Menschen” 164). He criticizes Freud’s concept of man as *homo natura* as “a genuinely scientific, biological-psychological concept,” a “scientific construction” (166), which Freud, according to Binswanger, pursued with the late nineteenth century scientist’s “epistemological optimism” (166-67). As Binswanger points out, Freud’s construction of *homo natura* is only made possible by a “destruction” of man’s holistic experiencing of man (*Gesamterfahrung des Menschen vom Menschen*), i.e. by the destruction of an “anthropological

experiencing" (175, 176). The idea of the *homo natura* is based on an *objective* approach to man (180) which depersonalizes the relation between physician and patient in replacing the mutual "personal communication in the we-mode" by the "unilateral, i.e. irreversible relation between physician and patient" and "the even more impersonal relation between scientist and theoretical research object" (*das noch unpersönlichere von Forscher und theoretischem Forschungsobjekt*, 180). In isolating and theorizing the self in terms of ego and id, ego and super-ego, this objectification denies any possibility of a genuine existence or *Dasein* which eludes any objectification and discloses itself in an "understanding encountering" (*verstehendes Begegnen*). What Binswanger calls the "ontological-anthropological strangulation of the self" (181) finds expression in the pleasure principle. "The pleasure principle replaces [...] freedom by necessity, consideration and decision by the [principle's] mechanism" (174) and thus makes the *homo natura* the epitome of a domination by drive, which in turn characterizes existence as "drivenness" (*Getriebenheit*). The pleasure principle, for Freud the objective principle or mechanism underlying the *homo natura*, means man's existence in the *idios kosmos* or "private world" which forms a mode of existence which has to be characterized as "being overcome" or "being overpowered" (*Seinsform des Überwältigt- oder Übermächtig-Werdens*) (186). This represents, however, a "one and among many" (186) possible modes of existence (*Daseinsweise*) or mode of being-in-the-world (*Weise des In-der-Welt-Seins*) – other modes of existence are, for example, the being-in-the-world of care (*Sorge*) or the being-in-the-world-and-transcending-it of Love (*Grundformen, passim.*). By defining man as enclosed in an *idios kosmos* and thus excluding him from the *koinos kosmos*, the pleasure principle excludes any self-reliant self whose maturing and growth always originates in a "labouring dealing" (*arbeitender Auseinandersetzung*) with the world as *koinos kosmos* ("Freuds Auffassung des Menschen" 187) – or,

as Bin Kimura says, in the "between man and man" or in the "between world and man" ("Schizophrenie als Geschehen des Zwischenseins" *Der Nervenarzt* 46 (1975): 434-439, *passim.*).

This concept of man as *homo natura* is equally at the root of Nabokov's criticism of Freud and psychoanalysis. It is no coincidence that Binswanger's assertion that the pleasure principle forms merely "one among many" modes of existence is repeated almost literally by Hugh Person, the protagonist of *Transparent Things*, who, reflecting upon one of his dreams, comes to the conclusion that "[t]he erotic theme was just one theme among others" (New York: Vintage International, 1989, 60). Similarly to Binswanger, Hugh does not deny "the erotic theme," i.e. the pleasure principle; he denies – and this bestows upon his statement "the fullest, fiercest, anti-Freudian force" (59) – its priority by reducing its status to that of "one among many." And so does Nabokov: behind his rejection of Freud stands a rejection of the primacy of the pleasure principle and with it a rejection of an understanding of man as subject to his drives and enclosed in an *idios kosmos*. What Nabokov's attacks on Freud reveal is not that he is a Freudian *malgré lui*; what they aim at is not the epithet "the man who hated Freud." Exactly as Binswanger's does, Nabokov's criticism of Freud points to the shortcomings of Freudian psychoanalysis. Whereas Binswanger argues from the viewpoint of the psychiatrist and phenomenological anthropologist, Nabokov speaks as an artist: his concern is *homo poeticus*; and his understanding of man as *homo poeticus* proves to be incompatible with the Freudian *homo natura*.

It becomes evident from Nabokov's statement on dreams in his autobiography *Speak, Memory* that Freud's concept of man as *homo natura* which limits man to an existence in the *idios kosmos* is at the root of his aversion to psychoanalysis.

It is certainly not then, not in dreams – but when one is wide awake, at moments of robust joy and achievement,

on the highest terrace of consciousness, that mortality has a chance to peer beyond its own limits, from the mast, from the past and its castle tower. (50)

Nabokov's denouncing of dreams as irrelevant is not just a verbal attack aimed at Freud's *via regia* to the unconscious – a polemic countering the unconscious by the consciousness. It is linked to the state of being awake, and “being awake” or “wide awake” does not merely signify the absence of dream and sleep and replace the passivity of the dreamer by an activity as Geoffrey Green suggests in his comment on the passage in “Splitting the Ego”: “In dreams, one is the passive recipient of images; when one is ‘wide awake’, one may control actively and shape artistically remembered images into the disciplined array of personal style” (84). Passivity does not make sleep, as Nabokov claims, “a betrayal of reason, humanity, genius” (*Speak, Memory* 108). What distinguishes the dream from being awake is not an “activity” in terms of “control” and “discipline” but the relation between man and the world which being awake implies. Whereas the dreamer is enclosed in his “private world” (Erwin Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Psychologie*. (1936) 2nd ed., repr. Berlin, Heidelberg, New York: Julius Springer, 1978, 281) or *idios kosmos*, the man awake is engaged in the *koinos kosmos*, i.e. the world as shared with others.

Another of Nabokov's contemporaries, who in his writings equally emphasizes the being awake and who equally reproaches Freud for his focussing on the unconscious, is the phenomenologist Erwin Straus, a representative of the Berlin School. The starting point of Straus' criticism of psychoanalysis is Freud's focussing on the unconscious while neglecting the conscious and thus even ignoring the fact that the dream can only be interpreted in the state of being awake: “but on this royal road only those who are awake can travel; and they have to double their vigilance, turning their attention at the same

time to the manifest and the hidden meaning of the dream. The interpretation of dreams, as all scientific endeavour, is a task and an accomplishment of the waking man” (“Some Remarks about Awakeness” *Die Psychologie der menschlichen Welt. Gesammelte Schriften*. Berlin, Göttingen, Heidelberg: Julius Springer, 348). Furthermore, it is only in being awake that the dream is recognizable as dream (349). In contrast to Freud, Straus therefore concentrates on the state of being awake or on “awakeness.” “Awake, we find ourselves within the world,” Straus writes,

we experience ourselves in the world together with the world, in relation to the world. Self-awareness does not precede awareness of the world; the one is not before the other; the one is not without the other. [...] Awake, we experience the power of reality in our action and in the world's counteraction, in its resistance and our suffering. [...] We experience reality in a personal relationship; it is not detached from us; as a living creature I am part of it; it affects me in its dramatic actuality [...] The one who awakens is not a “mind” making judgements, not a “consciousness” attending to an outside world but a human being experiencing the world in his corporeality. The experience of reality is prelogical; it is not mediated. (358 – 359)

What distinguishes awakeness from sleep and dreaming is the possibility of experiencing, and experiencing means within the framework of Straus' phenomenology esthetic experiencing (*aisthesis*) or “sensing” (*empfinden*); Straus uses these terms synonymously. “Sensing” denotes according to Straus the “bodily state” of an “immediate, non-conceptual co-experiencing” (“Die Formen des Räumlichen. Ihre Bedeutung für die Motorik und die Wahrnehmung.” *Die Psychologie der menschlichen Welt.*, 153), a sensory experiencing (*sinnliches Erleben*), which is as “prelogical way of communication” or “sensory communica-

tion" (*Vom Sinn der Sinne* 377) the antonym of any conceptual cognition. Conceptual cognition or perception belongs to what Straus calls the "gnostic moment" which focuses on the "what" of the given, its thematic content. Experiencing is of the order of the "pathic moment": the pathic is predominated by the "how" of the being-given, which eludes any objectifying or thematic definition and thus reveals itself in the act of experiencing. In the pathic moment, the marginal or "appresented" discloses itself; Edmund Husserl speaks of the "inactual" (*Ideen I*. Ed. Karl Schuhmann. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, 73), Aron Gurwitsch of the "irrelevant" (*Das Bewusstseinsfeld*. Transl. Werner D. Fröhlich, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975, 238). The pathic, although non-thematic in being not related to the thematic content of perception, is crucial: as Gurwitsch points out, it endows any perception with reality; without the margin of the "irrelevant" anything perceived would remain an unreal detail (Gurwitsch 341; Henri Maldiney, *L'Art, l'éclair de l'être*. Seyssel: Comp'Act, 1993, 238). The margin of the irrelevant forms the background of the world from which any thematic determination starts. "The being-present of sensing," Straus writes, "[...] is the experiencing of a togetherness unfolding itself toward the subject and the object. In the act of sensing, the person sensing experiences himself and the world, himself in the world, himself together with the world" (*Vom Sinn der Sinne* 372). Crucial in sensory experiencing is the togetherness characterizing the relation between the sensing and the object or the sensing and the world. On one hand, togetherness characterizes experiencing as located not within the sensing or the "subject" but as being situated between the sensing and the sensed. For this reason the togetherness correlating subject and object neither permits the primacy of a self-consciousness nor that of a world-consciousness (*Vom Sinn der Sinne* 372-373); it is to be understood, as Straus insists, as a togetherness not in the sense of the additional, but in the sense of a mutuality and reciprocity (373). The sensory communication of experiencing

is thus neither identical with an originary communication of subject and object in the Kantian sense, which is based on the *a priori* of a transcendental subject, nor is to be considered as a constituting perception in Husserl's sense. The togetherness of experiencing means co-originary and co-nativity: experiencing is according to Mikel Dufrenne a *co-(n)naissance* (*L'inventaire des 'a priori'. Recherche de l'originnaire*. Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1987, 148), the simultaneous, reciprocal and mutual constitution of the sensing and the sensed, the self and the world – a simultaneous being-born and mutual and reciprocal giving-birth to one another. On the other hand, the togetherness of experiencing marks the fundamental difference between dreaming or sleeping and being awake by linking man to the world. If "awakeness" means experiencing as togetherness, being awake or being "wide awake" involves man in the *koinos kosmos*: awake, man is engaged in that "labouring dealing with the world" which Freud's concept of *homo natura* excludes.

What Straus formulates as "experiencing," "sensing" or "sensory communication," Nabokov calls "sentient life" (*Speak, Memory* 22). The relevance Nabokov assigns to "sentient life" is not only reflected in his numerous references to the sensory sphere in *Speak, Memory* – such as, for example, to smells, "coloured hearing" and other forms of synaesthesia – or in the fact that he speaks of his childhood and youth in terms of an "Eden of visual and tactile sensations" (*Speak, Memory* 24). The central role of "sentient life" also underlies Nabokov's insistence upon style as opposed to "message" (*Strong Opinions*. New York: Vintage International, 1990, 66): "By all means place the 'how' above the 'what'," he says in an interview with Alfred Appel, Jr. (*ibid.* 66). The priority of the "how" over the "what" means a priority of the non-thematic over the thematic, a priority of the pathic over the gnostic. And "sentient life" implies for Nabokov the togetherness with the world, which according to Straus determines the structure of experiencing. He therefore compares the "birth of [his] sentient life" (*Speak, Memory* 22),

i.e. his first becoming aware of himself as experiencing, to a “second baptism” (*Speak, Memory* 21), since like baptism, “sentient life” means the joining of a community – that of the world as *koinos kosmos*. Being “wide awake” as the precondition of “sentient life” thus implies an understanding of man “beyond” the pleasure principle.

