

THE NABOKOVIAN

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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

The Original of Laura appears in mid-November in the USA and then simultaneously, or most rapidly, translations appear around the world. Tremendous attention is given and readers’ responses vary greatly. The question arising over and over again is “upon what basis was this work published?” Some conclude “It should have been published.” Other conclude: “It should not have been published.” The final answer to this nagging question is given most clearly and concisely by Dmitri Nabokov in this issue.

Odds & Ends

1. Dr. Kurt Johnson (co-author of *Nabokov’s Blues* and articles regarding Nabokov’s science) has donated his highly extensive archives on Nabokov and Nabokov’s science to the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera at the University of Florida, Gainesville. Therefore, he has now established the primary site for research and studies concerning Nabokov and lepidoptera.

2. Few books have received as much attention regarding how they can be taught and read as has *Lolita*. Following *Approaches to Teaching Nabokov’s “Lolita,”* edited by Zoran Kuzmanovich and Galya Diment (MLA, 2008), which offers a broad array of perspectives, we now have Julian Connolly’s *A Reader’s Guide to Nabokov’s “Lolita”* (Academic Studies Press, 2009). Connolly’s most perceptive work takes a reader/student through the creation and precursors of *Lolita*, ways to approach and analyze

the work giving special care to detail, and helpfully looks over the critical and cultural responses which have been engendered by this national and international classic.

As usual now for several decades, I wish to express my greatest appreciation to Ms. Paula Courtney for her essential on-going assistance in the production of this publication.

From Dmitri Nabokov
Regarding *The Original of Laura*

Well, after a period of pensive procrastination, sporadic at first, then increasingly focused, *Laura* is finally emerging from the dark of a bank vault into broad daylight.

Meanwhile, I have learned that I am slippery, that *Laura* is but a Nabokovian mystification, that I appealed to my friend Martin Amis to complete the unfinished novel, and that I do not exist, but am, together with my extravagant CV, a pure invention on the part of Vladimir Nabokov, who has been living on to a fantastic age in an unattainable hiding place.

Yet here I am, and there is *Laura*, complete only in part, a congeries of fascinating fragments exactly as my father wrote it, except for the correction of a very few, very obvious lacunes. The idea was to edit as little as possible, in order to show the Master at work at his *lutrain* (bookstand), and then in his hospital bed, filling his index cards with the minute script of his No.2 pencils, reaching the 138th card just before his death. Had I myself not fallen ill at the wrong moment, some further small corrections would have been made — for example, at the end, the orphan “navel” might be preceded by “my” or made plural, but I don’t think, as has been suggested, that Nabokov had intended to say “contemplating my navel”. Of the typical repetitious questions — “if he wanted *Laura* to be burnt, why didn’t he do it himself?”; “why did I contravene his command that it be destroyed?”; or perhaps, a question no one seems to have asked: “does the list of words on the very last card refer to self-immolation on Wild’s part, or, hypothetically at least, the immolation of the manuscript?” — all those regarding VN’s intentions or my actions can be answered in the twinkling of an eye: when asked what books he was reading or would keep, he replied: “Charles Singleton’s translation of Dante’s *Inferno*; *The Butterflies of*

North America by William H. Howe; *The Original of Laura*, the not-quite-finished-manuscript of a novel I had begun writing before my illness and which was completed in my mind” — hardly words typical of an author who wants that novel destroyed.

Rare is the verbiage that prompts a special reaction. One such example is the title previously perpetrated by a particularly pernicious member of the pansy patrol, and now exhumed by homo hunters among Nabokov’s relatives and in his works — “Queer, Queer Vladimir”. My reaction, were it legal, would be a swift kick in the teeth.

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**In Memory of Simon Karlinsky
by Brian Boyd**

Simon (Semyon Arkadievich) Karlinsky, a leading scholar of Nabokov and of Russian literature and culture, and from the late 1960s a friend of the Nabokovs, died on July 5, 2009, aged 84.

He was born on September 22, 1924, in Harbin, Manchuria, then the largest Russian émigré enclave for those who fled Russia to the East. At eleven he first read about Vladimir Sirin and at twelve began reading him. He arrived in the United States in 1938, completing secondary school in Los Angeles. From December 1943 to March 1946 he served in the US Army, and until 1957 as translator and interpreter in Europe for the Department of State (1945-50) and the US Control Council for Germany (1946-48), and as the Liaison Officer for the US Command in Berlin (1952-57). During these years he also studied musical composition at the École Normale de Musique in Paris and at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik.

Returning to the US, Karlinsky called on Nabokov’s “great friend” (VN to SK, 11 May 1971) Gleb Petrovich Struve (1898-1985), the first academic historian and critic of the Russian literary emigration, who told him he belonged in Slavic literature. After a BA at the University of California, Berkeley, and an MA at Harvard with Vsevolod Setchkarev, Karlinsky returned to Berkeley to write a dissertation on Marina Tsvetaeva under Struve. He joined the faculty there in 1961, completing his PhD in 1964. Struve, like Nabokov, was the son of a leading pre-revolutionary Russian liberal and Constitutional Democrat, and for Karlinsky writing and teaching about the pre-revolutionary liberal tradition and the Russian emigration would remain powerful motives in a milieu where Russian and émigré culture were so little known. Indeed in 1963 when he submitted his first academic article on Nabokov, on “*Dar* as a Work of Literary Criticism,” the editors of *Slavic and East European Journal*

were uncertain *Dar* was important enough to discuss, and had to be reassured by Struve that it was. Struve encouraged Karlinsky to send the article to Nabokov, who welcomed the first scholarly treatment of his major Russian work: “it was a great pleasure for him to find that his book had been read by you (and written about) with such admirable care, insight, and attention to the details which are dear to their creator” (VÉN to SK, 18 November 1963).

Among the first generation of academic Nabokov critics to emerge in the 1960s—Andrew Field, Carl Proffer, Alfred Appel, Jr., Robert Alter—Karlinsky was easily the greatest Slavist and, along with his Berkeley colleague Alter, the most elegant stylist. As a Slavist he wrote especially about eighteenth-century drama, Gogol, Chekhov, Chaikovsky, Stravinsky, Diaghilev, Tsvetaeva, Nabokov, Poplavsky, and many others, both for academic audiences and in serious periodicals. From 1976 he also began to publish on gay matters, becoming one of the first academics to argue for gay liberation and gay studies, focusing especially on gay aspects of Russian culture, including his 1976 book *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolay Gogol*.

In January 1969 Karlinsky nominated Nabokov for the Nobel Prize in Literature. In September of that year, in Montreux, he met Vladimir and Véra Nabokov for the first time, passing the playful legpull tests Nabokov posed for him and being rewarded with the manuscript of Nabokov’s “Notes to *Ada*” (see *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 571-72). Early in 1970, having just reviewed recent volumes of Russian verse translation in a similar vein, he welcomed Nabokov’s reproof to Robert Lowell for his “adaptations” of Osip Mandelstam (“On Adaptation”).

Karlinsky contributed articles on “Nabokov and Chekhov: The Lesser Russian Tradition” and on Nabokov’s translation of *Alice in Wonderland* to the special issue of *Triquarterly* edited as a Festschrift in Nabokov’s honor by Alfred Appel, Jr. He compared the puzzled receptions that had often greeted Chekhov and Nabokov in Russian literary circles, the sense that they

weren’t serious enough, that they chose art over ideology, that their objectivity and precision were somehow alien to Russian soulfulness. Nabokov responded that he “greatly appreciate[d] being with A.P. in the same boat—on a Russian lake, at sunset, he fishing, I watching the hawkmoths above the water. Mr. Karlinsky has put his finger on a mysterious sensory cell. He is right, I do love Chekov dearly” (SO 286).

In an April 1971 article in the *New York Times Book Review* Karlinsky pointed to the Russian subtexts in Nabokov, especially in *The Gift* and *Ada*, and the Russian contexts unknown to most American readers, like Pushkin, Lermontov, Bely, Sologub, and Remizov (the editors altered his title “Nabokov’s Russian Dimensions” to “Nabokov’s Russian Games,” under which it was also reprinted in Phyllis Roth, ed., *Critical Essays on Vladimir Nabokov*, 1983). Nabokov wrote to Karlinsky that he read “your elegant and important article with great interest” (VN to SK, 15 April 1971)—further evidence that he was not, as Alexander Dolinin suggested in 2005, eager by this point in his life to minimize his Russian roots.

In 1971 Karlinsky volunteered to translate “Krasavitsa” (“A Russian Beauty”). After approving and correcting the translation, Nabokov asked how much Karlinsky wanted for his work. Karlinsky thought it odd to charge for a labor of love, but suggested whatever was the going rate. “Or perhaps you might let me have a translation of a Khodasevich poem or two for the *Tri-Quarterly* issue on émigré literature I’m preparing” (SK to VN, 12 July 1971). Nabokov sent \$60, which Karlinsky thought so risibly small he framed the check—and when Alfred Appel, Jr., reported this back to Nabokov, he received another \$40. Nabokov also contributed translations of three poems and his essay on Khodasevich to Karlinsky and Appel’s edition of the 1973 Russian émigré literature special issue of *Triquarterly*, also published in book form as *The Bitter Air of Exile: Russian Writers in the West, 1922-1972*.

In late 1972 Karlinsky urged his friend Edmund White

to solicit Nabokov for a new essay for the special Nabokov issue of the inaugural issue of *Saturday Review of the Arts* that he was editing. Nabokov agreed to the request, writing "On Inspiration." Soon afterwards he read and liked White's first novel, *Forgetting Elena*, and welcomed Karlinsky's positive review of the novel in 1974. His own public endorsement of White's book in 1975 helped boost the career of the young novelist—by then working on *The Joy of Gay Sex*.

In September 1973, on his way back from his first trip to the Soviet Union, Karlinsky again visited Montreux. Nabokov, still composing *Look at the Harlequins!* asked Karlinsky for his first impression of Petersburg ("Loud women's voices, swearing obscenely," he answered) and incorporated it into the novel. He also could not stop discussing his distress at the manuscript of Andrew Field's biography. Karlinsky offered to act as an intermediary between Field and Nabokov, now communicating only through lawyers. When he wrote to Field he was told that he was "a schoolteacher to the marrow of your bones" and, as Karlinsky reported to the Nabokovs, should not interfere in this tussle between two giants (SK to VN and Vén, 10 October 1973).

After this visit, Nabokov asked Frank Taylor of McGraw-Hill: "Tell me, is Simon Karlinsky homosexual? I have a feeling he is. But it doesn't matter, I like him anyway." Hearing this from Frank Taylor, Simon was surprised and impressed that Nabokov had guessed, since he had learned to be very discreet with those who he was unsure could handle the information. He was also surprised to hear, later, that some thought Nabokov homophobic.

Véra Nabokov wrote to Karlinsky that his 1973 edition of Chekhov's letters was "absolutely first class" (22 February 1974). This judgement would lead to his most important Nabokov project, his edition of *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*. After Edmund Wilson died in 1972, his widow Elena began assembling an edition of Wilson's correspondence, and asked

Nabokov whether he would want any letters to him included. In May 1974 Nabokov replied he would be delighted, but that he thought it would be still better to publish both sides of the correspondence.

After Elena Wilson had laid out what would become Edmund Wilson's *Letters on Literature and Politics 1912-1972* (1977), she returned to the Nabokov-Wilson correspondence. Realizing that she did not have the specialized knowledge of Russian prosody needed to annotate their correspondence, she considered Gleb Struve, Harry Levin's wife Elena, and Karlinsky as possible editors. Nabokov did not think Elena Levin qualified; Véra warned about Struve's being difficult and recommended Karlinsky as younger and "very knowledgeable" (Vén to Elena Wilson, 21 January 1976). In February 1976 Elena Wilson therefore invited Karlinsky to edit the volume. Nabokov was having difficulty meeting the schedule of his second multi-book agreement with McGraw-Hill, signed in April 1974, and hoped the correspondence with Wilson could count as one of the required books, if it could be published by early 1977: "Is there any chance of your re-arranging your schedule? V.V. would be very much disappointed should it prove impossible for you to do the editing. Please, try!" (Vén to SK, 18 March 1976). Such a rapid schedule for such a large correspondence, needing considerable annotation, proved impractical. The book would eventually be published in 1979, and not by McGraw-Hill but by Harper and Row.

Late in 1976 Karlinsky sent Nabokov his *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolay Gogol*. Still groggy after the illness that had hospitalized him over the summer, Nabokov replied at the beginning of January 1977: "I think you over-symbolize the sexual meaning of certain marginal objects, and I am sure you overpraise certain writers: how can one rank the great Griboedov with such a mediocrity as Hmeltnitsky? Otherwise your book is a first-rate achievement" (VN to SK, 3 January 1977). That was to be the last communication between author and critic.

At Berkeley Karlinsky was supervising, with Robert Alter, the dissertation of a future leader of the next generation of Nabokov academics, Ellen Pifer, and editing the Nabokov-Wilson correspondence. Conscious of “a new generation of American intellectuals who view Lenin and the Bolsheviks as the great libertarians and who know nothing of the Chernyshevskyan tradition that preceded Lenin or of the importance of the entire Silver Age” (SK to V&N, 12 July 1976)—a generation whose views thus resembled those Wilson formed in the 1930s, but, Karlinsky thought, were more amenable to factual correction—he wrote his long introduction to *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* with the need for historical contextualization foremost in mind.

In May 1979, soon after defending my PhD thesis at the University of Toronto, I saw the *Nabokov-Wilson Letters* on sale in New York, noted that Nabokov’s side of the correspondence was at Yale’s Beinecke Library, and promptly headed there. I discovered 23 Nabokov letters omitted from the book, and errors of dating or identification. I wrote to Karlinsky praising his edition as the first piece of real scholarship on Nabokov—the first to provide rich and mostly reliable details of much of Nabokov’s life in the English-language phase of his career—but I also pointed out the errors and omissions. I added that I would be in San Francisco in late June on my way back to New Zealand. Three days before I was due to leave Toronto, I received a letter from V&era Nabokov, who had just read my dissertation and invited me to Montreux. I promptly rerouted myself across Europe rather than North America, and was chagrined to hear from Simon later that he had still been awaiting my arrival during the days I had expected to be in San Francisco.

V&era Nabokov invited Karlinsky to introduce the 1981 *Lectures in Russian Literature*, but when she read his text, she saw his contextualizing of the well-known figures in the volume, from Gogol to Gorki, as a criticism of the emphases in Nabokov’s teaching. She wrote to him that his approach was “in direct opposition to VN’s. . . . In your introduction you are

concerned with a history of Russian letters while VN’s concern is exclusively with a few works he considered the highest achievements of Russian [prose] literature in the 19th century.” (V&N to SK, 3 June 1981). Fredson Bowers, the editor of the lectures, a specialist of editing Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, was asked to write an introduction in his stead. Karlinsky was hurt at the rejection but soon recovered.

While working on my Nabokov biography in Montreux in 1982—and in the process finding two more batches of letters for a revised Nabokov-Wilson volume—I met Simon for the first time at a conference on Russian émigré literature in nearby Lausanne. Short, ideally bald, with a white beard and moustache outlining his face, he spoke in accented, clipped, rapid English, his delivery urgent and serious, even when, as often, the smile on his lips gave the lie to his earnest tone. With Robert Hughes and John Malmstad, also at the conference, he visited V&era in Montreux, I think for the last time.

I interviewed Simon for the biography a number of times, in Lausanne, in the home in Kensington, California, he shared with his partner Peter Carleton (whom he married in 2008), and in Jack London Square. On completing the biography I sent him and other leading Nabokov scholars the manuscript. After reading the first six chapters all day Simon wrote: “At some point during the day I felt a sense of relief which I couldn’t quite identify. It has to do, I think, with a sense of guilt somewhere in the back of my mind about not having done anything big about Nabokov during those years I’ve spent convincing people of the uniqueness of Tsvetaeva (people who can’t read her) or trying to bring Chekhov closer to Western readers or telling them what Gogol was really all about. Nabokov, with whose writings I fell in love when I was 12 and he was still Sirin, does not lack interpretations. But now you’ve done what I had half-consciously felt was my duty to do. . . . Hence, this relief—I am no longer obligated and Sirin-Nabokov is in very good hands” (SK to BB, 28 August 1987). His feedback was superb, especially his

insistent exhortations to explain Russian references in full to an audience that knew so little about Nabokov's background.

In 1989 I happened to change planes in San Francisco, and called Simon from the airport. He told me excitedly about the Tsvetaeva conference in Moscow from which he had just returned, and exhorted me: "You *must* go back to Russia" (which I had visited, on Nabokov's trail, in 1982). "This time, they'll show you everything." I took his advice next year, and found material now incorporated into the major translations (French, German, Russian) of the biography, but in English, fittingly, published only in a Festschrift, *For SK: In Celebration of the Life and Career of Simon Karlinsky*, ed. Michael S. Flier and Robert P. Hughes (Berkeley Slavic Specialists, 1994), on the occasion of his retirement from Berkeley.

Karlinsky had hoped to incorporate into the paperback the Nabokov and Wilson letters found after the first hardback edition, but the publisher did not want to defer the announced paperback date and incorporated only minor corrections. He then continued to try to find a publisher for a thoroughly revised edition of the letters. Even after the success of the 1998 play, *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, adapted movingly from the correspondence by Terry Quinn (with Dmitri Nabokov sometimes playing his father), it was not until 2001 that the University of California Press published Karlinsky's revised and expanded edition, now itself called *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*.

The opening of the Festschrift for his retirement provides a fitting close: "Simon Karlinsky is without question one of the most influential cultural critics to have emerged from the emigration."

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In Memory of Alfred Appel, Jr. by Brian Boyd

Alfred Appel, Jr., best known to Nabokovians as editor and annotator of *The Annotated Lolita* and as Nabokov's good friend in the late 1960s and early 1970s, died of heart failure on May 2, 2009, aged 75.

Born on January 31, 1934, in New York, Alfred grew up in Great Neck, N. Y., where he edited the Great Neck High School newspaper and had lead roles in numerous school shows. He attended Cornell from 1951. In his sophomore year, he read *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and realized, unlike most Cornell students, the astonishing writer they had in their midst. In the 1953-1954 school year he took Nabokov's Literature 312 course, Masterpieces of European Fiction, which he and his future wife Nina, who starred in the course a year later, thought their "most inspiring and meaningful academic—or, rather, artistic—experience at Cornell" (AA to VN, 25 September 1958). In the winter of 1955 Alfred was discharged from Cornell "because of my anemic 'points-toward-graduation' count," and served two years in the US Army. In 1957, on his return from the Army and Europe, he married Nina Schick, and in 1958, now a student at Columbia, wrote to his former Cornell teacher congratulating him on *Lolita*'s success in America. He not only related the Stockade Clyde story he would later make famous in the introduction to the *Annotated Lolita* but wrote also that "'312' was my first vital encounter with literature: your lectures on Proust and Joyce captured my imagination as no course has since, and, frankly, influenced me in pursuing my present studies in English." In 1959 he completed a BA in Literature and Fine Arts at Columbia, and continued there to a PhD in English on Eudora Welty. As a young teacher at Columbia he shared an office with Robert Alter, later another leading light in the first generation of Nabokov scholars.

By 1965 Alfred was at Stanford, teaching *Lolita* and *Pale*

Fire in his 180-strong American Novel lecture course. His seminar course, *Studies in the Grotesque*, helped inspire Page Stegner in his PhD dissertation and in what would become the first academic book on Nabokov, *Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (1966). Preparing for a special Nabokov issue of *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, the first multi-author volume on the writer, Alfred wrote to Nabokov asking if he could come to interview him. He and Nina stayed four days in Montreux with the Nabokovs, September 25 to 29, 1966 (*Strong Opinions*, interview 6) and established what would become a warm friendship. Nabokov's reputation in the 1960s often made others tongue-tied when they at last were allowed to see him. Nothing daunted Alfred or his sense of humor.

Later that year Alfred was working on a volume on Nabokov for New Directions' *Makers of Modern Literature* series, to include a "brief biographical chapter" (AA to VNs, 5 December 1966). On 14 and 21 January 1967, for the launch of *Speak, Memory*, the *New Republic* published his "Nabokov's Puppet Show," their longest literary review since Edmund Wilson's two-part review of *Finnegans Wake* in 1939, and the first detailed explication of Nabokov's self-conscious strategies and their implications, like "the transcendence of solipsism." Véra Nabokov wrote to Alfred: "Your essay . . . is so brilliant and profound that I cannot resist telling you of the pleasure it gave my husband. If he ever broke his rule not to thank critics, this would have been the occasion. (This is cheating a little, as you may notice.)" (VéN to AA, 24 January 1967).