It is the absence of “sentient life” as experiencing that makes sleep, as Nabokov phrases it, a “betrayal” of reason, humanity and genius. If sleep is a “betrayal of reason,” it is because reason is founded upon experiencing, i.e. upon the pathic moment. The pathic is distinguished by its primacy over the gnostic: the non-thematic, which escapes the thematic “what,” precedes it at the same time and serves as the precondition of any thematic perception. The gnostic is thus founded upon the pathic, perception upon sensing, reason upon experiencing – *mathesis* is founded upon *pathos*, according to Aeschylus’ formula *pathei mathos*. Due to the absence of experiencing, sleep also means a “betrayal of humanity,” because experiencing oneself and the world as co-originary is essentially human. The animal is not related to a world but to an environment (*Umwelt*); living in a “symbiotic relationship with its environment” (Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne* 200), the animal is, as Heidegger phrases it, “deprived of a world” (*Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*. Frankfurt / M.: Klostermann, 1983, 284). Nabokov’s emphasis of being “wide awake” thus implies an understanding of man radically different from Freud’s concept of man as *homo natura*. By insisting upon the relevance of being “wide awake” – of “sentient life” as experiencing in the sense of man’s being engaged in the *koinos kosmos* – Nabokov situates man “beyond” the pleasure principle. And above all, this holds for the artist or the “genius”: the absence of “sentient life” as experiencing oneself together with the world makes sleep a “betrayal of genius,” for the act of artistic or poetic creation is founded upon “sentient life.” “Shiver of inspiration” (*Strong Opinions* 15), “shock of wonder” (*Speak, Memory* 217) or the “shiver” of “The Poem” (*Poems*

and Problems. New York, Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970, 157) – the terms Nabokov employs to formulate poetic inspiration can be paraphrased as “astonishment” which belongs to the order of experiencing or “sentient life” and thus engages man in the *koinos kosmos*.

Homo poeticus: the artistic existence

Nabokov’s aversion of psychoanalysis does not result from the fact that, as Stark suggests, “it subordinates artistic creation to psychological processes” (Stark 76), but from its incompatibility with artistic creation. That for Nabokov artistic creation is anchored in “sentient life” and that for him artistic creation literally “begins” with astonishment, finds expression in his account of the genesis of his first poem:

A moment later my first poem began. What touched it off? I think I know. Without any wind blowing, the sheer weight of a raindrop, shining in parasitic luxury on a cordate leaf, causing its tip to dip, and what looked like a globule of quicksilver performed a sudden glissando down the center vein, and then, having shed its bright load, the relieved leaf unbent. Tip, leaf, dip, relief – the instant it all took to happen seemed to me not so much a fraction of time as a fissure in it, a missed heartbeat, which was refined at once by a patter of rhyme. I say ‘patter’ intentionally, for when a gust of wind did come, the trees would briskly start to drip all together in as crude an imitation of the recent downpour as the stanza I was already muttering resembled the shock of wonder I had experienced when for a moment heart and leaf had been one. (*Speak, Memory* 168)

That Nabokov experiences the genesis of his first poem as a “shock of wonder” dissociates artistic creation from the “controlled shaping” so often associated with his writing. He does not

describe *poiesis* as the act of an intentional consciousness: it is not the writer, who “begins” the poem, but the poem “begins” on its own. It produces itself; its genesis is auto-genesis. Producing itself or becoming present on its own, it can neither be intended nor anticipated, but discloses itself to non-intentional “sentient life”: the “oneness” of “heart and leaf” is experienced or “encountered.” What “begins” on its own or produces itself is *phainomeinon* and, according to Heidegger, a “distinctive way in which something can be encountered” (*Being and Time*. Transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Intr. Taylor Carrman. New York, London: Harperperennial, 2008, 54). The poem’s autogenesis is thus an event.

As Henri Maldiney points out, an event has to be understood as “event” and “advent” or “arrival”: as *événement-avènement* articulating in the unpredictability of its “there” its “becoming present” or presencing (Maldiney, *Art et Existence*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1985, *passim*). Significantly, Nabokov characterizes “the instant it all took to happen” as a “fissure in [time]” as opposed to “fraction of time,” since an event is not part of vectorial or chronological time. The “there” of an event (*événement-avènement*) cannot be subsumed under a now-point within a chronological axis: its inchoative aspect or “implied” time defines it as a chronogenetic – and therefore originary – present and thus the present of presence. Time-generating, the present of presence is, as Maldiney underlines, a negation of time (Maldiney, *Aîtres de la langue et demeures de la pensée*. Lausanne : L’Age d’Homme, 1976, 292) and inverts as “fondateur du temps” (*Penser l’homme et la folie. À la lumière de l’analyse existentielle et l’analyse du destin*. Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1992, 65) the relation of present and time. “Par là,” Maldiney writes, “la relation du présent et du temps s’inverse. Le temps n’est plus au fondement du présent, mais le présent est au fondement du temps” (*Regard. Espace. Parole*. Ed. Jean-Pierre Charcosset and Bernard Rohrdorf. Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1973, 160). Chronogenesis could be called

the “essence of Time” (*Ada*. New York: Vintage International, 1990, 536; *Strong Opinions* 185) investigated by Van in *Ada*: if the “sense of Time” is a “sense of continuous becoming,” as Van concludes, the sense of Time is time’s own inauguration or temporalisation. The originary present is an ek-static present transcending the limits of a “now.” It is discontinuous in respect to vectorial or chronological time by inaugurating its presence, and its rupture with chronological time makes it a “fissure in time.” Nabokov therefore compares the event to “the *missed* heartbeat,” since the heartbeat is related to measurable, objective time or, in Nabokov’s terminology, to “applied time [...] which we measure by means of clocks and calendars” and which is “tainted by our notion of space, spatial successions, stretches and sections of space” (*Strong Opinions* 185). Its inchoative present defines the event as “advent” or “arrival” and thus as the “never-having-arrived”: “un événement-avènement toujours en arrivance et jamais arrivé” (*Penser l’homme et la folie* 306). Inaugurating its presence, the “there” evades any apriority as implied in Heidegger’s notion of project (*Entwurf*) with its being-possible presupposed by the structure of care (*Being and Time* 235f.). “Presence” or being there, Maldiney writes, “toutefois ne signifie pas être-là mais être le là. Le là de tout qui a lieu, de ce qui se produit, le là qu’apporte et emporte avec soi l’apparaître” (*Penser l’homme et la folie* 199). It is the “there” itself, which produces or projects its being-there, whereas Heidegger’s *Dasein* in its “throwness” (*Geworfenheit*) is determined by the “one” (*Man*), which is – according to Heidegger – the “who of being-there” (*das Wer des Daseins*) (*Being and Time* 312). Due to its temporal structure the event eludes any projected possibility. By inaugurating its “there” the event is its own possibility and thus auto-possibilisation. Therefore the present of the event as *événement-avènement* can be characterized in Nabokov’s terminology as “Pure Time” or “Time free of content and context” (*Strong Opinions* 186; *Ada* 539): “pure,” because it is uncontaminated by the no-

tions of metric space, “free of content and context” because it is “absolute” in the sense that its being-possible defies any presupposition. An event does not take place in the word, but it opens a word. As auto-possibilisation it is situated beyond any presupposed possibilities and transcends them by being *transpossible* (Maldiney, *Penser l’homme et la folie* 316).

It is the temporal structure of the poem’s autogenesis – the transpossibility of its autogenesis – which produces the “shock of wonder” Nabokov experiences. “Shock of wonder” does not only denote the suddenness of the event; the astonishment expresses at the same time that the event is not a mere “spectacle” Nabokov “attended.” As Eugen Fink underlines, astonishment is essentially ekplectic since it is marked by a de-positing (*Ent-Setzen*): “What is essential to the notion of astonishment is the fact that as a ‘happening’ (*Widerfahrnis*) it de-posit (ent-setzt) man [...]. In abandoning his being caught in the everyday familiarity of things in his astonishment, in giving away his suspended understanding of the world, man’s understanding of being, of his essential existence, is set into motion” (“Die Entwicklung der Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls” Ed. Franz-Anton Schwarz. *Nähe und Distanz. Phänomenologische Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Freiburg, München: Karl Alber, 1976, 66). Astonishment or “de-positing” (*Ent-Setzen*) denotes in Fink’s phenomenology “a mode of man’s regaining his original [“original” as opposed to traditional] behaviour towards himself (*Sich-zu-sich-selbst-Verhalten*), the bringing back into play of his ‘being for himself’” (66). “Being for oneself” means according to Fink not an “Ego detached from all its relations to other beings” (67), but the “actual being in relation with all other beings” (*das konkrete Sein im Verkehr mit allen anderen Seienden*) – “in its interaction with the whole of human life amidst the things, with all its relations and its relation to the world” (67). Thus, Fink’s notion of “being for oneself” is not identical with Hegel’s, which is primarily to be understood as a “single one” (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Ed. Eva

Moldenhauer, Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt / M.: Suhrkamp, 1986, 147-48). What Fink terms “being for oneself” (*Für-Sich-Sein*) corresponds to Bin Kimura’s notion of existence as “being between” (Kimura 435) (*Zwischen-Sein*) – a notion which is not to be reduced to the ‘inter-human’ or ‘inter-subjective’ sphere, but embraces man’s whole being-in-the-world and signifies “the most original sphere [...] which man has shared with the other before encountering him, the sphere in which man has always to participate again and again in order to be able to encounter the other” (436).

Astonishment or de-positing implies, as Fink points out, a “transformation” (Fink 66). Therefore the oneness of “heart and leaf” is not only that of a heart and a “cordate leaf” with its veins, but as well the oneness of the poet’s heart and the event he experiences, since it is his “heart” which “misses” a “beat.” The event Nabokov experiences as a “shock of wonder” – the poem’s advent – is at the same time the advent of the artist or *homo poeticus* (*Speak, Memory* 298), since the poem’s “beginning” or presencing is a co-presencing, its autogenesis or “birth” a *co-naissance*: a simultaneous, mutual and reciprocal being born and giving birth to one another. The transpossible “there” of the poem is simultaneously the “there” of an existence, of the artist’s existence and thus the existence of *homo poeticus*. Nabokov’s art, Alfred Appel, Jr. writes in his introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, “records a constant process of becoming – the evolution of the artist’s self through artistic creation” (New York, Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970, xxii). The artist’s astonishment or de-positing is such an “evolution” or “becoming” from which *homo poeticus* emerges. *Homo poeticus* is what Nabokov finally opposes to Freud’s *homo natura*: Nabokov’s *homo poeticus* is neither a type or species nor the self-styled poet like Humbert whose being enclosed in a “private world” merely permits the mannerist pose of the artist. Nor is *homo poeticus* identical with the one exerting “extreme control,” as Geoffrey Green claims in *Freud and Nabokov* (88). Nabokov’s

homo poeticus is a mode of existence constituting itself in encountering the transposable event – in the “fissure of time” from which artist and art simultaneously arise.