Early in February Alfred proposed an annotated *Lolita*. Véra reported that VN found the idea "extremely attractive and interesting, and says you are quite right—the comments should be strictly factual and utilitarian" (VéN to AA, 20 February 1967). From March to December 1967 Alfred sent to Montreux draft annotations to *Lolita*, which Nabokov would return with detailed emendations and explanations. The Appels visited Montreux for another "marvelous time" in January 1968. The

next month, Alfred proposed an annotated *Pale Fire*; not until a reminder a year later did Nabokov reply: "*Pale Fire* may be commented [sic] in a separate pamphlet . . . but not as an annotated edition since it already is (a parody of) an annotated edition. Your sunlight would dilute my moonshine" (VN to AA, 30 May 1969). In July 1968 Prentice-Hall asked Appel to edit a Nabokov volume in their highly successful Twentieth-Century Views series. In October, by now teaching at Northwestern University, Alfred mentioned to Nabokov the *Triquarterly* Festschrift planned for the fall of 1969, and asked him for some fresh Nabokoviana for the volume but received the reply that "a festschrift should not contribute his own works" (VéN to AA, quoting VN, 20 October 1968)

One day during the Appels' January 1968 visit Nabokov had told them he had just completed Part 1 Chapter 32, the blue pool scene, of *Ada*. On 4 May 1969, the eve of the novel's publication, Alfred's front-page *New York Times Book Review* essay appeared, hailing *Ada* as "A supremely original work of the imagination. . . . further evidence that [Nabokov] is a peer of Kafka, Proust, and Joyce. . . . a love story, an erotic masterpiece, a philosophical investigation into the nature of time." Two days earlier Nabokov, after reading the advance of the review, had telegraphed Alfred: "ADA JOINS ME IN SALUTING AN ADMIRABLE READER. VAN VEEN." By October 1969 Alfred, still working on his Nabokov volume for New Directions, although now thinking it should move to Nabokov's new publisher, had also discussed with McGraw-Hill the possibility of an *Annotated Ada*.

1970 saw the publication of both the *Triquarterly* Festschrift (co-edited with Charles Newman, and also appearing in hardback as *Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes*) and the *Annotated Lolita*, which Nabokov welcomed generously: "How delighted I am that you undertook this task!" (VN to AA, 9 June 1970). From August 28 to September 2 Alfred and Nina Appel stayed with the Nabokovs, Alfred again sending ahead

interview questions (SO, interview 15), this time already with a strong focus on the film and visual art that he would focus on so much in his post-Nabokov career.

After a symposium at Berkeley in November 1970 where he had met Simon Karlinsky and other Nabokovians, Alfred proposed to Nabokov in February 1971 another *Triquarterly* special issue on the Russian emigration, this time with Karlinsky as his co-editor. A year later he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship which would allow him to complete, he wrote, "an ever-expanding manuscript known officially, in grant-giving circles, as 'Vladimir Nabokov: A Study'" (AA to VN, 22 February 1972). The Appels visited Montreux for five days in November 1972, where Vera asked Alfred why he didn't warn them about Andrew Field, whose attitude while writing his biography of Nabokov had already begun to alarm them. A year later, after the Nabokovs had read Field's manuscript and spent fraught months trying to reduce its errors, Alfred admitted he had wanted to warn them five years earlier, but hadn't been asked and might have seemed self-interested (AA to VNs, 29 August 1973).

In May 1973 Nabokov wrote to Appel that he had "read with great interest your article on the flicks"—"Nabokov's Dark Cinema," in the *Triquarterly* special issue on émigré literature, also published as *The Bitter Air of Exile: Russian Writers in the West, 1922-72* (1973)—"admiring your erudition but not regretting the meagre influence, if any, that the cinema had on my work" (VN to AA, 14 May 1973). Appel explained six weeks later that this essay had originally been intended as a chapter in his half-finished book on Nabokov for McGraw-Hill and Guggenheim, but that he "got carried away (or inspired) and a new book was suddenly before me, amoeba-like," and had already been accepted by Oxford, although he was "a bit depressed that the other book is still half-done" (AA to VN, 24 June 1973). Unlike *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, the general study would remain unfinished.

In mid-July 1974 the Appels visited the Nabokovs for the last time, at Zermatt, where Nabokov was resting after completing *Look at the Harlequins!* but already reworking the French translation of *Ada*. On a path in the mountains, with the peak of Zermatt in the distance, Nina took the brilliant photograph of her old teacher and her husband pointing in opposite directions, as if neither could see what the other saw. In November, Nabokov thanked Alfred for *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, "a brilliant and delightful book," although he had misgivings about being sometimes connected "with films and actors I have never seen in my life" and about what less subtle readers might suppose to be his direct borrowings from film (VN to AA, 8 November 1974). In reply Alfred explained his hope "that the good reader will realize that this book is finally about my mind . . . and the ways in which high culture and the popular arts intertwine in one consciousness" (AA to VNs, 14 November 1974).

When he read *Look at the Harlequins!* on its publication at the end of 1974, Alfred disliked it intensely, feeling that it seemed to characterize Nabokov as the self-referential and self-obsessed writer his critics had portrayed him as all along. He never reread the novel, and apart from obituary tributes and memoirs, he never again wrote an essay on Nabokov. Nabokov had told him in the 1970s that he regretted that he could no longer set novels in the United States, because he was out of touch with American slang and other ephemera. Appel, who celebrated the merging of popular culture (advertisements, comics, films, popular songs) in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, himself came to feel that Nabokov had lost touch and lost much by his relocation to Europe.

In the summer of 1975 Nabokov succumbed to the first of the infections that would plague his last years. Appel, thirty-five years younger, himself had a heart attack in July 1976, while Nabokov was back in hospital with yet another infection. A year later Appel had recovered but Nabokov was dead. Alfred

spoke eloquently at the McGraw-Hill memorial in New York in July 1977, later expanding his memoir for the *Times Literary Supplement* and for *Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute* (1979), edited by Peter Quennell.

Although he was deeply disappointed by Nabokov's last completed novel and wrote no more critical essays on him, Alfred "never lost his enthusiasm for and admiration for Nabokov," Nina Appel assured me recently. He moved in the new directions he opened up in the rush of inspiration that led to *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*: writing in a personal vein, as in his first book after his heart attack, pointedly entitled *Signs of Life* (1983), and about the interrelationship between popular culture and high culture in the twentieth century. A former fine arts major, and already eagerly pursuing passions beyond literature, he had shown Nabokov some of Ansel Adams' best landscape photographs at Zermatt in 1974: "A great artist!," proclaimed Nabokov (Quennell, p. 15). *Signs of Life* shows how to read American photographs and the society they record.

1983 was the year I first met Alfred, at a Nabokov conference at Cornell in April. He was a delightful and difficult person at a conference. Delightful because he was so funny, difficult because he was so irrepressible: when he sat next to you he would wisecrack in your ear about what was being said on stage, and it would be hard not to laugh even if you were trying to concentrate on the presentation. A week later I visited him in Wilmette, a lakeside suburb north of Chicago. His children, Karen and Richard, about whom he writes so proudly in the *Annotated Lolita*, had already left home. Nina, a law professor at Loyola, was about to become a singularly successful Dean of Law. Both Alfred and Nina regaled me gleefully with stories of the Nabokovs, Alfred appreciating especially his omnivorousness: "He could talk about anything and laugh about almost anything."

I saw Alfred next at the Nabokov conference at Yale in February 1987. Occasionally I would call him from Chicago

airport on my way from or to New Zealand. In June 1991 he sent me the revised *Annotated Lolita* with the inscription: "For the greatest discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls, p. 369" (the advertisement "See The Conquering Hero Comes—in a Viyella Robe!" with its picture of the man Lo identifies as a Humbert lookalike).

His next book, *The Art of Celebration: Twentieth-Century Painting, Literature, Sculpture, Photography, and Jazz* (1992), aimed to counter the sense of modernism and twentieth-century art in general as predominantly dark, bleak, and ironic. Alfred had begun his memorial tribute to Nabokov by stressing him as "a great and most resilient celebrant of life" (Quennell 11), and *The Art of Celebration* focuses on artists like Joyce, Picasso, Louis Armstrong and the Nabokov of "A Guide to Berlin": "only eight pages long, but it can serve as a springboard, a quick way to gain an overview of the art of celebration, especially if you don't have time to reread *Ulysses*" (114).

I last saw Alfred and Nina at the Nabokov Centenary celebration in April 1999 at the Town Hall, New York, where writers like Martin Amis, Joyce Carol Oates and Richard Ford were also paying tribute. Backstage, Alfred asked me anxiously, should he tell the "spooning" anecdote? Wouldn't everybody know it? (Quennell 21; *VNAY* 578) I insisted he tell it: even if people knew it already, they would love to hear it again. Of course it brought the house down. Apart from Nabokov's impromptu punchline, the most memorable line of the night was Alfred's enthusiastic description of Nabokov: contrary to the impression so many had that he must be dauntingly haughty, "he was the most fun to be with of anybody I have ever met"—and this from the most untameably funny person I and others have ever met.

Despite having a son who became an opera singer, Nabokov notoriously did not care for music. He loved art, and the high finish of the best art. Partly because of its element of improvisation he especially disliked jazz. He has John Shade

write:

Now I shall speak of evil as none has
Spoken before. I loathe such things as jazz;
The white-hosed moron torturing a black
Bull, rayed with red; abstractist bric-a-brac;
Primitivist folk masks. . . .

Ironically the last book of Nabokov's closest friend among his critics was *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce*, which Alfred published in 2002, two years after retiring from Northwestern. *Jazz Modernism* won the 2003 ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for outstanding coverage of music ("The first sustained attempt by any critic, musical or otherwise, to locate jazz in the larger context of modernism. Rarely if ever has a non-musician written about jazz so intelligently, and rarely has any musically trained critic brought to the study of jazz so wide a frame of cultural reference"—*Commentary*).

Nina Appel notes that Alfred's "zest, humor and joy in his work continued his entire life." At the time of his death he was working on two new books, one, *Victory's Scrapbook, Warfare from Life, Leger and Hemingway to Dick Tracy, Picasso, and Me*, on the effects of the propaganda rearing American citizens for World War II, and the other on Louis Armstrong. Even the list of his books confirms Nabokov's comment that Alfred was a "unique" (Quennell 21).

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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'S *LOLITA* AND FROST'S "DESIGN": A "WITCHES' BROTH" OF COINCIDENCE

In "Frost and Shade, and Questions of Design" (*Nabokovian* 56 [2006], 19-27), Anna Morlan discusses Nabokov's use of Robert Frost's poetry in the novel *Pale Fire*, specifically John Shade's poem, which Morlan sees as "Nabokov's homage to Frost and also his take on some of the issues raised by Robert Frost throughout the volume of his poetry" (19). I will extend Morlan's argument to *Lolita* and limit it only to Frost's poem "Design." While Morlan claims that, in *Pale Fire*, Shade's idea of "design is not one of darkness, but of sense, a game which fills the world with playfulness and provides him some certainty" (27), the opposite proves true in *Lolita*—Humbert

Humbert's design is clearly one of "darkness," marking this novel as more cynical in tone and less hopeful, less assured in its questions of greater or transcendent meaning.

While Nabokov most often directly references Frost in *Pale Fire* and Poe in *Lolita*, thematically, *Lolita* comes closest to the majority of Frost's nature poems, which reflect the ambivalence, even malevolence, in the "design" of the natural world.

"Design" (1922) is one of Frost's poems (such as "Mending Wall," "Birches," or "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things," to name a few) that consider the pathetic fallacy, the projection of man's inner feelings upon the world around him and his need for patterns of meaning (or "design") in what he observes. Nabokov often shares this thematic concern with Frost, constructing narrators who look to their surroundings for affirmation, condemnation, or "signs and symbols." In "Design" Frost creates a poetic persona who, in commenting on his environment, reveals the deceptively simple, yet cruel, coincidence that allows a predatory spider to capture its prey:

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—
Assorted characters of death and blight
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but design of darkness to appal?—
If design govern in a thing so small.

(*The Road Not Taken*, Ed. Louis Untermeyer, New York: Henry Holt, 1971, 202)

The following significant passage from *Lolita*, in which Humbert describes a rainy morning in the Haze household, seems to be an indirect homage to Frost's poem:

My white pajamas have a lilac *design* on the back. I am like one of those *inflated pale spiders* you see in old *gardens*. Sitting in the middle of a luminous web and giving little jerks to this or that strand. *My* web is spread all over the house as I listen from my chair where I sit like a wily wizard. Is Lo in her room? Gently I tug on the silk. She is not. [. . .] one has to feel elsewhere about the house for the beautiful warm-colored prey. (49, emphasis added)

The confluence of the white spider, the rare white heal-all, and the white moth bring about the moth's doom, much as the convergence of Humbert the predator with young Lolita in sunny Ramsdale will trap her in her lamentable destiny. This "witches' broth" (6) of coincidence does not make, as in *Pale Fire*, a "web of sense" but an overwhelming feeling of an insidious design; as Frost's narrator feels the capricious hand of chance behind the death of the moth, so we too feel the "darkness" of the designs upon young Lolita. We see the results of these designs when, acknowledging the role of accident, of simple bad luck, in Lolita's unimaginably unhappy existence, Humbert observes her face reflecting "a kind of dull amazement at the curiously inane life we all had rigged up for her" (Nabokov 215); Lolita, much like Frost's moth, finds her life becoming an intractable snare of inexplicable suffering.

The web of "Fate scheming" (50) continues to spread throughout Humbert's narration, and a mere three pages after describing his spider-like morning habits, he will present his reader with the first mention of what he playfully calls

"McFate" (52), which he defines as "that devil of mine," the force outside himself that toys with him, initially keeping Lolita out of his clutches and later causing him to lose her (56). As readers, of course, we see "McFate" most often working in Humbert's favor against Lolita, the will of the bloated spider overtaking the fluttery life of the moth. Even Miss Phalen ("moth" from the French, as Appel tells us in his Notes, 364), Lolita's potential ally against Humbert's designs on her, has been caught in another of McFate's webs, breaking "her hip in Savannah, Ga., on the very day [Humbert] arrived in Ramsdale" (56). Despite his protestations to the contrary, these hints and clues about Humbert's role as predator—working more in conjunction with McFate, with this "design of darkness," than against it (Frost, line 13)—reveal the possible brutality of chance, the sometimes random, senseless accident, such as the murder of John Shade or the assassination of Nabokov's own father.

While Humbert, much like Frost's poetic persona, addresses the nature of destiny, of fate, throughout the novel, his ruminations in chapter thirty-one of part two are probably the most telling. Here Humbert claims that "in a moment of metaphysical curiosity" he "had hoped to deduce from [his] sense of sin the existence of a Supreme Being," the final arbiter in the court of McFate (Nabokov 282). Conferring with a priest on "*frosty mornings* in rime-laced Quebec," Humbert cannot reconcile religion with the world he knows (282, emphasis added). These mornings, Humbert is indeed *Frost-like* in his search for "design," and, like Frost's narrator, he retains his uncertainty. Looking back upon his time with Lolita, this child who is but a "thing so small" (Frost line 14), Humbert claims:

Unless it can be proven to me....that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood

by a maniac, unless this can be proven (and if it can, then life is a joke), I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art. (Nabokov 283)

Humbert's inquisitive stance in this section is similar to the series of questions Frost's narrator poses at the end of "Design" when he wonders "what brought" (line 11) the flower to be white, the white spider to the flower, and the white moth to the spider's web. Does "design govern" in nature (14)—or in the life of a nymphet? Humbert's calling us back to "art" as the final moral "palliative" for his condition brings to mind the fact that Nabokov is the absolute "designer" here, the Supreme Being governing Humbert's life, or, as Morlan explains, "ultimately [Frost is] the one who designs a web on the page that brings about the death of the moth. In the end, his design is beautiful but harsh, and the only playfulness that Frost finds is that which he as poet brings into it" (25). I would argue that this type of poet's playfulness is primarily what we find in *Lolita* as well—not exactly the "sly playfulness" Nabokov found in nature (or created in *Pale Fire*) but the very human, self-reflexive, ability to create webs of meaning. As Brian Boyd reminds us, Nabokov was "fascinated by deception in nature, especially mimicry" and he "liked to find in his art equivalents for the sly playfulness he sensed behind things" ("Even Homais Nods": Nabokov's Fallibility; or, How to Revise *Lolita*" *Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A Casebook*, Ed. Ellen Pifer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 58). The poetic playfulness of Frost in "Design" or of Nabokov in *Lolita* highlights the seriousness of art, of human endeavor; Humbert's parody of humanity, his grotesque imitation of fatherhood, is no less meaningful than the mischievous "deceptions" of nature.

In the end, these types of playfulness—that of nature and that of the poet—are not mutually exclusive but can combine

to add to the richness and texture of the artists' works. In *Lolita*, these layers do not allow for the kind of transcendent reassurance John Shade finds in *Pale Fire*; instead, Nabokov seems to abandon the possible comforts of design to emphasize the uncertainty and misfortune of fate in tracing the life of "blue and innocent" Dolores Haze (Frost, line 10). Like Frost, Nabokov was interested in the paradoxes—and sometimes the absurdities—found in nature, as well as what Louis Untermeyer calls "the paradox of people" and "the contradictory nature of man" (*The Road Not Taken* 111). As he describes his own "paradise whose skies were the color of hell-flames" (Nabokov 166), Humbert certainly seems an embodiment of man's contradictory nature, suggesting, with his "paradise," not the precariousness of life after death, but the bewildering calamities of the world we inhabit and the power of the imagination to form the lives we live.

--Misty Jameson, Greenwood, South Carolina

CASTOR AND POLLUX IN *PALE FIRE*

"... *The Moon follows the Sun like a French
Translation of a Russian poet.*"

"*Variations on a Summer Day*"

Wallace Stevens

"*I imitate the Saviour,
And cultivate a beaver.*"

"*Antic Hay*"

Aldous Huxley

I

An uncommon word shared by Nabokov and another author is, most often, the key to a wealth of hidden references in his novels. It may also happen that a common word is applied by him to mislead the reader. *Pale Fire*'s pale fires may serve to indicate different sources of light, mythological references, spiritualistic séances, literary works or, perhaps, all of these at once. Readers should trust Kinbote's interventions, although not literally. For example, why would Kinbote observe that his "silly cognomen" (the Great Beaver) "*was not worth noticing,*" if not to call our attention to it?

Castor means "beaver" in both Greek and Latin and it is the name of one of the twins in Greek mythology, Castor and Pollux. Their names designate two stars in the constellation of Gemini and the patrons of sailors, who derive portents from electromagnetic phenomena also recognized as "Castor and Pollux." In Kinbote's commentaries there are several indications which suggest the importance of their names, both in connection to mysterious fires and as a hidden reference to the libretto for Rameau's lyrical tragedy, "Castor and Pollux." These two items lead to a secondary attribution to the novel's name, besides the one Shade invokes, a "moondrop title. Help me, Will! *Pale Fire,*" for his work.

II

"Pale Fire," the poem, is described by its characters as being: (a) something "*pale and diaphanous,*" "*a transparent thingum,*" ie: a feeble light, irrespective of its causation; (b) in need of a "*moondrop*" title; (c) comparable to the satellite whose light reflects or robs the fire of a sun, i. e.: it is undecided if Shade's poem reflects CK's story, Shakespeare's plays or poems by Robert Frost; (d) a description of a "*crystal land,*" related to

Zembla, perhaps like "crystal to crystal"; (e) a poem whose structure bears a crystal symmetry and "predictable growth."

Kinbote's images are curiously mingled when he returns to the (Shakespearean) sun-moon orbs of heat and light, for he may consider that Zembla and himself are the sun, whereas Shade is in the position of the moon by suggesting that (a) *PF* sheds a waning moon's diaphanous light and seeing himself as the steady sun ("Although I realize only too clearly, alas, that the result, in its pale and diaphanous final phase, cannot be regarded as a direct echo of my narrative..."); (b) his Zemblan story not only glows like the sun, but it warms Shade into a boiling bubbling point ("one can hardly doubt that the sunset glow of the story acted as a catalytic agent upon the very process of the sustained creative effervescence"); (c) his effect on Shade engenders a resemblance in color and hue, i.e. it must be closer to ice crystals/moonlight than to sun/moon ("a symptomatic family resemblance in the coloration of both poem and story"). Nevertheless, Kinbote has also compared himself to the moon which borrows its light from Shade's sun ("in many cases have caught myself borrowing a kind of opalescent light from my poet's fiery orb").

There are other kinds of reflections and pale fires in Nabokov's novel. In the Foreword, CK testifies to Shade's burning a batch of cards "in the pale fire of the incinerator." There are magic circlets of light enticing Shade's daughter, Hazel, into spiritualistic research. Although we find, in Shakespeare's Hamlet, "The glow-worm shows the matin to be near, And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire," (mentioned by Peter Lubin, 1970, "Kickshaw and Motley," A.Appel & Newman ed.) and in "The Tempest," a reference to a meteor which may appear as a single flame, a will-o-the wisp, or a double fire (when it is called "Castor and Pollux"), it is generally assumed that the title of the novel, like Shade's poem, is solely inspired by Shakespeare's lines: "The moon's an arrant thief, /And her pale fire she snatches from the sun" (Act IV, Scene 3 in "Timon of Athens").