The event of the poem – as every event, and consequently, every “shock” or “shiver” Nabokov speaks of – can therefore be termed “crisis.” According to Viktor von Weizsäcker, the notion of crisis signifies “states or events which induce the life-process to break off the trajectory determined by causal chains” (*Der Gestaltkreis. Theorie der Einheit von Wahrnehmen und Bewegung*. 4th ed., Stuttgart: Georg Thieme, 1968, 170) which means the sudden, defying any expectation or anticipation. Crisis is considered by Viktor von Weizsäcker as essential for the life-process itself, or rather: for the “pathic,” which von Weizsäcker – in contrast to Straus – does not oppose to the “gnostic” but to the “ontic.” Whereas the “ontic” determines the mode of being of objects and can be formulated in terms of the actual (*Ist-Aussage*), the pathic existence, as which the living reveals itself, is not “posited” (*gesetzt*): the pathic existence is “sustained” or “incurred” (*wird erlitten*) (von Weizsäcker, *Anonyma*. Bern: Francke, 1946, 11). According to von Weizsäcker, the crisis, which corresponds to the de-positing and its inherent self-transformation in which man is (re-) gaining his “being for himself” or “being-between” is constitutive for the “incurring of existence.” Not only the transition from one order to another is essential to the crisis, but the subject’s abandonment of its continuity or identity (*Der Gestaltkreis* 171). Crisis therefore implies a “compulsion toward the impossible” (*Zwang zum Unmöglichen*) (171), because crisis always means “a crisis of the subject” (*Krise des Subjekts*), which makes the subject “experience the abandoning of its finite form as a task” (171) in finding itself as another in another world (*sich als ein anderes in einer anderen Welt vorfindet*) (188). “Finding oneself as another in another world” does not mean a mere transposition. Crisis is neither a transposing oneself from one order to another, nor is it a powerless being-transposed into another world or being

over-powered by the event. As the compulsion to the impossible (*Zwang zum Unmöglichen*) or as the “abandoning of the finite shape” (*Aufgabe der endlichen Gestalt*), crisis is at the same time a transformation. This transformation is precisely what Freud’s *homo natura* is denied. As Binswanger points out, the notion of a real transformation is absent from Freud’s thinking with its emphasis on the drive as “the permanent within the change” (“Freuds des vom Menschen” 187), whereas it is “the *metá* of metamorphosis, the *trans* of transformation which distinguishes the whole of transformation” (*ibid.*). Nabokov, however, was well aware of the “whole of transformation” – the transformation “across to the shore of a new being” (*ibid.*), as Binswanger phrases it – for which the metamorphosis of the butterfly might serve as a paradigm. “Human life is not a pulsating heart but the missed heartbeat,” (*Strong Opinions* 186) Nabokov states in an interview and thus acknowledges the crucial function of crises which at the same time forms the core of his rejection of psychoanalysis. “Human life is [...] the missed heartbeat” because, being “sentient life,” it is not determined by a causal or chronological sequence, but consists of “critical” situations in which existence is “incurred.” “Human life” as the “missed heartbeat,” as crisis and the transformation it implies, means a transcending of oneself, for the self-transformation is transcendence.

Crisis as transcendence is also reflected in the “spiral form” Nabokov distinguishes in *Speak, Memory* from the circle: “In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free” (275). It is transcendence that transforms the circle into a spiral and makes it “uncoil” by a self-transformation of oneself into oneself, not, however, *anew*, but as *a new*. As transcending of oneself, de-positing or “incurring the existence” is not identical with a passive suffering or with being helplessly subjected to something like Freud’s *homo natura* with his existence in the *idios kosmos*. “To incur” as crisis and thus as decision (*krisis*) implies a pas-

sive endurance as well as an active component: that of opening oneself. The self-transformation implied in experiencing or in astonishment – the “shock of wonder” – requires an openness towards the phenomenal: a susceptibility to the transpossible. For the openness towards the transpossible Henri Maldiney uses the term *transpassibilité*, denoting susceptibility or receptivity (*passabilité*) as transcendence. *Transpassibilité* means an infinite capability of opening of oneself, of opening one’s self “without any intention or any design” (*Penser l’homme et la folie* 421) – the capacity of an non-intentional opening oneself towards the nothingness, out of which the event in its phenomenality – in its *transpassibilité* – emerges. *Transpassibilité* is the precondition for “incurring” the crisis or the sentience of “sentient life”: it is the transcending receptivity that makes the “circle” “uncoil” or “unwind” and thus transforms it into the “spiral form.” A default of transcending receptivity results, as Maldiney expounds, in the circularity of the repetition of the same, which characterizes pathological existence with its inability to encounter the unexpected or transpossible (*Penser l’homme et la folie passim.*).

As constituting itself in the crisis, Nabokov’s notion of “human life” is not identical with “being there” in the sense of Heidegger’s *Dasein*, for the concept of “being there” as “care” (*Sorge*) is incompatible with the temporality of decision. As Maldiney points out, “in the instant of decision, nothing comes either from the future or from the past. The present of decision is one of a presence, which does not ‘come’ or ‘happen to me’ (*qui ne m’arrive pas*). It is neither the ultimate incidence of a time which comes, nor is it the first decaying moment of a time which passes. The present of decision is ecstatic and inaugurative. It is neither an interpolation with the past, nor with the future, but it is at the foundation of the future, from which time may come and turn itself into decadence in passing” (*Penser l’homme et la folie* 64). The present of decision is a present-origin (65) and thus the foundation of time: the present

of decision is chrono-genetic (*ibid.* 65) If “human life” is the “missed heartbeat,” if it is distinguished by crisis as transcendence, then “human life has to be understood as ek-sistence.

“Exister (*ex-istere*),” Maldiney explains, “c’est avoir sa tenue hors de soi et hors de tout” (*Penser l’homme et la folie* 301). In this case *ex-* does not refer to an exteriority, but to transcendence. “*Ex* (hors) ne signifie pas, ici, l’exteriorité mais la transcendence. Hors de tout, la présence a d’ores et déjà transcendé tout l’étant [...]. Soi et monde n’étant pas des étants, on ne saurait les avoir devant de soi, sous la main et prêts d’emploi” (305-6). Therefore “to ek-sist” is not identical with “being-in-the world” (*In-der-Welt-Sein*), but means – to use Ludwig Binswanger’s terminology – “being-in-the-world-and-transcending-it” (*Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins*. 2nd ed. Zürich: Max Niehans, 1953, *passim.*). Ek-sistence constitutes and reveals itself in the artist’s astonishment – in his encountering the transpossible event, “the fissure in time,” from which artist and art co-originarily emerge. The artist’s astonishment, the “shock of wonder” he experiences due to his being *transpassible*, marks the advent of *homo poeticus*, the auto-possibilisation of artistic existence. Ek-sistence – being-in-the-world-and-transcending-it – is *homo poeticus*’ mode of existence: in contrast to a mere being-in-the-world it is the artistic mode of existence like the artist’s “borneness” (*Getragenheit*) which Oskar Becker opposes to Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* as “thrownness” (“Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers. Eine ontologische Untersuchung im ästhetischen Phänomenbereich”. *Festschrift, Edmund Husserl zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet*. 2nd ed., Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1970, 27-52, 47). As a mode of existence or as artistic existence, Nabokov’s *homo poeticus* does not denote somebody “aloof” or “detached” – as little as his alternative notion of the *genius* does: “betrayed” by sleep and dependant on “sentient life,” Nabokov’s “genius” resembles the “divine *mania*” of Antiquity. *Mania*, Hubertus Tellenbach

underlines in his study *Melancholie* (Intr. Viktor Emil Freiherr von Gebattel, 2nd ed., Berlin, Heidelberg, New York: Julius Springer, 1974, 8), means man's being in symmetry with the cosmos and is basically founded on an experiencing of "oneself and the world."

Being-in-the-world-and-transcending as *homo poeticus*' mode of existence corresponds to the "moment of robust joy and achievement" (*Speak, Memory* 50) Nabokov opposes to dreams in his autobiography. "Achievement" is not identical with "something finished" or the self-satisfied state after having "accomplished a task," for the "moment of achievement" is also that in which "mortality has a chance to peer beyond its own limits" (*Speak, Memory* 50) and thus the moment it transcends itself. The achievement Nabokov speaks of can therefore be paraphrased as the artist's auto-possibilisation or "auto-realisation" which Ludwig Binswanger examines in *Henrik Ibsen und das Problem der Selbstrealisation in der Kunst* (Heidelberg. Lambert Schneider, 1949, *passim.*) – the artist's auto-realisation as ek-sistence. Significantly, Nabokov formulates "the moment of [...] achievement" in terms of the "highest terrace" and the "castle tower" and thus employs notions expressing a "height" or verticality which forms, according to Binswanger, together with "breadth" or horizontality the "anthropological proportion," characterizing existence as spatio-temporal un-folding (*Henrik Ibsen* 115ff.). "Breadth" or "striding forth" means in this context a "walking through or experiencing of world" (*ibid.* 52), "height" or "mounting upward" is to be understood as the "exceeding" or "surplus" which is implied in experiencing as a transcending oneself. Height or verticality is thus tied to breadth or horizontality: striding forth into the breadth as experiencing oneself and the world is at the same time self-transcendence; mounting upward as self-transcendence always implies an experiencing of oneself and the world and thus a "back-to-one's self" in the "loving communication or in the encounter with being as a whole" (*ibid.*

13). A disproportion of height and breadth, of horizontality and verticality, is the feature of pathological modes of existence, such as mannerism or *Verstiegenheit* as in the case of master builder Solness in Ibsen's drama. With the notions "terrace" and "castle tower" Nabokov as well ties the dimension of height to that of breadth. The height of the "highest terrace" is not the aloofness of the flight of ideas, that of the tower not the detachment of the "ivory tower" or the proverbial "castle in the air." *Terrace* equally implies horizontality and being linked to the ground; the tower as "castle tower" is firmly anchored in the ground by its solid foundations and, synonymous to the "highest terrace," as an expression of the proportionality of height and breadth, accentuates the aspect of profundity. Verticality is thus accompanied by and grounded in the horizontality of the "back-to-one's self" in "the encounter with being as a whole," since the altitude of both the "highest terrace" and the "castle tower" – the altitude of transcendence – is indebted to being "wide awake" or "sentient life" as experiencing oneself and the world or "labouring dealing" with the *koinos kosmos* which situates *homo poeticus* beyond the pleasure principle.

"There is also the keen pleasure," Nabokov writes, "[...] in meeting the initial blossoming of man's mind by postulating a voluptuous pause in the growth of the rest of nature, a lolling and loafing which allowed first of all the formation of *Homo poeticus* – without which *sapiens* could not have evolved" (*Speak, Memory* 298). By assigning anteriority to *homo poeticus* Nabokov does not claim that the first man was a poet. That *homo poeticus* precedes the *homo sapiens* means an anteriority of "sentient life" and thus the primacy of the pathic moment over the gnostic moment, that of sensory experiencing over cognition: *homo poeticus* is anterior to the *homo sapiens* because *mathesis*, arising from *pathos*, requires *homo poeticus*' transcending receptivity (*transpassibilité*), his openness towards the transpossible.

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. All contributors must be current members of the Nabokov Society. Deadlines are April 1 and October 1 respectively for the Spring and Fall issues. Notes may be sent, anonymously, to a reader for review. If accepted for publication, the piece may undergo some slight editorial alterations. 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 (footnotes incorporated within the text, American punctuation, single space after periods, signature—name, place, etc.) used in this section.