III

The French words for "pale fire" (*pâle flambeau*) were first mentioned by Priscilla Meyer, in "Find What the Sailor Has Hidden" (Wesleyan University Press, 1988, 170-174), when she discusses some of the references in Kinbote's note to line 80. In his commentary Kinbote cites A. R. Wallace, a scientist who, like Charles Darwin, described the theory of "the survival of the fittest," before he links Wallace and spiritualism: "The Countess...had him attend table-turning séances ...at which the Queen's spirit, operating the same kind of planchette she had used in her lifetime to chat with Thormodus Torfaeus and A.R. Wallace, now briskly wrote in English: "Charles take take cherish love flower flower flower" (Cp. CK's note to line 347, on Hazel's experiment with the moving circlet of light that responded with "broken words and meaningless syllables... pada ata lane pad not ogo old wart alan ther tale feur far rant lant tal told").

Meyer also quotes Kinbote's note to line 549, with its long and atypical dialogue, when "Shade takes the materialist position and Kinbote is aligned with Wallace" (Meyer 171). The first lines she quotes are: "*Shade*: Personally, I am with the old snuff-takers: *L'homme est né bon*."

The outline of two additional hidden references is here discernible. When Kinbote resorts to twenty-two reported exchanges between himself and Shade, he seems to be parodying the style of Denis Diderot, particularly "*Le Neveu de Rameau*," which contains similar dialogues between a philosopher and Rameau's nephew, discussing moral and religious issues, friendship and patriotism. He is also introducing the musician Rameau, although neither Diderot nor Rameau is directly mentioned in *Pale Fire*. Nor is there a reference to yet a third French composer and philosopher, J. J. Rousseau, even though the lines espoused by Shade, "*l'homme est né bon*," doubtlessly point to the latter.

If Shade is indeed referring to Rousseau's famous ideal "good savage," Kinbote is relating to Wallace, and to his spiritualistic investigations. According to Meyer (172-173), "Wallace recorded the proceedings of the many séances he attended" and he offers a long message, in French, dated August 1893, purportedly sent by a dying Napoleon III to a medium who signed the poem as 'Ésprit C.'"

The lines Meyer quotes are: "Où vais-je?.../Des bords du lit funèbre, où palpète sa proie/Aux lugubres clartés de son pâle flambeau,/L'impitoyable mort me montre le tombeau./Éternité profonde..." In the libretto of Jean-Phillipe Rameau's lyrical tragedy, "Castor et Pollux" (1737), written by Pierre-Joseph Bernard, we also encounter a "pâle flambeau," the pale fire of mortal decomposition, applicable to Castor, a dead hero. It is worth remembering that Diderot and Rousseau are ranked among the first anarchists and that they stand in opposition to classic Voltaire and Rameau, with whom Rousseau had established an open rivalry.

It is impossible to ascertain if the reference to Rousseau indicates VN's knowledge of Rousseau's opposition to Rameau, or of Bernard's libretto for "Castor and Pollux." The links with Wallace are clear, as is his reference to a poem "taken down by a medium." And yet, independently of VN's knowledge about the two seventeenth century musicians and philosopher, we must realize that the lines the "Ésprit C" wrote were inspired by the libretto for "Castor et Pollux." There are too many words in common between their few lines (flambeaux, tombeau, lugubre, clartés, funèbres). We have here a clearly demonstrable hoax, which may have taken Wallace in, but not Kinbote who parodies the belief in spiritual messages derived from moving lights. By mentioning his cognomen, "The Great Beaver," and referring to Rousseau and Wallace, Kinbote may be pointing to Rameau's libretto, away from Shakespeare's sun and moon evoked by John Shade.

In Rameau's "Castor and Pollux" (Act II, Scene 2) Télétaire,

whose father is the sun, exclaims: "Tristes apprêts, pâles flambeaux,/Jour plus affreux que les ténèbres/ Astres lugubres des tombeaux./ Non, je ne verrai plus que vos clartés funèbres./ Toi, qui vois mon cœur éperdu,/ Père du jour, ô soleil, ô mon père !/ Je ne veux plus d'un bien que Castor/ Et je renonce à la lumière."

As mentioned in the beginning of the present note, the circlet of light that sends warning messages to Hazel might be considered a "will-o-the-wisp" (the spirit-light denies this attribution following one of Hazel's enquiries) or represent a "Fire of St. Elm" or the "Castor and Pollux" electromagnetic phenomena with their magical connotations. To all appearances Kinbote has failed to recognize Shade's chosen title in Shakespeare since, as he informs us, all he's managed to carry to his "Timon cave" has been "a tiny vest pocket edition of "Timon of Athens"— in Zemblan! It certainly contains nothing that could be regarded as an equivalent of „pale fire“ (if it had, my luck would have been a statistical monster)." The passage he selects, from which "pale fire" has disappeared, is a retranslation into English by Conmal: "The sun is a thief: she lures the sea/ and robs it. The moon is a thief:/he steals his silvery light from the sun./The sea is a thief: it dissolves the moon." Rameau's envious nephew, from Diderot's dialogues, once exclaimed: "*si un voleur vole l'autre, le diable s'en rit.*" Perhaps the devil is laughing at Kinbote's hoaxes and thefts or at his opalescent blind-spots, or Nabokov is sharing his mirth with the reader by jostling him back and forth between truth and fiction, authentic references and hoaxes.

I thank Priscilla Meyer for her generous editorial advice and Mércia Pinto, Jacob Wilkenfeld, Luiz Fernando Gallego and Abdallah Bouazza (who also brought up in the Nabokov-List the lines by Wallace Stevens, quoted in the epigraph) for their invaluable help with the bibliography.

--Jansy Berndt de Souza Mello, Brasília, Brazil

BAUDELAIRE, MELMOTH AND LAUGHTER

Humbert Humbert refers to his car as a “Dream Blue Melmoth” (*Annotated Lolita* 227). Near the end of the novel, Humbert draws further attention to the name of this car by parenthetically saying hello to it from the text: “Hi, Melmoth, thanks a lot, old fellow” (307). Why Melmoth? *The Annotated Lolita* explains that “Melmoth” is a reference to both Charles Robert Maturin’s large Gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* and to Oscar Wilde’s “post-prison pseudonym” Sebastian Melmoth. Nabokov playfully adds another reference: “Melmoth may come from Mellonella Moth (which breeds in beehives) or, more likely, from Meal Moth (which breeds in grain)” (416-417). These three possibilities do not really have great resonance within the novel. They do not quite explain why Nabokov (or Humbert) would choose the name Melmoth. In fact, the name seems to have greater resonance in yet another source, Charles Baudelaire’s essay “On the Essence of Laughter” (ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne, New York: Phaidon, 1964, 147-165).

Baudelaire’s analysis of laughter contains ideas that can be connected to Humbert and to some themes of *Lolita*. Baudelaire describes the laughter of the man who lives with a sense of his own superiority: “this laughter ... is—you must understand—the necessary resultant of his own double nature, which is infinitely great in relation to man, and infinitely vile and base in relation to absolute Truth and Justice. Melmoth is a living contradiction” (153). Here we have one of Nabokov’s favorite themes, the double—a theme that is clearly expressed by Humbert’s double name. More specifically, we have a sense of Humbert’s character, a man who feels superior to others and, at the same time, commits actions that are “vile and base.” Brian Boyd describes Humbert’s doubleness: “Humbert might wish to introduce Lolita to Baudelaire or Shakespeare, but his false relationship to her, his breach of her mother’s trust, and his

crushing of her freedom mean he can only stunt her growth” (*Vladimir Nabokov, The American Years*, 1991, 6). In fact, this doubleness—or as Baudelaire states, this “living contradiction”—can in part explain the moral difficulty that many readers have with this novel. A number of scholars have discussed this theme of the double, often focusing on Humbert’s apparent doppelgänger Quilty; reading with Baudelaire’s thoughts in mind (and Boyd’s), one can see the double within Humbert alone.

Baudelaire goes on to describe the “satanic” laughter of Melmoth, in a sentence that could be read as an insightful analysis of Humbert’s text: “And thus the laughter of Melmoth, which is the highest expression of pride, is forever performing its function as it lacerates and scorches the lips of the laugher for whose sins there can be no remission” (153). Humbert, too, has a pride that lacerates, an arrogance that is thoroughly bound up in his sense of guilt. His “sin” is his “soul”(9). An essay on laughter might seem an odd place to find insight into Humbert, a man who is not prone to great laughter. Nabokov sees Baudelaire’s essential ideas, keeps the point about a sense of superiority and removes the actual laughter—that is, unless one senses some disturbing laughter coming from the entirety of Humbert’s text.

The locale of Humbert’s writing also has some resonance in Baudelaire’s essay. Humbert begins writing this text “in the psychopathic ward,” and he remains in an ambiguous “legal captivity” (308, 3). Baudelaire writes, “[I]t is a notorious fact that all madmen in asylums have an excessively overdeveloped idea of their own superiority: I hardly know of any who suffer from the madness of humility” (152). This too could be seen as a Baudelairean reading of Humbert, who in a previous “bout with insanity” had found “an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists” (34). Note Baudelaire’s description of “Satanic” laughter: “Laughter, they say, comes from a sense of superiority. I should not be surprised if, on making this discovery, the physiologist had burst out laughing himself at

the thought of his own superiority" (152). Humbert Humbert shares this sense of superiority as well as the self-awareness; Baudelaire sees something Satanic in that sense of superiority, and he also connects this to Melmoth, who he refers to as "that great satanic creation of the Reverend Maturin" (153).

It would be appropriate to Humbert, the author of a "comparative history of French literature for English-speaking students" (32), to think of Baudelaire when using the name Melmoth and comically (or madly) saying hello to his car. In addition, Nabokov apparently had little respect for Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, stating that "Maturin used up all the platitudes of Satanism, while remaining on the side of the conventional angels" (*EO*, II, 352). (This comes from Nabokov's note on "Melmoth" in his annotations of *Eugene Onegin*. Nabokov quotes Baudelaire's praise of Maturin's novel toward the end of that note, as though he associates Melmoth with Baudelaire.) Any reference to Oscar Wilde would be less relevant to this novel (and to Humbert) than the presence of Baudelaire. And the idea that the name has to do with a real moth (or two) is most likely some misleading information planted by Nabokov. Appel's annotations state the "Melmoth" is "a triple allusion" (416), but he does not explain how any of these three allusions (Maturin, Wilde, or moths) add to the texture of the novel. Baudelaire's sense of Melmoth is more suited to *Lolita*.