NABOKOV AND NADAS: THE PAPER CHASE

Péter Nádas's *A Book of Memories* (Nádas Péter, *Emlékirtok Könyve*⁴, 2 vols., 530, 463 pp. Pécs: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2003, first published 1986; Péter Nádas, *A Book of Memories*, Engl. trl. by Ivan Sanders with Imre Goldstein, 706 pp. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997) is rightly considered The Great Hungarian Novel of the post-war period. It is a tangle of three first person narratives folding and unfolding: the anonymous narrator as a young adolescent in 1950s Budapest, as a young man in early 1970s East Berlin, as well as the (named) narrator of (what slowly emerges as) a novel composed by him taking place in *fin de siècle* Berlin and Heiligendamm, an East German spa. The memoirs, in parts dealing with both homosexual and

heterosexual desire and experiences, include fair portions of the author's actual biography, such as e.g. his mother's early death and the suicide of his father, a highly placed communist official, in the wake of the 1956 uprising. For our special quest it may be of some consequence that Nádas was, before becoming a writer, a professional photographer, a subject to which he returns in *A Lovely Tale of Photography* (1999).

The complicated play of intricate multi-layered memories has been compared, quite rightly, with Proust and Musil (e.g. by Eva Hoffmann, 'The Soul of Proust Under Socialism', *The New York Times*, July 27, 1997) and Nádas has also been called 'the Thomas Mann of our times': in an interview by Davis Kovacs, in Issue 100, Summer 2007 of *Bomb*, Nádas names some of the literary influences on him; they include, among others, Thomas Mann (very emphatically), Proust and Musil, but not Nabokov. Interestingly enough I have not seen comparisons with, or discussions of the influence of Nabokov, though the fictional/autobiographical memoirs, and especially the novel-inside-the-novel with its likeness to the narrator's own story, have at least a surface generic semblance to the fictional/parodic autobiography of *Look at the Harlequins!* (published 1974). However, not unlike Nabokov himself, Nádas sometimes sends his readers on a paperchase of hints and clues, no doubt as amusing to the author as to the lucky retriever.

In one of the last chapters of *A Book of Memories* (in the novel inside the novel) there appears at the centre of events the person, or rather the murdered body, of a Swedish gentleman by the name of Gyllenborg, whose hobby seems to have been pornographic photography (vol. 2 pp. 277ff Hung.; pp. 571ff Engl. trl.). In the same chapter there is also a single reference, entirely *obiter* and gratuitous, to a book by a baron Jakob Johann von Uexküll (p. 289 Hung.; p. 581 Engl. trl.).

Now some years ago, still totally unaware of Nádas and his novel, I drew attention in this journal (J. Geiger, 'On Exiles and Regicides', *The Nabokovian* 36 [Spring 1996], 28-29) to a

passage in *Look at the Harlequins*: in Pt. iv ch. 1 p. 157 there appears the narrator's assistant, 'Waldemar Exkul, a brilliant young Balt, incomparably more learned than I; *dixi*, Ex!'. My point was the resemblance of the name to that of Woldemar Graf Uxkull-Gyllenband, a real-life German aristocrat and a professor of Classics (Ex- for Ux- being a play of words by Nabokov; and part of the game is, of course, the similarity of the first name Waldemar to the author's Vladimir). The large and widespread family, also known in the variations Uexküll and Üxküll is of Nordic origins and includes a great number of famous people. Indeed, a quick search will lead one from the religious fantasies of the Baroness Natalie von Uxkull-Gyllenband (writing in French, also under the pseudonym V. Rouslane) to a 'Baron Waldemar Uxkull of Russia' who 'lectured on Russia at the Harlem Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association yesterday afternoon. He made a plea for missionaries for Russia. He appeared in Russian costume...' (The New York Times, April 16, 1906, p. 7); from 1Gräfin Alexandrine von Üxküll-Gyllenband, who did distinguished work for the Red Cross in World War I to Bernhard Graf Uxkull-Gyllenband, the younger brother of Woldemar and a poet of the circle of Stefan George who committed suicide at the age of eighteen (the poems, approved of by 'the Master' himself, were written between the age of fourteen and eighteen), and many more. Woldemar himself was the son of Nikolaus, who was among those executed for their part in the conspiracy against Hitler on July 20, 1944; Nikolaus' sister was the mother of Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg, the would-be assassin, thus a first cousin of the classical scholar. Nevertheless, it seems better not to speculate whether Woldemar would have joined the conspiracy were he alive (he was killed in an automobile accident before the outbreak of the war in 1939). In a speech to the students of Tübingen marking the sixty-fifth birthday of Stefan George (*Das revolutionäre Ethos bei Stefan George*, Tübingen 1933) he enthusiastically welcomed the New Germany, quite in line

with the Rector of his University, Heidegger.

Now the titled Uexküll in Nádas's novel together with the concurrent and gratuitous appearance of Gyllenborg will leave hardly any room for a coincidence. Moreover, Gyllenborg is a Swede: though the Uxkull-Gyllenbands could trace back their Baltic origins to the thirteenth century (hence the 'young Balt' in *Look at the Harlequins!*), they were made barons in Sweden in 1648 and counts in Germany in 1790 (preface by the editor in Bernhard Victor Graf Uxkull-Gyllenband, *Gedichte* [ed. E. Morwitz], Düsseldorf and Munich 1964).

However, as I have already pointed out, there were rather numerous distinguished bearers in the extended family with that extraordinary name. In fact Count Nikolaus himself, the executed conspirator and father of the classical scholar, was born in Köszeg (Güns) in Hungary, and another member of the family, Alexander, was a general with a distinguished career in the Austro-Hungarian army - interesting enough points for a Hungarian author. Nevertheless, it seems to me that certain clues, although tentative, point to the classical scholar.

The strongest clue, no doubt, is the Nabokov connexion, the strong similarities, briefly referred to above, between *A Book of Memories* - 'Memoirs' would have been a more correct translation - and *Look at the Harlequins!* Significantly, Waldemar Exkul makes in Nabokov's story his only appearance as an expert on biography - the mock-subject of the book. The counterpart to this is Nádas's reference in his 'Author's Note' to his novel being written 'somewhat in the manner of Plutarch's Parallel Lives'; Woldemar Uxkull-Gyllenband's best-known book, and certainly the one that must have caught Nabokov's attention when working on his pseudo-autobiographical novel (and inserting into it the expert on biography Waldemar Exkul), was *Plutarch und die griechische Biographie: Studien zu plutarchischen Lebensbeschreibungen des V. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1927). Without entering the question to what extent one can in fact detect the influence of Plutarch's *Lives* in Nádas's novel, the

'Author's Note' makes it quite clear that he was in the author's mind, at least at the time of the conclusion of the book, when in all probability that Note was composed.

And then there is one more clue, raised in conversation by Jani Bodor, pertaining to both the physical appearance and the name of the woman at the centre of the murder story in the novel inside the novel: Miss Stollberg (the daughter of a count, the news of whose death is part of the plot here under discussion), has the curious custom of never taking off her gloves; in the event the reason is revealed – her middle and ring fingers on both hands were fused together 'like hooves.' This may be a coincidental correspondence with, or hint at, the one-armed would-be assassin Count Schenck von Stauffenberg, as is the aristocratic title and the (admittedly, somewhat faint) similarity of names and the count's fate; however, there are only so many coincidences one can allow an author in one small part of a story.

But even without accepting this point it is obvious that Nádas did some independent research on Uxkull-Gyllenband's scholarly work and that he was acquainted with his family connexions - he could not have derived the name Gyllenborg (Gyllenband) from Nabokov. Is it then possible that his references to the Swede Gyllenborg, to the baron von Uexküll and to the aristocratic German Miss Stollberg where all arrived at independently from Nabokov? Though this is not entirely inconceivable, it seems to me highly unlikely that two authors writing in closely related genres independently from each other researched the same rather obscure and gratuitous piece of information.

All this leads to a rather more serious question. Even disregarding the hypothesis advanced above, the generic connexion between Nádas's semi-autobiographical masterpiece and Nabokov's semi-fictional and parodic pseudo-autobiography is glaring. Is Nádas's ignoring the connexion as part of his game of hide-and-seek with the reader, or does it have a deeper significance? Why, while freely admitting of so many literary

influences, does he never admit to that of one of the greatest writers of our age?

—Joseph Geiger, Jerusalem, Israel

WHEN A CLOWN DEVELOPS WINGS

*"Displayed...as in a piece of arras-work,
the whole of my past life...its passions
exalted, spiritualized, and sublimed."*

Thomas De Quincey

Brian Boyd's annotation to *RLSK* for Mr Siller's "Adam's apple 'moving like the bulging shape of an arrased eavesdropper'" indicates Polonius hiding behind an arras [B.Boyd, notes 80.17-18, 677, *Nabokov, Novels and Memoirs 1941-1951*, Library of America; cf. Hamlet, III, iii.28]. Occasional references to purple passages, Mr. Goodman's funereal feasts and stout young men confirm its precision. Furthermore, Sebastian Knight's parodies, and Nabokov's own, move on from the comic allusions to Hamlet into "serious emotion... 'a clown developing wings, an angel mimicking a tumbler pigeon'" (91), and a different theme, the knightly quest and courtly love, may be discerned in connection to the word "arras" through the song of medieval troubadours.

Like Sebastian, Nabokov traveled from St. Petersburg to Cambridge in his early twenties. At Trinity college he took courses in French and Russian literature. B. Boyd writes: "In his formal studies at Cambridge Nabokov's greatest gain was probably the deep love he acquired for the medieval masterpieces he may not otherwise have encountered: Aucassin and Nicolette and the work of Chrétien de Troyes--that could share a shelf in his mind with the medieval Russian *Song of Igor's Campaign*, dear to him from schooldays" [RY, 174]. If VN enjoyed Chrétien

de Troyes, he must have had some acquaintance with another distinguished medieval French troubadour, Adam de la Halle. Although Chrétien and Adam are not included on Sebastian's fictional shelf in Cambridge (perhaps only on VN's mental shelf), they are represented indirectly by Malory and his tales of chivalry and courtly love. The inclusion of Adam de la Halle creates a dimension both Chrétien and Malory lack: the profane world of satire and down-to-earth malice, as it appears in "*Cock Robin*," a nursery rhyme mentioned by Sebastian Knight:

"He [Sebastian's publisher] even seems to approve of the title *Cock Robin Hits Back*, though Clare doesn't."

"I think it sounds silly," said Clare, "and besides, a bird can't hit."

"It alludes to a well-known nursery-rhyme," said Sebastian, for my benefit." (72)

Sebastian's aside, in the above quotation, instructs his Russian half-brother V about the source of the intended title for his new novel, and its reference to traditional English rhymes. Sebastian himself is half-Russian and half-English. Like his creator Nabokov, he is also familiar not only with English medieval ballads, but with French and Russian literature from the same period. Clare's objections (her comment simply affirms that "a bird can't hit") hint at the wealth of associations with parodies and fables contained in a nursery rhyme about a murdering sparrow and a retinue of birds.