Of course, Nabokov refers to Baudelaire in other works as well. Baudelaire's *L'Invitation au voyage* is directly referenced in the title of Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, and elsewhere in the novel, as Gavriel Shapiro and other scholars have pointed out. There is a telling moment in Baudelaire's "On the Essence of Laughter" that may have been in Nabokov's mind when writing the conclusion of his *Invitation*. Baudelaire describes a scene in which "the English Pierrot" is beheaded:

His head was severed from his neck—a great red and white head, which rolled noisily to rest in front of the prompter's

box, showing the bleeding disk of the neck, the split vertebrae and all the details of a piece of butcher's meat just dressed for the counter. And then, all of a sudden, the decapitated trunk, moved by its irresistible obsession with theft, jumped to its feet, triumphantly "lifted" its own head as though it was a ham or a bottle of wine...(161)

Nabokov adds a metaphysical dimension to the scene where Cincinnatus arises from his decapitation. Cincinnatus moves toward his double, toward a place that may have a greater sense of "Truth and Justice," and away from the "base and vile" prison in which he had existed (to use Baudelaire's terms in describing the double, quoted above). Cincinnatus leaves his head behind. Again, Nabokov removes the direct sense of laughter, and adds a dimension that is not present in Baudelaire's description. Nonetheless, Nabokov seems to have read Baudelaire's essay attentively.

This is certainly true when one reads Baudelaire's thoughts on the laughter of children: "the laughter of children...is altogether different, even as a physical expression, even as a form... from the terrible laughter of Melmoth—of Melmoth, the outcast of society, wandering somewhere between the last boundaries of the territory of mankind and the frontiers of the higher life" (156). Here we have that final scene of *Lolita*, where Humbert rests high on a mountain road and listens to the sounds of children at play, which includes "an almost articulate spurt of vivid laughter" (308). Baudelaire continues: "For the laughter of children is like the blossoming of a flower. It is the joy of receiving, the joy of breathing, the joy of contemplating, of living, of growing." This is exactly what Humbert hears ("the melody of children at play"), and exactly, he realizes, what *Lolita* has been absent from. Baudelaire writes, "Joy is a unity"; Humbert writes, "[T]hese sounds were of one nature." Nabokov also adds a Baudelairean exclamation aimed at the reader during this scene: "Reader!" (308). *The Annotated Lolita* explains in

an earlier note that this direct appeal to the reader “echo[es] the last line of *Au Lecteur*, the prefatory poem in Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal*” (436).

Interestingly, Humbert keeps this moment pure. Many readers have used this as evidence of Humbert’s knowledge of his crime, perhaps of his sense of guilt or his transformation toward love. Some have gone so far as to judge Humbert with less contempt because of this moment (although one should note that this scene does not happen at the end of the story: Humbert only places it at the end, perhaps to manipulate the reader into being more lenient). Baudelaire, however, does not think of this laughter as so pure: “the laughter of children... is not entirely exempt from ambition, as is only proper to little scraps of men—that is, to budding Satans” (156). Baudelaire seems more cynical than Humbert here, as he sees budding Humberts—budding Melmoths—in that laughter. Humbert, on the other hand, depicts such laughter as something entirely separate from himself.

There is plenty of evidence of Nabokov’s interest in Baudelaire, as explained by scholars not mentioned in this brief article, such as John Burt Foster, Jr., and Robert Alter. My purpose is merely to offer a small addition to that work. There is certainly some affinity between Nabokov’s work and Baudelaire’s “On the Essence of Laughter.” Jorge Luis Borges writes that we create our own precursors: one who knows Nabokov cannot read “On the Essence of Laughter” without seeing some Nabokovian ideas. In a more chronological sense, Baudelaire’s essay may have inspired the name of a car.

--David Rutledge, New Orleans

“MOUNTAIN, NOT FOUNTAIN,” PALE FIRE’S SAVING GRACE

Canto III of John Shade’s poem “Pale Fire” may surprise the reader for a number of reasons. What exactly “dawned” on Shade after he learned about the misprint which destroyed the “robust truth” he derived from the “twin display” of the white fountain? And why did he experience “something...of...Pleasure” after he had just finished Canto II, containing the story of his daughter’s suicide?

The clue to the answers to both questions may be found in the white mountains Mrs. Z. and Shade envisaged; Mrs. Z. in her near-death dreamlike vision, Shade in his poetry. These mountains owe their whiteness to snow and ice. And as they are enveloped by a “veil,” they seem to act as agents capable of showing water in all its manifestations, from gaseous to crystallized forms. The single line Kinbote quotes from Shade’s poem “Mont Blanc” refers, through its images and its style, to the Romantic Poets who have celebrated high mountains for similar qualities, such as the splendor of sun-reflecting snow, and the evocation of eternity to which these mountains seem to belong. The various states of water—gaseous, liquid and solid—and its movements result from the interference by the sun and the moon, the orbiting of our planet, and its atmospheric conditions, thus establishing manifold links with the universe.

The powerful image of the “rain puddle” Nabokov presents in *Bend Sinister*, which is “shaped like a cell that is about to divide,” not only symbolizes the regenerating force of life, but its promise of an afterlife as well. This is because of the puddle’s narrow bottleneck which thinly connects metaphorically this world with the otherworld. Charles Sherrington’s explorations into the origin of life are mentioned to show how well-founded Nabokov’s related notions are.

Many of Nabokov’s heroines are drowned, others like Irma in *Laughter in the Dark* notice the various forms of the aqueous

medium and its communications with light and lightning. Hazel Shade, disappearing in a neck, which, as an isthmus, is suggestive of the possible link between the two worlds, is surrounded by water in all its states, as well as by miniature "sun-creamed domes" which her father describes in his poem "Mont Blanc."

The aim of this paper is by no means to present Nabokov as a kind of modern Thales. Indeed, suggesting that Nabokov's metaphysics, about which we know hardly anything, may somehow be condensed in "water," would be a dismal *reductio ad absurdum*. It is rather the dazzling display of Nabokov's many marvelous images and their interlacement, superposed on the beauties already discovered by the Romantic poets and Alexander Pope, that I would like to highlight.

The leap that Shade makes from disappointment (after Coates' disclosure of the misprint in lines 801-2) to contentment by apprehending the contrapuntal theme is so apodictic that it seems to require some clarification to make this conversion comprehensible. Nabokov often hides the "elegant solutions" for his riddles in the very phrases he uses to detail these riddles (*Strong Opinions* 16). The acrostic in "The Vane Sisters" illustrates this as does the remark by Falter, who has solved "the riddle of the universe," to Sineusov who is after its solutions: "I inadvertently gave myself away" (*Stories* 518).

Shade pays a visit to Mrs. Z. expecting to receive confirmation of the near-death vision they both had, which included a white fountain. But, alas, she never saw the fountain: she saw a white mountain. Shade, driving home, thinks about abandoning his lifelong pursuit of everlasting life, but suddenly realizes "that *this* / Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme" he had been looking for with so much persistence (P 806-7; *Pale Fire* is referred to by using the letters F,P,C and I for its Foreword, Poem, Commentary and Index and by the numbers of the poem's lines). What had dawned on Shade we can learn from Kinbote's comments on line 802. Kinbote here informs his readers that "[t]he passage 797-809, on the poet's

sixty-fifth card, was composed between the sunset of July 18 and the dawn of July 19." As Shade "preserved the date of the actual creation" by noting it on "the pink upper line" of the index cards he used, and as the lines mentioned, including the skipped one "to indicate double space" exactly match "the fourteen light-blue lines" available on these cards, Kinbote's information appears to be accurate (F). Asked by Kinbote "'what were you writing about last night, John?'" the poet answers: "'Mountains'" (C 802). The actual lines written at that time comprise precisely the switch from disillusionment due to the misprint, to Shade's reaching "the real point," and contain no "mountains" at all, apart from the misprinted one: "[*m*]ountain, not *fountain*." But of course Shade is right; the lines 797-809 are essentially about mountains, as these restore the "twin display" that would provide Shade the "robust truth" of the existence of the hereafter (P 746; 766). Shade must have realized that not he but Mrs. Z. must have noticed this unique coincidence by combining her own "white mountain" with Shade's "white mountain," envisaged in his poem "Mont Blanc" (P 782-83; C 782). If the mountain in Shade's poem resembles that of Mrs. Z.'s vision and if the poem pertains to the hereafter, that is, if Shade's "Mont Blanc" somehow has prefigured that of Mrs. Z.'s vision, then the recurrence Shade counted on would have been regained.

Unfortunately, the reader is only given "one line" from Shade's poem: Mont Blanc's "blue-shaded buttresses and sun-creamed domes" (I; C 782). Luckily, the two colors of this line, the blue and the implied white of the cream, mirror those in the lines devoted to Mrs. Z. who sees a "white" mountain and has "blue hair" (P 758; 771), and reads about Shade's poem "Mon Blon" in the "Blue Review" (P 783; 782). Moreover, the line cited from Shade's "Mont Blanc" has two collocations (forms frequently used by the Romantic poets), while "Pale Fire" has only two collocations in all its 999 lines: "flax-haired" and "ink-blue" (P 574; 995), yielding another combination of blue and

(yellowish) white. Furthermore, all or most of Shade's shorter poems presented or mentioned in *Pale Fire* have transcendental subjects or intentions: "The Sacred Tree," "The Swing," "Mountain View," "The Nature of Electricity" (I). (From "April Rain" there is only one line: "A rapid pencil sketch of Spring," C 470). "The Sacred Tree" is about a ginkgo leaf, which tree is considered sacred in China and associated with eternity. In "The Swing" the final stanza is about "The empty little swing .../That break[s] my heart," a reference to the swing of Shade's "little daughter" whose ghost is suggested in line 57 (C 61). "The Nature of Electricity" is a lyrical meditation on the chance that deceased souls continue to live by residing in electricity. In "Mountain View" a mountain is admired when the poet who has reveled in its view, realizes that

... we all know it cannot last,
The mountain is too weak to wait--,

clearly a reference to eternity, the only dimension that can outlast a mountain (C 92). In Canto three, Shade, while discussing the "Institute of Preparation for the Hereafter," cheerfully recalls the view of "a snowy form" of a great mountain, strongly suggesting that gazing at a nebulous white mountain is a better preparation for the hereafter than President McAber's Institute (P 513).