The elements cited in "*Cock Robin*" have been found in several early 12th century lyrics and Robin Hood lore, but there is no proof of any relationship between them. It is agreed, however, that the tale was inspired by satirical ballads directed in different times at real historical figures (Sir Robert Walpole, deposed Kings, aristocracy, yeomen, criminals), and appeared in versions that kept being distorted and recreated for centuries. The source for the romantic inclusion of Maid Marion in

the Robin Hood legend (she was inserted in the plot, together with Friar Tuck, in the 16th century and later associated with May Day festivities in England) has been traced to Adam de la Halle's "*Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*" with its description of a peasant couple who must face a knight intent on carrying off Robin's beloved. Through Adam's lyrics we learn how Robin was struck down and knocked out by this knight ("*il me donna telle colée*") while Marion was left to fend for herself. In other words, the songs of "*Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*" show us how a cocky but ineffectual Robin "didn't hit back" to save his love from her assailant. The knight only carries Marion off during their third encounter, after he has struck down Robin, who was mishandling his falcon.

Adam de la Halle (1230-1288), a poet and musician from the city of Arras, in France, was born during the decline of courtly love refinements and at a time when knightly rituals were disappearing. Adam composed part of his work "against the cultural background including a confraternity known as the "Confrérie des Jongleurs et des Bourgeois d'Arras," also known as "Notre Dame des Ardents," and a literary competition called the "Puy d'Arras" [*Adam de La Halle Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*," ed. and trans. Shira I. Schwam-Baird, music ed. Milton G. Scheuermann, Jr., Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994]. Almost a century before, Chrétien de Troyes, the French troubadour who found inspiration in Anglo-Norman poems, became one of the best representatives of medieval literature on Arthurian subjects. Sir Thomas Malory's (1405-1471) "*Le Morte D'Arthur*," written almost two hundred years later, became the final interpretation of the Arthurian myth before the emergence of an English Renaissance. Malory's inclusion on Sebastian's bookshelves indicates Nabokov's fascination with chivalry and with Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval. Wedged between these two poets, Adam de la Halle's earthy satires strike a discordant note, but one which might have equally appealed to Nabokov at that time, by allowing him to contrast the lofty ideals in

poems that sing of irreparable losses or unattainable love, and the less exalted demands of everyday reality and married life. This conflict is presented in *RLSK* by Sebastian's two ladies, Clare Bishop and Nina Rechnoy.

The "*Cock Robin*" nursery rhymes begin with a question: "Who killed Cock Robin?" and every answer is followed by a new question. After the reply ("*I, said the Sparrow, with my bow and arrow, I killed Cock Robin.*"), the next one is: "Who saw him die?" A fly answers it: "*I... with my little eye, I saw him die.*" There is a passing hint of sacrificial rites ("Who caught his blood?") and a Christian burial, with shroud and psalm, until "all the birds of the air fell a-sighing and a-sobbing, when they heard the bell toll for poor Cock Robin." Not only birds (sparrow, owl, lark, linnet, dove, kite, wren, cock, hen and thrush) are mentioned, but two insects (fly and beetle), a fish with a dish, a bull. A murder is reported and there are no guards, police or sheriff. No investigation is made. There is no punishment. The murderer's confession and the weapons he chose are presented with no further developments. Cock Robin's death remains unavenged.

Except for their link with SK's mockery of standard murder stories present in "*Cock Robin Hits Back*," (later published as "*The Prismatic Bezel*"), it is difficult to ascertain why Nabokov selected these rhymes in particular, unless he wanted to bring together English and French medieval texts through his reference to "Robin." Perhaps VN had been acquainted with a 1928 best-selling novel, "The Bishop Murder Case," by S. S. Van Dine (the surname "Bishop" is used twice in *RLSK*), where its first lines are applied to the murder of a certain Christopher Robbin, killed by an arrow. Agatha Christie and other mystery-novel writers have followed a similar inspiration and structured their plot according to rhymes extracted from *Mother Goose*. This fits in with Nabokov's parody of mystery stories, but it also makes way for Sebastian Knight's satirical conjunction between modern detective-novel stereotypes and the bawdy

messages from musical dramas, like Adam de la Halle's. It also suggests the Elizabethan tactics of a "play-within-a-play," used to trap a murderer into confessing his crime, as in Shakespeare's tragedy of revenge.

The historical links between the legends about Robin Hood and "Cock Robin," established by diverse researchers in folklore and ancient ballads, commonly allude to the clash between peasants and nobility, while they also reassert the theme of gallant knights. Nabokov's disguised references to knightly codes of conduct are interspersed in *RLSK*, although it is often difficult to separate satirical elements from their transcendental dimension. Shira Schwam-Baird's introduction to Adam de la Halle's innovative works shows that "*Robin et Marion*" and "*Feuillée*" represent the first theatrical attempts in the French language on a secular subject. "*Robin et Marion's*" erotic and obscene songs connect it not only to *bergères* and *pastourelles*, but to the *fabliaux*. Michael Zinc (quoted by Shira I. Schwam-Baird, op. cit., from *La Pastourelle: Poésie et folklore au Moyen Age*. Paris: Bordas, 1972) considers the *pastourelle* to be a northern European literary expression of sexual desire "where courtly love was imposed upon by the church's moral doctrine, which purged it of its sexuality and made it platonic [...], driving all erotic desire out of the courts and into the countryside." Kathryn Gravdal, [cited by Schwam-Baird from "Camouflaging Rape: The Rethoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle." *Romanic Review* 76 (1985): 361-73)] finds in it samples of the artifices devised by a courtly poet, intent on seducing the lady he worships and who needs to disguise her in a shepherdess' dress. Sebastian Knight's erotic experience with a mysterious Russian lady and his impending unfaithfulness to practical but prosaic Clare Bishop acquire a special poignancy when she blindly opposes the title that introduces the irreverent confusion of transcendental knightly pursuits and common peasant licentiousness.

Two other excerpts from *RLSK* suggest a relationship to

Adam de la Halle (also called *Adan d'Arras* and *Adan le Bossu*) by a sequence of interlinked images.

“Mr Siller makes his bow[...] the Adam’s apple ‘*moving like the bulging shape of an arrased eavesdropper*’, the brown eyes, the wine-red veins on the big strong nose, ‘*whose form made one wonder whether he had not lost his hump somewhere*’...”(p.104)

Mr Silberman, a stranger who V. seems to meet in a train, describes to him a “*robinsonnada* - a marrvellous trick.” (p.127).

Nabokov readers are familiar with his erudite cross-references and with his careful, never random selection of words. When he favors the verb “to bow” or writes about Siller’s “Adam’s apple” he seems to be simply using a verb or a noun, but he could also be smuggling a substantive “bow” held by rebellious Robin and Adam de la Halle by a “robinsonnada” trick. The additional references to “arras” and to “hump” (cf. “Adan d’Arras” or “Adan, le Bossu,” i.e. a hunchback), inserted with quotation marks in V.’s description, confirm this subtle allusion. Through it we may follow how Adam de la Halle (Adan d’Arras) was inserted, together with a pompous “arrased” Polonius, on the underside of the weave.

The “arras” illustrates one of the ways Nabokov regularly hides medieval subtexts in his plot. Sebastian’s character Perceval Q alludes to Wilkie Collin’s novel “The Woman in White” (Cf. Rory Bradley, *Nabokovian* #61, 2008) and also to Chrétien de Troyes’ innocent fool. Although we only read about Sebastian’s older friend Alexis Pan’s translation into Russian of Keats’ “La belle dame sans merci”, there was, long before John Keats’, another medieval poem by the same title: a 1526 edition by Pynson includes “La Belle Dame Sans Mercy” among the poems written by Chaucer.

Adam de la Halle adds a comic dimension to the songs of courtly romantic love by Chrétien de Troyes and Sir Thomas

Malory. Although Sebastian’s parodies shy away from resurrecting the past or expressing belief on a spiritual rebirth, Nabokov’s *RLSK* is a novel devoted to an “essential drama” (18), a quest for a missing person and unexpected losses (his father’s recent assassination, his exile, his farewell to the siren Irina Guadanini). Nabokov seems to be permanently jostling the reader from the cosmic into the comic and back again towards the sublime. The disguised minstrel from Arras probably serves no other purpose in *RLSK* than to mingle the sacred and the profane the better to hide, from the common-reader, Nabokov’s complex striving towards immortality and the hereafter.

—Jansy Berndt de Souza Mello, Brasília, Brazil

GLIMMERS OF SHELLEY IN JOHN SHADE’S VERSE

Percy Shelley’s name appears twice in *Pale Fire*. In the first instance, Kinbote relates Shade’s pet peeves regarding his students’ analysis of literature. The two examples given are “Shelley’s style is always very simple and good” and “Yeats is always sincere” (New York: Vintage, 1989, 156). Shelley also appears in “The Nature of Electricity,” where Shade imagines “the gentle dead” abiding in various forms of light: “And Shelley’s incandescent soul / Lures the pale moths of starless nights” (192). That the nights are “starless” implies that on a star-filled night, the moths would be lured by the stars, a fanciful image drawn directly from the concluding lines of Shelley’s “One Word is Too Often Profaned”:

The desire of the moth for the star
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the realm of our sorrow. (*The Major Works*, Oxford UP, 2003, 590)

Shade's otherwise clever poem gains poignancy when we see Shelley's poem behind it, for we know that Shade himself, at the time he wrote the poem, was seeking solace from the "realm of sorrow" brought on by the loss of his daughter. The connection to Shelley's lines highlights the importance of Shelley's imagery and ideas both to Shade's poems and to *Pale Fire* as a whole.

In Shelley's *Adonais*, as in Shade's "The Nature of Electricity," the souls of dead people live on in the form of light. In stanza 46, Shelley writes:

And many more, whose names on earth are dark,
But whose transmitted effluence cannot die
So long as fire outlives the parent spark,
Rose, robed in dazzling immortality. (543)

Earlier, in stanza 44, we read of the dead who "move like winds of light on dark and stormy air" (542), an image similar to the image of Tamerlane in Shade's poem. And in Shelley's poem's final lines, "The soul of Adonais, like a star, / Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are." Just as Shelley has imagined the soul of the dead poet shining down like starlight, so too has John Shade imagined Shelley's "incandescent soul" as a surrogate star alone in the darkened sky.

Similar celestial images recur throughout Shade's "Pale Fire," and two of these seem drawn directly from a single stanza in Shelley's verse play, *Hellas*. In line 286, Shade writes of "A jet's pink trail above the sunset fire," and in lines 528-9 he nearly repeats the twilight image when he imagines "The claret taillight of that dwindling plane / Off Hesperus" (43, 53). In lines 1031-1041 of *Hellas*, Shelley writes:

The young moon has fed
Her exhausted horn,
With the sunset's fire:

The weak day is dead,
But the night is not born;
And, like loveliness panting with wild desire
While it trembles with fear and delight,
Hesperus flies from awakening night,
And pants in its beauty and speed with light
fast flashing, soft, and bright.
Thou beacon of love! thou lamp of the free! (582).

Both Shade and Shelley refer to the "sunset[']s fire" and both refer to Hesperus, the evening star (really the planet Venus). The correlation is confirmed in Shelley's description of Hesperus, which matches in its details Shade's description of the "dwindling plane." Both are flying away from the scene, and Shelley's description of Hesperus as a "light fast flashing" and a "beacon" matches Shade's description of the "claret taillight," especially considering that a plane's taillight is more properly called a tail beacon. To these consonant images we can add Shelley's initial vision of the moon feeding its "exhausted horn" with the sun's light—a vision similar to Shakespeare's "pale fire" image from which Shade draws his title.

Images of reflected, refracted, and colored light abound in Shelley's poems, just as they do in *Pale Fire*. In *Adonais*, stanza 52, Shelley figures life as a glass barrier that colors our vision of eternity, up until the moment of death:

Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly.
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments. (544-45)

In Canto Three of "Pale Fire," Shade presents a similar image:

And, from outside, bits of colored light

Reaching his bed like dark hands from the past
Offering gems; and death is coming fast. (612-14, 56)

Both Shelley and Shade figure life and death in images related to colored light passing through glass. Similarly, Shade reports that Mrs. Z., in her passage "beyond the veil," noticed "a glint of stained / Windows" (752-2, 61). We should also note that at the time Shade wrote lines 612-614 (on either July 14 or 15) the Shadow Gradus was flying into the airport in Nice (see note to 697), a literal figuring of Shelley's "Earth's shadows fly."

Later in Shelley's stanza, he exhorts Adonais to die and, therefore, live on in the "azure sky." In the opening lines of "Pale Fire," the reflected waxwing, drawn by the window's "false azure," "lived on, flew on" into its own azure sky. Shade's eternal waxwing has left its own shadow behind, just as, in stanza 40, Shelley declares that Adonais "outsoared the shadow of our night" (541). Moreover, just as John Shade, in the weeks prior to his death, recognizes that his own artistry is but a reflection of that practiced by higher powers, Shelley too, in the penultimate stanza of *Adonais*, imagines his death in similar terms, declaring that "sustaining Love," woven through the earthly realm and all its inhabitants, "Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of / The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me, / Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality" (545).

In Shelley's view, earthly forms are but reflections of a more perfect reality which is ever-present but visible only to the dead and to souls in the midst of ecstatic reverie. Such a notion resonates with the otherworld theme in many of Nabokov's works, including *Pale Fire*. In his essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," William Butler Yeats asserts that in *Adonais* Shelley declares his belief that even after death, "he will still influence the living" (72). Likewise, Shade believes that Hazel "somewhere is alive" (l. 978), and Hazel, in the haunted barn, seems to receive a message from the beyond. Brian Boyd argues that the *Vanessa atalanta* that flutters near John Shade just before

his death is a manifestation of Hazel Shade, returning to warn her father of immanent danger (*Nabokov's Pale Fire*, Princeton UP, 1999, 136-37). Each of these examples is consistent with Shelley's notion of an ever-present, alternate reality and with what Andrew Field has described as Nabokov's interest in "the simultaneous cofunctioning of two distinct worlds" (*Nabokov: His Life in Art*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1967, 76).

In his essay, Yeats identifies Shelley's image of the fountain as a distinct marker of the immortal landscape. Shade encounters a "tall white fountain" in his near-death vision, and in stanza 38 of *Adonais* we see the dead poet's soul returning to "the burning fountain whence he came" (521). Yeats, while reviewing what he calls Shelley's "ruling symbols," points to passages from *Epipsychidion*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Laon and Cythna*, *The Triumph of Life*, and many of the lesser poems, where Shelley uses "rivers and wells and fountains continually as metaphors" (81). At times, Shelley combines these images of flowing water with images of light, as in "Mont Blanc," where, as Yeats points out,

Shelley compares the flowing through our mind of "the universe of things," which are, he has explained elsewhere, but thoughts, to the flowing of the Arve through the ravine, and compares the unknown sources of our thoughts, in some "remoter world" whose "gleams" "visit the soul in sleep," to Arve's source among the glaciers on the mountain heights. (86)

John Shade also wrote a poem about Mont Blanc, and Shelley's line ("Some say that gleams of a remoter world / Visit the soul in sleep") chimes with Shade's description, in Canto Three of "Pale Fire," of "childhood memories of strange / Nacreous gleams beyond the adults' range" (633-34, 56) and with his description of sleepwalking in Canto Four (874-86, 65). In both cases, Shade glimpses another "remoter world" which is

ever-present, yet mostly inaccessible to the conscious mind.

It seems likely that Yeats' essay on Shelley provided Nabokov with a distilled collection of Shelley's ideas and images, which Nabokov then employed throughout *Pale Fire*. Indeed, Yeats, within one long paragraph (89), selects as examples both the "moth for the star" lines from "One Word is Too Often Profaned" and the Hesperus lines from *Hellas*—altered versions of which Nabokov gave to John Shade. This may explain why Nabokov places Shelley and Yeats side by side in Kinbote's note to line 172. For the reader of *Pale Fire*, the connection to Yeats' essay is not essential knowledge. The connections between Shelley and John Shade, however, reveal a great deal more. Shelley's presence gives texture and depth to John Shade's meditations on life after death and to the otherworld theme as a whole. By placing Shelley's poems, and particularly his long elegy *Adonais*, at the root of many of Shade's most significant images and ideas, Nabokov deepens the emotional appeal of Shade's elegy for his lost daughter, while further grounding Shade's ideas within the poetic tradition, most particularly that of English Romanticism.

—Matthew Roth, Grantham, PA

PROBLEM SOLVING POLICIES AND FICTIONAL POWER

Narrative has been a topic of great academic interest in many disciplines; yet philosophers have become interested in analyzing the subject only recently.

My present argument inspired by the recent philosophical interest in narrative, concerns Nabokov's theme of how selves are constituted by life-narratives. Nabokov's method of solving narrative problems in his novels can be compared to what he himself calls in problem # 4, "the so-called 'Nabokov Theme'"

(*Poems and Problems*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970, 185). From the seventeen chess problems (two and three-move mates) proposed "for the bafflement of sophisticated solvers" (*Poems and Problems*, 182), "the Nabokov Theme" presents a pattern of puzzle solving which goes from generalization (which is rule based) through the idiosyncratic (particular cases that ask for particular solutions) to further generalization (taking/accepting the challenge of *searching for* the key to entering the game and solving it). Transposed to the realm of fiction, the above mentioned pattern of puzzle solving may suggest Nabokov's commitment to (1) discovering how our engagement with fictional characters can make a genuine cognitive contribution "for use in the real world beyond the fiction" (Ira Newman, "Virtual People: Fictional Characters through the Frames of Reality", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 67, Issue 1, 80) and (2) discovering whether the (authorial) self is both knowable and traceable.

In his fictional problematic worlds, as in his chess problems, Nabokov admits both to his characters' fictionality—the idiosyncratic position conferred by the author and fictional context—and their position as a pattern for understanding real people, their behavior, and their character. The first aspect relates to an external perspective on the fictional world seen as a completed product or finite artifact; the second to an internal perspective on the fictional world through which we are invited to see fictional characters from their perspective as agents and experiencers in a world of events. From this internal perspective, characters are imagined as having alternative fictive futures, a situation analogous to the reader's situation as an inhabitant of the actual world, where we face an ongoing sequence of alternative future possibilities, in the form of either chosen or non-chosen events. Nabokov's method, as in his chess problems, is to make characters, first, cognitively benefit from the projection of actual-world structures onto them, and second, contribute to our understanding of actual-world configurations

by reversing the projection back to their real-world prototypes. Characters manage to do this by eliciting from the reader, eager to understand and pass judgments on them, puzzle-solving procedures that become paradigmatic for illuminating aspects of human reality. Their credibility is thus tested against our world schemata.

In Nabokov's case, the emergence of a problem-solving pattern is based on a style of fallacious suppression mixed with resistance—a mixture with implications for power structures at the fictional level. My assumption builds, first, on Nabokov's valorization of what Rorty calls "the relation between alternative standards of justification" (Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), which makes his narrative open to the possibility of diversity and the possibility of similarity; and second, on how the novel form displays the way we construct the sense of "reality," a word—he explains in his comments on *Lolita* that means nothing except in quotes.

Nabokov's problem-solving practice for a three-move fictional mate reveals the intricate relationships between author, characters, and readers inside and outside the fictional worlds.

For example, in *Pnin* (1957), the deceptive narrating agency may lead to a "tempting discovered check" (*Poems and Problems*, 186) on the value of our engagement with fictional characters. The three-mover as problem-solving method, in *Pnin*'s case, raises questions connected to the process of composing fiction and the curious relationship between the artist, his material, and his readers. The three "good tries" which materialize in the fictional world "clearing the way to his doom by eliminating a white man," as Nabokov says about the black king in one chess problem (187), revolve around Pnin's relationship to the narrator. The ensuing "slippery slope" fallacy becomes the writer's textual harassment and power grab: (1) Pnin does not recognize "his own past" (*Pnin*, 150) in the distortions of the narrator whose credibility is continually brought into question.

The intervening steps worsening the situation are analogous to a "domino effect" or the theory that contamination happens to parts and the whole structure collapses. The subsequent situational overthrows relate to: (2) the reader's sympathizing with Pnin and her/his implicit condemnation of the narrator's "inventive" power despite our admiration for any author's power of invention; and (3) the reader's realization that "It is godlike to create; it is unbearably human, and inferior, to be the subject of someone's creation" (William Carroll, "Nabokov's Signs and Symbols" in Carl R. Proffer (ed.), *A book of Things about Vladimir Nabokov*, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 208). Thus Nabokov's problem-solving policy in this novel touches upon the question formulated earlier: can narratives, particularly fictional narratives, give us authentic understanding of actual people and their characters? Nabokov's answer: "The problem is not quite as easy as it seems at first blush" (*Poems and Problems*, 183).

Another ingenious three-mover that serves as a problem-solving method is based on the author's tactic of apparently committing an *ignoratio elenchi* (the fallacy of irrelevant conclusion) in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) in order to further enrich his involvement in the epistemological debate occasioned by (fictional) narrative.

In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Nabokov, the maestro of dissimulation, offers a paradigmatic exposition of the ways in which an author does and does not enter his own work. This relates to the author's disturbing interrogation of whether or not it is possible for the self to leave a "trace" in the world, a replica of Wittgenstein's simultaneous acceptance and exclusion of the knowing self from the world. The knowing self is a transcendental eye that sees its world but cannot see itself seeing, or as Wittgenstein says, "The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is a limit of the world" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, London: Routledge, 2003, 69, 5.632).

The three-mover in this novel packed with chess dilemmas

and terminology may be detailed in the following way:

(1) The narrator V, in search of the “real life” of his half-brother, the fiction writer Sebastian Knight, enters into a game of truths whose ultimate stake is to turn the gaze upon oneself and thus show the consequences of the multiple refractions of truth. A way to achieve this goal is Sebastian’s very “methods of composition” in his novel *The Prismatic Bezel*, that of a painter’s teaching landscape painting, not by making a display of a landscape painting, but, by showing “the painting of different ways of painting a landscape” (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 95). This type of structure is conducive to an ambiguous “self-block” (*Poems and Problems*, 198) by successive actions of “pinning” and “unpinning” (198) of (the) Knight, who, although (or rather because of being) dead, continues to conceal what the others shape and reshape;

(2) Nabokov’s scheme of ensuring against the failure of presence emerges in the way he seems to establish an identity between V and Sebastian. He insinuates that V, as reader and writer, may project himself into the main hero so thoroughly that he may be seen as a fictional character that the real Sebastian creates as a mask so as to present autobiography as biography. In other words, Sebastian can only write himself down by turning into a fictional character that must be prematurely killed off so as to emerge even more alive in the pages he has written. It is through an elusive movement of regressive narration that Sebastian’s ghost actually becomes of this world, and, while affirming his own self’s existence, he, in fact, affirms the existence of all authors in the pages they have written;

(3) Nabokov is constantly subverting what he is trying to build in the way he mobilizes metaleptic devices so as to infringe ontological boundaries, and in so doing, to save the self by making it visible in the world. The “effect of presence” (Genette, *Métalepse. D’Homère a Woody Allen*, Paris: Seuil, 2004, 39), which the writer carefully weaves into the narrative, relates to the author’s presence in the fictional ontology almost

against the logic of telling and showing. This also connects to the way the writer turns the multiple appropriations in the story into a parable of self-generating fiction, symptomatic of postmodern narrative to come. This necessarily engages the mechanism of intertextuality/parody, which involves repetition and critical distance simultaneously, thus allowing ironic signaling of difference at the heart of similarity.