Mrs. Z. sees her white mountain beyond a "veil" whereas Shade sees his mountain beyond a "veil of blue amorous gauze" (P 751; C 92), and both notice trees, an orchard in Mrs. Z.'s case, pines in Shade's poem. Shade's three poetical evocations of mountains (lines 510-14; "Mountain View" and "Mont Blanc") share the veil, the trees, the snow and the mountain's grandness with Mrs. Z.'s mountain. Shade must have realized that the recurrence of these features, all part of what his imagination created as the vista of the hereafter, is a much better validation than a mere repetition of a moribund vision. That his powerful imagination, engrossed in creativity "on the highest terrace of

consciousness" could have matched the vision of Mrs. Z., whose consciousness even when fully restored to life was somewhat enervated, must have convinced Shade of the veracity of this image (*Speak, Memory*, 50). In *Ada* Nabokov called "individual magically detailed imagination" the "third sight," thus ranking it above the perception of supernatural phenomena (second sight) or plain observation (252).

The love of great mountains has not been widespread in all ages. Thomas Gray was one of the first to become enraptured (instead of repelled) by the sight of mountainous scenery (see Leslie Stephen, "Gray and his School" in *Hours in a Library*, volume 3). In the Romantic Age the love of great mountains reached its peak. Wordsworth was a restless walker and Coleridge a reckless climber, and they, like Shelley and Byron, wrote poems inspired by the awe the Alps evoked. The view of peaks covered with eternal snow prompted reflections on the creation and the limits of earthly life, as the highest summits seem to support or even to pierce the sky. It is indisputable that Shade, entitling his poem "Mont Blanc," was aware, in every detail, of Shelley's great example, one of his best known lyrics. (See also Matthew Roth, "Glimmers of Shelley in John Shade's Verse," *The Nabokovian*, 2009, 62). Shelley's "Mont Blanc" has two striking images, a mountain beyond a veil as well as a waterfall with a veil:

Thine earthly rainbow stretched across the sweep
Of the aethereal waterfall, whose veil
Robes some unsculptured image ... (25-27)

...I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? (52-54)

As is clearly suggested in the lines cited, this veil covers a different world:

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep,--that death is slumber. (49-50)

Apart from the phrase "The Land Beyond the Veil" (P 750-51), Shade uses the image of "sun-creamed domes" in his "Mont Blanc." "Veil" and "dome" are words that typically belong to the vocabulary of the Romantics. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the eponymous protagonist, living in the Alps and eager to learn "the secrets of heaven and earth," complains that even the most learned philosopher had only "partially unveiled the face of Nature" (New York: New American Library, 1965, 37, 39). Wordsworth wrote how he beheld "Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc" (*The Prelude*, IV, 525), and Byron provides another example:

A spirit pass'd before me: I beheld
The face of immortality unveil'd
(“A spirit Pass'd Before Me”)

Shelley uses the image of a "veil" as a symbol for what can be sensed but not be seen, quite often, as for example in *Adonais* (l. 392 & 493; see also his "Epipsychidion," l. 343, 556). Eternal life is also connoted in the "idea of the dome, of the artifact that repeats the shape of the universe" and which is "a central Romantic motif" as in Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* (Allan Grant, *A Preface to Coleridge*, London: Longman, 1972, 132). The "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice" from *Kubla Khan* is probably its most famous representation.

Shelley's mountain, with a "giant brood of pines" clinging to it (20) and "still, snowy and serene" in canto III (61), becomes quite vivid in canto IV: glaciers creep, frost and sun pile onto precipices, ice beams, snow flakes turn in the sinking sun, winds form breath, rapid and strong, all this under "The infinite dome [o]f Heaven." Mountain, veil, trees and snow,

beautifully celebrated in Shade's lines from "Mont Blanc," "Mountain View" and the lines in "Pale Fire" devoted to the Yewshade mountain, are lavishly exalted in Shelley's visionary poem and in Mrs. Z.'s vision as well.

The opening lines of Shelley's "Mont Blanc,"

The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind,...

could be, looking at the penultimate line which says that everything springs from "the human mind's imaginings," turned into the poem's conclusion by reading the second line as "flows [from] the mind," which is remindful of Kinbote's conviction "that somehow Mind is involved as a main factor in the making of the universe" (C 549).

The spectacles offered by high mountains may remind one of Edward Whymper, the first predecessor of Mrs. Z.'s niece in climbing the Matterhorn, designated Mount Everest as the Third Pole (Robert MacFarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, London: Granta Books, 2004, 231). In a 1971 interview, Nabokov, discussing insects hatching from eggs under different conditions, compared the Alps with the poles: "Alpine, or Polar form" (Stephen Jan Parker, "Vladimir Nabokov and the Short Story," *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, vol. 24, 1991, 69). And it is for its niveous quality alone that Shade borrowed Zembla metaphorically in line 937. Brian Boyd writes how Nabokov in 1921 longed to go to the Alps as "the sight of snow and trees rimmed with frost could be a nostrum for nostalgia" (*VNAY*, 188). For Pope and his contemporaries, Zembla was the world's most northern country within man's reach. By making its climate more moderate, Nabokov melted the frozen and snow-covered areas of its real mirror-image Novaya Zemlya and made it habitable. In return for its frozen fields, Zembla is given a large number of high mountains and alpine regions, all listed in the Index: Bera Range, Bregberg, Falkberg, Glittern-

tin, Kobaltana, Kronberg, Multraberg and Paberg, its number amounting to eight and thus buttressing the many appearances this figure, symbolizing eternity, makes in endlessly varying shapes in *Pale Fire*. The mountains of the Bera Range “retain their snow in midsummer” (C 149) and in this way Nabokov has assured that Zembla has its share of perennial ice crystals, just like Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn and the poles. But the Zembla Shade refers to, *pace* Kinbote, stems from Pope.

In *The Dunciad* Zembla is mockingly endowed with fruits, which befits the orchard Mrs. Z. saw. But it is in Pope’s *Temple of Fame* where the most important description is presented:

So Zembla’s Rocks (the beauteous Work of Frost)
Rise white in Air, and glitter o’er the Coast;
Pale Suns, unfelt, at distance roll away,
And on th’impassive Ice the Lightnings play:
Eternal Snows the growing Mass supply,
Till the bright Mountains prop th’incumbent Sky:
As Atlas fix’d, each hoary Pile appears,
The gather’d Winter of a thousand Years. (53-60)

To these lines Pope added a lengthy note, its crux being that “[t]he Simile here is of that sort, and renders it not wholly unlikely that a Rock of Ice should remain for ever, ...” (*The Poems of Alexander Pope*, Ed. John Butt, New Haven: Yale UP, 1963, 174.)

As in Shelley’s “Mont Blanc,” we see frost at work, making rocks which “glitter” in Pope’s poem and precipices of “beaming ice” in Shelley’s; we see suns disappearing by rolling away (Pope) or sinking (Shelley); lightning that plays (Pope) or broods (Shelley) on ice or over snow. By including Zembla in his hazy landfalls of everlasting life, Nabokov comprises a reflection of his native country. (For autobiographical dimensions of Zembla, see my “Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, Pushkin, Belkin, Botkin and Kinbote,” paper presented at the Fourth VN

International Conference, St. Petersburg, 2009, forthcoming). The eternal snow on the summits of mountains might bode the hereafter, and with the eternal snow of Zembla (read: Russia) he approximates eternal life as it might have extended antenatally: “infinite aftertime” and “infinite foretime” are sensed by the glassy glaciations of Alpine summits and the frosted fields of Zembla (P 122-23).

Although mountains, due to their near-attainable elevation, might inspire numinous reflections, the Alpine images in *Pale Fire* seem to be selected primarily because of their frostiness. “In the temperature charts of poetry,” writes Kinbote, “high is low, and low is high,” suggesting that “our poet” more easily warmed to subjects the colder these are (as he is convinced that Shade’s remark that he is “just behind ...Frost” is not only a pun but a metaphor as well) (C 426).

No element is more susceptible to the interferences of the universe than water, which is transmuted into multiple forms by its operations. In its most airy condition it appears as a haze, mist or fog. In a more condensed form it turns into clouds, which in cooperation with sunshine yield such rapturous pictures that move many a painter and poet.

Those painted clouds that beautify our days
(*Essay on Man*, II, 284)

writes Pope, and Shade at length admires

[t]he painted parchment papering our cage (P 106).

In its liquid form water cooperates with the moon and sun causing its tidal surging and ebbing and it runs in rivers that have stirred people’s imaginations to populate them with mermaids, *loreleis*, naiads, *rusalki* and sirens. Water is the medium Nabokov uses for his heroines to find their way to an afterlife: “[n]one of the [drowned] women simply dies,” writes D. Barton Johnson,

"all continue to exist and act upon the living" ("L'Inconnue de la Seine," *Comparative Literature*, Summer 1992, 244). Crystallized as snow, water can glitter and sparkle in the lights of sun and moon. Finally, in its most glaciated form it covers the spots where the earth reaches farthest out into the universe.

This may be illustrated by the story "Lance" written in 1951, ten years before the first manned spacecraft was launched. Lance, an astronaut, travels to an unnamed planet where he finds "Gothic structures of ice" and "seracs" (*Stories* 634). A serac is, i.e., a pinnacle. In the line Kinbote quoted from Shade's "Mont Blanc," "buttresses" are mentioned as well as a "dome." In Webster's Second the word "buttress" is illustrated with an example which is actually a Gothic buttress. Buttresses, pinnacles and domes are first of all architectural artifacts. It seems that in Nabokov's art arctic regions serve as points of junction between planets, with some sort of edifices to make the transit more convenient.

The association of the death of a beloved girl with water, snow and ice can be observed already in *Laughter in the Dark*. On the first day of Irma's illness she sees in the rays that the bedside lamp casts on the ceiling "a fisherman and a boat" and "reeds" which makes it likely that she saw water as well (156). The next day she dreams of "playing hockey with her father" (on the previous day she watched an ice-hockey match preceded by some figure-skating performed by a girl whose "glittering skates flashed like lightning"). Unfortunately, later that evening she fell "and could not get up"; during the night she died, "snow was falling," visible for Irma, since "nobody had troubled to draw the curtains" (160, 150, 175).

In the second Epistle of the *Essay on Man*, Pope ponders man's fate; his intellect enables him to envisage the universe and the eternity he is part of, while his earthly existence is doomed by disaster and death. Situated between these irreconcilabilities man is placed, in Pope's phrase, on an "isthmus" (II, 3). Nabokov's concerns are different, as he endeavored to learn how

earthly life would continue in the afterlife, which makes the meeting point between this world and the hereafter of interest.