Nabokov’s three-move fictional mate as problem-solving strategy in the two novels may represent the author’s contribution to the ongoing debate on narrative in the fields of literature, history, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. The examples are certainly symptomatic of a writer who works in the field of “defusing subjectivism” (Bernard Williams, *Morality. An Introduction to Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 1972, 50-1) and whose avowed purpose in life is “being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm” (“On a Book Entitled *Lolita*,” 314-5). For once, these specific characteristics of art, referring us to human reality, create an illuminating feedback loop about how fictional narrative/characters can enhance our understanding of actual people and their characters on the one hand, and aspects of human “reality”, on the other.

I thank Priscilla Meyer whose very attentive editorial eye has significantly helped to shape the finished note.

—Maria-Ruxanda Bontila, Galati, Romania

LIK’S TRILINGUAL PUN

Vladimir Nabokov’s 1938 story “Lik” ends with a perplexing sentence. The title character has just come upon a suicide: his cousin and childhood nemesis, Oleg Petrovich Koldunov, has blown his brains out. Rather than expressing surprise, remorse,

or any other emotion, Lik makes a statement that, presumably, refers to the new white shoes the corpse is wearing: "Those are mine" ("Èto moi," *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* 479/*Sobranie sochinenii russkogo perioda* 5:397).

Lik's final statement is a well-hidden pun. I have not seen the pun identified in the critical literature or in commentaries to the story, although scholars have suggested a number of roles for this closing sentence and for the shoes themselves. Maxim Shroyer identifies Lik's shoes as a "figurative echo" of Chekhov's "shotgun principle" (*The World of Nabokov's Stories* 346 n8), while Pekka Tammi analyzes the text's literal parallels with this principle, establishing that the story is a complex, at times deliberately misleading work whose "structural trickery... emerges as an integral part of the author's artistic canon" ("Chekhov's Shotgun and Nabokov: A Note on Subtext, Motif, and Meaning in the Novella *Lik*" 5). Robert Grossmith points out that Suire, the fictitious author of the play in which Lik performs, bears a name that "in Old French is a variant of *suor*, meaning 'shoemaker'" ("The Twin Abysses of 'Lik'," 49). Brian Boyd notes that the story's unexpected ending "seem[s] to fulfill the unique and as if preexistent harmony of an individual life" (*The Russian Years* 494).

The pun does more than add another specimen to the catalogue of Nabokovian wordplay. It enhances an approach to the story as an extended exploration of Nabokov's artistic principles. I will first explain how the pun works, then discuss the impact it has on interpreting the story.

The pun can be unlocked by referring to the rest of the story's final sentence, "said Lik in French" ("*skazal Lik po-frantsuzski*") (479/397). The process requires Russian, French, and English, regardless of which version of the story (Russian or English) is being discussed. I will consider the two versions together, pointing out along the way how the pun is kept accessible to the non-Russian-speaking reader. These efforts on the author and translator's part (the *New Yorker*, where the English version

was first published, lists Dmitri Nabokov as translator, but it is likely that Vladimir Nabokov collaborated closely with his son, as was their usual practice) provide additional evidence of the pun's importance to the story.

There are two possible French translations of Lik's statement, but they vary only in the gender of the subject pronoun and its modifier: either "Elles sont les miennes," if referring to his shoes by the feminine *chaussure*, or "Ils sont les miens," if using the masculine *soulier*. The pun hinges on the French possessive pronoun "*(le) mien*" (English "mine"). The French pronoun is homomorphic with the English noun "mien," another word for "face." "Face" brings the reader back to "*lik*," a Russian word for "face," and the main character's pseudonymous name (462/377). The English version adds interplay between the possessive pronoun "mine" and the French noun "*mine*" ("face") to the other links. It also defines the protagonist's name for the reader who may not know Russian: at the beginning of the story, the narrator notes parenthetically that Lik "means 'countenance' in Russian and Middle English" (462). If the reader remembers this casually presented bit of information almost twenty pages later, he may realize, along with his Russian-speaking counterpart, that Lik says, "Those are the '*liks*'" – in essence, "That's me."

Saying "that's me" while pointing toward the body of the cousin he loathed and feared, Lik confirms an idea presented at the story's midpoint, when he first learns that Koldunov has survived the Bolshevik Revolution and made his exile's home in France: "he had to admit the possibility of two parallel lines crossing after all" (468/384). Although the Lik and Koldunov are blood kin, Lik feels no familial bond or identification with his cousin, but rather a deep antipathy based on their childhood history. His cousin's reappearance, after years without contact, violates the laws of "reality" as Lik has understood them to this point. These laws appeared to have set the cousins on two distinct, non-intersecting paths after their school years.

Having Lik say “That’s me” suggest that the parallel lines not only cross, but are conterminous.

Interpreting the pun as the conclusion of the “parallel lines” idea supports readings of the story that suggest a kind of envy toward Koldunov on Lik’s part. Andrew Field, for example, suggests that “Lik” is a play on the saying “I’d like to be in your shoes” (*Nabokov: His Life in Art* 194); having Lik claim that the dead Koldunov is “me” fits with this view. Boyd offers a fitting explanation for Lik’s envy by reading the story’s conclusion as a surprise, one that is unpleasant for the title character: “Apparently assigned the central role of the hero about to die, Lik finds that even death relegates him to the periphery” (*The Russian Years* 494). Grossmith supplies information that supports Boyd’s interpretation, observing that “Nabokov was doubtless also aware that Lik means ‘corpse’ in Old Saxon, Norwegian, Swedish, etc.” (“The Twin Abysses of ‘Lik’,” 48). If Koldunov’s suicide denies Lik the finale that both character and reader anticipate, Lik can reclaim what fate seems to have promised him by reversing Grossmith’s definition and labeling Koldunov’s *corpse* “Lik” (that is, saying “That object – the corpse – is a *lik*, and *lik* is ‘me’”).

More important than the pun’s meaning is that it exists at all. Nothing in the story leads the reader to believe Lik capable of such wordplay, and indeed, it is not clear that Lik himself knows he has made the pun. The reader discovers the pun thanks only to the narrator’s concluding words, “said Lik in French.” Even with this hint, the pun is well camouflaged, because by the story’s end Lik’s use of French has become automatized. Therefore, the reader is more likely to focus on the utterance’s meaning than on its form. Nonetheless, what Pekka Tammi writes of the story’s parodic elements holds true for the pun, as well: “even though the protagonists are themselves not aware...it is important that the reader make the connection” (“Chekhov’s Shotgun” 4).

Why, then, is the pun so important? “Lik” opens with a discussion of art, and the story as a whole is a demonstration of Nabokov’s artistic principles. Suire’s imbedded play and Lik, himself, provide a foil for these principles. The final pun, invisible to Lik, is there for both author and reader to see. Once visible, it connects Lik’s ideas about the intersection between art and life to the author’s.

The story opens with an extended evaluation of *The Abyss* (*Bezdna, L’Abime*) (461/376), the French play in which Lik is performing. This discussion establishes art as a theme. The play’s title signals the presence of the otherworld; Grossmith notes (“The Twin Abysses” 47) that it evokes the opening lines of *Speak, Memory*, where earthly life hovers over the abyss and birth and death are separated by a negligible span. As the narrator enumerates the play’s shortcomings, it becomes clear that this *Abyss* parodies Nabokov’s otherworldly one. The plot rests upon a trite web of love interests, as if a French hack were trying to mimic Turgenev or Chekhov. “It goes without saying that there is not a single jolt of talent to disrupt the ordered course of action” (461/376). Far from being a work of genius, *The Abyss* cannot even be placed among the also-rans, the works that display mere “talent.” Its author, unlike the true artist, lacks both skill and genius.

In addition to its clichéd plot, characters, and structure, the play’s dialogue reveals linguistic flaws:

Igor expresses himself (at least in the first scenes, before the author tires of this) not incorrectly but, as it were, a bit hesitantly, every so often interposing a questioning “I think that is how you say it in French?” Later, though, when the turbulent flow of the drama leaves the author no time for such trifles, all foreign peculiarities of speech are discarded and the young Russian spontaneously acquires the rich vocabulary of a native Frenchman; it is only toward the end, during the lull before the final burst of action, that

the playwright remembers with a start the nationality of Igor" (462/377).

The problem stems not from Igor's hesitation in French, but from the author's inconsistent application of it. Having introduced Igor's linguistic tic, the author is too careless to follow through. Using language with precision and originality is a hallmark of Nabokov's writing. The playwright's shortcomings on this point add to the parodic function of *The Abyss*; it supplies a helpful example of how *not* to write.

If Suire's play serves as an example of a poor literary product, Lik himself provides negative examples of the qualities needed in the creative process. Nabokov's creativity exists at the intersection of memory and language. The story addresses these qualities in Lik directly, and in both cases, Lik falls short.

Exile influences the weakness in Lik's memory, for he has been wrenched from Russia before his memory matured. Nabokov writes that, for elderly exiles, "nostalgia evolves into an extraordinarily complex organ," but that "in Lik, this memory of Russia remained in the embryonic state" (463/378). The Russian uses *pamiat'* ("memory") where the English uses both "memory" and "nostalgia." The latter, for Nabokov, is negatively marked. However, memory, *pamiat'*, is the raw material both of nostalgia and of art. Lik's inchoate memory, having been pulled too soon from the Russian womb, has failed to develop in either direction. A fluid memory, just like linguistic deftness, is one of the tools of artistic genius in Nabokov's world (see, for example, Vladimir Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld* 29). Lik lacks both.

Nabokov's protagonist, like the play in which he performs, is marked by linguistic weakness. Lik's theatrical renown stems from "a film in which he did an excellent job in the bit part of a stutterer" (462/377). Exile compounds his problems with language, forcing him to try to fit in with his peers via a language of which he is not a native speaker. Socializing with

the troupe's other actors, "he understood little of the jokes, allusions, and nicknames that the others bandied about with cryptic gaiety," and "when someone gave him a particularly hearty greeting or offered him a cigarette, he would think that there was some misunderstanding" (464/379).

Several passages emphasize Lik's sense of displacement from the group. "In relation to the other members of the company...he remained as much a stranger as he had been at the first rehearsal. He had immediately had the feeling of being superfluous, of having usurped someone else's place" (463/379). In Russian, Lik's status as "stranger" and "superfluous" is rendered with two highly charged terms from the literary and cultural tradition: *chuzhoi* and *lishnii*. These words evoke non-belonging, foreignness, and inefficacy.

In the process of establishing Lik's inefficacy and linguistic shortcomings, the text also demonstrates Nabokov's own linguistic agility. Lik is almost a non-entity: "his absence from friendly gatherings, instead of being attributed to lack of sociability (leading to accusations of haughtiness and thus endowing him with, at least, some semblance of a personality), simply went unnoticed" (464/379). The Russian passage displays an ironic twist, for the "personality" Lik fails to obtain is rendered by the word *lichnost'*, which shares its root with the character's own pseudonym, *lik*; N. Semenova has commented on the irony of juxtaposing the "elevated register" of Lik's name with his milquetoasty personality ("Rol' zaglavii v vyiavlenii invariantnosti tekstov u V. Nabokova ('Lik' i 'Zud')" 56). Lik wants to join the fun in which his French colleagues indulge, but he exists outside their sphere, all the while "yearning to be persuaded to come" (464/379) when they plan an outing. Once again, wordplay in the Russian highlights Nabokov's use of language, thematizing it within the story and providing another example of the author doing what the character cannot: the Russian verb for "persuade," *ugovorit'*, is a form of *govorit'*, to talk, speak, or say, with the perfective prefix "u-"

denoting accomplishment. Lik longs for his French colleagues to accomplish what he cannot, “talking him in” to the French circle. While writing of Lik’s failings, the author demonstrates his own strength.

Lik has weaknesses beyond language and memory. He suffers from multiple organ failure, if the organs are defined according to Nabokov’s principles of artistic anatomy: language, memory, and heart. Lik’s heart pain adds another level to the demonstration of Nabokov’s artistic principles. It turns the discussion toward the practical by focusing on the device. Rather than providing an additional counterexample of artistic qualities, “heart pain” is generally a positive quality in Nabokov’s stories, as Shroyer has argued (*The World of Nabokov’s Stories* 53). In “Lik,” heart pain is joined by a second device, metrical marking; together, they isolate a key sentence, one that returns the discussion to broader artistic principles and to Lik’s pun.

Shroyer has discussed “heart pain,” including Lik’s, as a device that “signal[s] to the reader the nearness of an otherworldly experience” (*The World of Nabokov’s Stories* 53). The diagnosis of Lik’s heart trouble comes at the end of a paragraph in which the narrator records intimations of the otherworld that Lik may or may not notice: “signposts that do not exist but that perhaps have appeared to him in a dream, or can be distinguished in the underdeveloped photograph of some other locality that he will never, never visit” (462-63/378). Shroyer notes that this long sentence features metrical marking, another element of Nabokov’s “intricate system of markers of otherworldly experiences” (54). The repetition of “never” underscores Nabokov’s metrical construct, “an iambic tetrameter (Ia4) with a feminine clausula: ‘that hé will néver néver vísit’” (Shroyer 56). In the Russian, the meter differs, but the device is the same: “*gde emú ne byvát’ nikogdá, nikogdá*” (378), which Shroyer identifies as “either...a long line of anapaestic tetrameter (An4) with a caesura or as two lines of anapaestic dimeter (An2)” (56).

The paragraph’s final sentence includes another example

of metrical marking within a phrase. The same marking recurs in the story’s final sentence. These examples of rhythmic patterning, neither of which I have seen discussed in the critical literature, provide a technical link between the two sections of the story and lead to further explication of the pun. The paragraph ends with this sentence:

There seemed to be a certain connection between this illness of his and his fondness for fine, expensive things; he might, for example, spend his last 200 francs on a scarf or a fountain pen, but it always, always happened that the scarf would soon get soiled, the pen broken, despite the meticulous, even pious, care he took of things (463/378-79).

The clause “but it always, always happened” (“*no vsegdá, vsegdá sluchálos’ ták*”) echoes the metrical marking found earlier in the paragraph (“that hé would néver, néver vísit” / “*gde emú ne byvát’ nikogdá, nikogdá*”). The Russian uses iambs instead of the earlier anapests. The English is more consistent, using a binary meter in both examples. It is possible to read the latter English clause as a line of trochees beginning with a weak foot (unstressed “but”), a rhythmic inversion of its iambic predecessor. This reading suggests a parallel to the clause’s semantics, in which “always, always” inverts “never, never.” However, given that English conjunctions, like Russian ones, tend to be unstressed, the clause is more likely another iambic line with both an anacrusis and a feminine ending, one that reproduces the rhythm of the Russian original.

This doubly marked sentence, containing both metrical marking and a reference to Lik’s illness, is saturated with important Nabokovian devices. As Shroyer and others have discussed, these devices often indicate an otherworldly experience. In this example, I believe that they invite the reader to ponder the sentence’s surface meaning. The connection between

these signals and Lik's "fondness for fine, expensive things" turns out to be a fruitful one. Lik is one of many Nabokovian protagonists whom "things do not like." This sentence sets up a fateful series of events involving precious objects. More significantly, it connects Lik's shoes, and therefore his pun, to the final principle of Nabokovian art explored in the story, inspiration.

Nabokov began to articulate his own definition of inspiration, the artist's engine and muse, as early as 1937, a year before he published "Lik," in the essay "Pouchkine, ou le vrai et le vraisemblable." "Lik" belongs to the earliest period of Nabokov's writings on inspiration, yet it is possible to extrapolate value judgments about inspiration from this story that prefigure Nabokov's later, most robust discussions of the concept (in, for example, "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," ca. 1951).

"Inspiration" (*vdokhnovenie*) appears only once in this story. Nabokov writes that, despite Lik's social isolation, he "rather liked some of his colleagues. The actor who played the bigot was in real life a pleasant fat fellow, who had recently purchased a sports car, about which he would talk to you with genuine inspiration" (464/379). Lik's fellow actor, "genuinely inspired" by his new sports car, misplaces, or misuses, inspiration. Inspiration has been recast as *poshlost*, the banal vulgarity that so often contrasts with the artistic in Nabokov's works.

This false inspiration provides another element of parody; Nabokov lampoons both the otherworld, via *The Abyss*, and the foundational concept of his views on art. It also masks fatidic interventions by the author, who uses the ruin or loss of three more precious objects to trap Lik in his final confrontation with Koldunov. Koldunov writes his home address, even mapping the location, in Lik's "brand-new gilt-and-leather notebook." Koldunov "wrote with great diligence and force—a force that was almost incantational" (472; cf. Martha Dreyer's attempted spell with pencil and paper in *King, Queen, Knave*). From Koldunov's sweaty forehead to the violence with which

he forces his address onto the notebook's pages, this passage leaves little doubt that Lik's notebook is spoiled, and that the "incantational force" of Koldunov's action (a fitting phrase, given the etymological link between the man's surname and the Russia *koldun*, "sorcerer") will guarantee a further encounter between the men.

The encounter occurs almost immediately, in both chronological (next day) and textual (just two paragraphs later) frames of reference. Lik picks up his expensive watch from the repair shop; he had broken the crystal by knocking his wrist against a wall (466/382). On this same outing, he decides to "buy some nice white shoes" to wear in that evening's performance of *The Abyss*. Leaving the shoe store with his purchase under his arm, he runs directly into Koldunov, who drags him back to his apartment (472-73/390). Koldunov grows drunk and hostile, and Lik slinks away, forgetting his new shoes.

In the midst of another day-dreamy spell of heart pain, Lik remembers his shoes, and this recollection not only "saves him" (478-79/396-97), but brings him to Koldunov's corpse, where he utters the pun that closes the story: "Those are mine." As noted above, the final clause ("said Lik in French") signals the reader to translate Lik's utterance from either Russian or English into French. It functions as a stage direction from the author to both character and reader, perfectly in keeping with Tammi's observation that the story "to a significant degree draw[s] its materials from the world of playacting" (4). His words bring to a close the story's "shoe motif," linking his white shoes, meant to be worn on stage in a play by a writer named "Shoemaker," to a brilliant bit of stagecraft set in motion by the author.

The entire sentence reprises the metrical marking discussed above, but this time the Russian displays a definite rhythmic inversion (dactyls instead of anapests: "*Éto moi' skazal Lik po-frantsúzski*"), while the English once again features iambs ("Those are mine," said Lik in French"). At least one publication of the English story, its 1964 debut in *The New Yorker*,

underscores the meter by placing a comma after "Lik," thus punctuating each metrical foot and, by forcing an extra pause, drawing the reader's attention to the rhythm (90).

This conclusion calls for a reassessment of Lik's hitherto uncertain status as one of Nabokov's privileged characters. Two of the most extensive analyses of "Lik," those by Shroyer (*The World of Nabokov's Stories* 52-57) and Tammi ("Chekhov's Shotgun"), both present evidence for and against privilege. While the text supports critical equivocation, I believe that the discovery of the final pun can lead to a more definite, and positive, answer.

Lik's false inspiration, his love of fine things, leads him back to Koldunov's apartment to retrieve his shoes. This act brings him face to face, as it were, with his cousin's theft of the shoes and of Lik's own fantasy. Thinking that "if death did not present him with an exit into true reality, he would simply never come to know life" (467/383), Lik had determined that he would die onstage and cross into the world of Suire's play, with "his smiling corpse...on the boards, the toe of one foot protruding from beneath the folds of the lowered curtain" (465/381). The position of Koldunov's corpse, along with his propensity to rewrite his own history (471/387-88) and comment on the poor quality of the "story" he is living (476/393), suggests that his theft of Lik's plan to enter a more "real" world is no accident.

Despite the failings of *The Abyss* and its function in "Lik" as a foil for Nabokov's artistic principles, Lik's plan has merit. Rehearsing his role, Lik "would hurry onstage with unchanged, mysterious delight, as though, every time, he anticipated some special reward." He realizes that the reward

lurked in certain extraordinary furrows and folds that he discerned in the life of the play itself, banal and hopelessly pedestrian as it was, for, like any piece acted out by live people, it gained, God knows whence, an individual soul, and attempted for a couple of hours to exist, to evolve its

own heat and energy, bearing no relation to its author's pitiful conception or the mediocrity of the players, but awakening, as life awakes in water warmed by sunlight (465/381).

Lik experiences the magical transformation that art can effect, even when it is of the flawed and tepid variety. As Shroyer puts it, Lik "peers into art's capacity to create other worlds" (*The World of Nabokov's Stories* 57), and this vision motivates his fantasy about dying onstage. I would hesitate, however, to assert that Lik "apprehends the metaphysical designs of his creator" (*ibid.*). He senses the link between his heart trouble and his constantly damaged expensive things, but gets no closer to realizing the construct in which he already exists.

Tammi writes that Lik's plan "to exit into true reality" is "constantly undermined through covert authorial involutions" ("Chekhov's Shotgun" 4). These "involutions" do thwart Lik, but Nabokov is kinder to his protagonist than is generally suggested. Nabokov grants Lik a moment of linguistic brilliance that neither his French colleagues nor Suire's Igor could match. Lik remains unaware of his pun, but it reminds the reader that the character is already on stage. Nabokov bars Lik from crossing into the flawed world of *The Abyss*; he must stay in the world Nabokov has made. Simply put, Lik's author protects him. Conscious or not of this beneficence, Lik must be considered privileged.

—Kristen Welsh, Geneva, New York