Nabokov visualized these possible links in a variety of ways. In *Bend Sinister* it is "[a]n oblong puddle inset in the coarse asphalt; like a fancy footprint filled to the brim with quicksilver; like a spatulate hole through which you can see the nether sky"(1). Because this puddle is "shaped like a cell that is about to divide" (xiv), it resembles an "8," the Christian symbol for eternity.

Sir Charles Sherrington beautifully describes this mystery of how cells grow into organisations with numerous different organs, amounting to "26 million million magic bricks" when a human child is born, using phrases not unlike those of Pope and Shade (*Man on his Nature, The Gifford Lectures*, 1940, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1955, 101). "[H]ow are they all co-ordinated, to give a harmony of growth 'according to plan'," writes Sherrington (107), while Pope saw "[a] mighty maze! But not without a plan," (*Essay on Man*, I, 6) and Shade saw the "[c]oordinating" of "events and objects" into "coincidence," thus creating a "web of sense" (P 826/7 & 809/10). This multiplying of cells can occur as a cell feeds "on juices from its mother" and "the magic in those juices" is the more miraculous as 80% of them is water. "Water," writes Sherrington, "is a great menstruum of 'life.' It makes life possible" (113).

The behaviour of cells is, according to Sherrington, so remarkable, "as if it were inspired by purpose," that the question arises whether a cell has "some modicum of mind in it," which question "is not decisively answerable"(97), but which gives Kinbote's idea "that somehow Mind is involved as a main factor in the making of the universe," apart from its philosophical merits, a scientific standing (C549).

The same shape as the puddle is provided by a lemniscate, an hourglass, a shoe and a bath-tub, and, approximately by a bicycle or sunglasses. Any commerce between the two worlds is bound to happen through the hourglass's wasp-waist or its

neck. In this waist one is able to participate in both worlds.

In *Pale Fire* the shape of the puddle is retained in the lake in which Hazel drowned, as she “tried to cross the lake [a]t Lochan Neck” (P 488-89). In this way Hazel can hover in both worlds and she will eventually return as a Red Admirable, as Boyd has argued (*Nabokov's Pale Fire. The Magic of Artistic Discovery*. Princeton: PUP, 1999).

If cosmic consciousness could be compared, however metaphorically, with a physical equivalent, water would be a natural choice. Its degree of condensation and crystallization is ruled by the sun, while its marine movements were supposed to be governed by the moon. This enables Shakespeare, in the lines from *Timon of Athens*, to imagine a circular movement of water from the earth through the universe with the help of pale fire:

The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
Robs the vast sea; the moon's an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun;
The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears... (IV, 3, 438 – 442)

(“The theory current in Shakespeare's day to explain the phenomenon of the sea's tidal flow was that the sea attracted moisture from the watery planet, the moon,” notes G.R. Hibbard in his edition of *Timon of Athens*, Penguin, 1970, 235).

By associating with water one becomes qualified to partake in the perpetual motion of water and light that Shakespeare suggests. Nassim Berdjis observes a comparable “circular motion in space” in *The Gift*: “Existence is thus an eternal transformation of the future into the past as “the watery abyss of the past” permanently gains on “the aerial abyss of the future” (*Imagery in Vladimir Nabokov's Last Russian Novel (Dar), Its English Translation (The Gift) and Other Prose Works of the 1930's*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995, 95). And Falter, who in “Ultima Thule” possesses the key to the riddle

of the universe, recalls how by asking “Some water, please,” he gave himself away, since in these words “flashed a fringe of absolute insight” (*Stories* 512, 518; see David Rutledge, “The Otherworldly Role of Water,” *The Nabokovian*, 1998, no. 41). In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov describes his Aunt Praskovia, “a very learned, very kind, very elegant lady,” whose last words were: “That's interesting. Now I understand. Everything is water, vsyo – voda” (67, 68). J. B. Sisson, in his discussion of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* also presents a number of instances of water imagery in Nabokov's novels (*The Garland Companion to VN*, 1995, 641).

Supposing that Shade's “Mont Blanc” conveys a sort of intimation of immortality, the reoccurrence of its symbols might be significant. Indeed, some miniature sun-creamed domes can be recognized on the night that Hazel lost her life. The rotund “snowpatches” brightened in “a festive blaze” (P 484-85) which the Shades saw were of course invisible to their daughter. But as the oncoming “headlights” will have illuminated the snowcaps topping the “reflector poles” (P 445; 447), Hazel saw similar signposts.

If the present tentative interpretation might be a plausible illustration of some of Shade's thoughts furthering his discovery of the contrapuntal theme (that Mrs. Z.'s vision was not a supporting but a leading one), then it is understandable why he found pleasure in envisaging the “game of worlds.” On the night Hazel lost her life she was surrounded by fog, sleet, water, snow and ice, all available to “assist assimilation” (P 514) by the transformations that an afterlife in the universe might offer. Having received assurance that his daughter is “somewhere alive,” Shade might even be reconciled to his poor daughter's miserable fate. Exchanging such a life for an afterlife might be considered a relief and this may explain why Shade found pleasure in detecting a “game of worlds” which might have engendered this afterlife.

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--Gerard de Vries, Voorschoten, The Netherlands

BEHEADING FIRST: ON NABOKOV'S TRANSLATION OF LEWIS CARROLL

Ania v strane chudes (Berlin: Gamaion, 1923), a masterful Russian retelling of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, was one of the first works in prose by young V. Sirin. Nabokov noted when interviewed by Alfred Appel in 1966, "In common with many English children (and I was an English child), I have been always very fond of Carroll." Like all Nabokov's writings, *Ania* was banned in Russia, and was first published there only in 1989.

In 1970, Simon Karlinsky ("Anya in Wonderland: Nabokov's Russified Lewis Carroll," *Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations, and Tributes*, eds. A. Appel, Jr. & C. Newman, Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 310–315) wrote: "For the near future, Olenich-Gnenenko's awkward, misshapen *Alisa* [a Soviet translation of 1940--V.F.] seems fated to remain the standard *Alice* in Russian, while Nabokov's warm and witty *Anya* stays in exile on foreign bookshelves. Were she allowed to return to the country of her spiritual origin, *Anya* could easily supersede the ungainly incumbent."

Neither Karlinsky nor Nabokov knew about the new 1967 translation by Nina Demurova. In fact, Nabokov, who first read *Alice* in English at age six, "had never seen a Russian translation of it—either before or after making his" (letter of Véra Nabokov to Stephen Jan Parker, 18 September 1973). See also Appel & Newman (*op. cit.*, 375) where Nabokov himself says "Incidentally, I had not (and still have not) seen any other Rus-

sian versions of this book." Another generation passed before *Ania* came to Russia—but then she already faced strong competition from younger Russian *Alisas* by Demurova, Zakhoder, Shcherbakov, Orel, and others. The language changed as well, especially children's slang and folklore. In her *Lewis Carroll in Russia: translations of Alice in Wonderland, 1879–1989* (New York: Russian House, 1994), Fan Parker specifically, albeit not always justly, noted changes in the Russian language comparing various translations of *Alice*. Among other things, Parker stated that addressing Alice as "you" in the Russian second-person singular ("ty") instead of a polite plural ("vy") vulgarizes Carroll's text—a change probably hardly noticed by a modern Russian reader whose ear is accustomed to much more profound vulgarizations.

Warren Weaver (*Alice in Many Tongues. The Translations of Alice in Wonderland*, 1964) rated *Ania* "the best translation of the book into any language" (Boyd, *The Russian Years*, 197). Modern researchers agree (Demurova, N. M. "Alisa na drugikh beregakh" [Alice on Other Shores], Carroll, L. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Nabokov, V., *Ania v strane chudes*, Moscow, Raduga, 1992, 7–28; *id.* "Alice speaks Russian: The Russian translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*." *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1994-1995, 5(4), 11–29; *id.*, "Vladimir Nabokov, translator of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*," *Nabokov at Cornell*, ed. G. Shapiro, Cornell Univ. Press, 2003, 182–191; Tolstaia, N. I. "Russkaia sestra Alisy" [A Russian Sister of Alice], Carroll, L. *Ania v strane chudes*. Perevod V. Nabokova. Irkutsk, 1992, 112–116; Connolly, J. W. "Ania v strane chudes," *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* (ed. V. Alexandrov), New York: Garland, 1995, 18–24; Vid, N. "Domesticated translation: The case of Nabokov's translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*," *Nabokov Online Journal*, 2008, 2).

In his "gleeful raid on the toys and tags of a Russian nursery" (Boyd, *The Russian Years*, 197), Nabokov carefully

leads Ania/Alice and her readers across abysses separating tongues and cultures. For instance, in the “dry lecture” on medieval Russian history (which supplants Carroll’s history of William the Conqueror), Nabokov’s Mouse explains how “...after Monomakh’s death, Kiev passed not to his brothers but to his sons, and became therefore a family property of the Monomakhovichs. ... While they lived in friendship, their power in Kiev was strong; but when their relationships worsened..., the Olgovich princes rose against them, and took Kiev by force more than once... But the Monomakhovichs, in their turn...”

This text was taken by Nabokov verbatim from a famous textbook of Russian history (St. Petersburg, 1909–1910) by Sergei Platonov (1860–1933). This is mentioned as a known fact by Igor Vdovenko (“Raspolozhenie teksta v prostranstve kul’tury” [The Position of the Text in Cultural Space], *Nauki o kul’ture – shag v XXI vek*, Moscow, 2000; *Strategii kul’turnogo perevoda [The Strategies of Cultural Translation]*, SPb, Ross. inst. istorii iskusstv, 2007), but to my knowledge this source was never before identified by researchers of Nabokov’s *Ania*. Karlinsky (1970, 313) talks about “some 19th-century history text,” and Alexander Floria (“‘Angel’skii iazyk’ V. Sirina. ‘Alisa v strane chudes’ v interpretatsii V. V. Nabokova” [The ‘Angelic Language’ of V. Sirin. ‘Alice in Wonderland’ as Interpreted by V. V. Nabokov]. *Almanakh perevodchika*, Moscow, 2001, 50–54) even considered this fragment a parody of Karamzin’s “History of Russia.” A prominent historian, S. F. Platonov, who lectured until 1926 at Leningrad University, was in charge of the Archaeological Institute and Pushkinskii Dom; in 1930 he was arrested and accused of plotting with Germany for “restoration to the Russian throne of his former student, Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich.” Platonov was exiled to Samara and died there.

For those children who read Nabokov’s translation in 1923, the textbook words about Kievan struggles were not at all dry—they bore a fresh echo of the Russian civil war, at the same time described by Bulgakov in his *White Guard* (1924).

On her dive “down to rabbit-hole” (“nyrok v krolichyiu norku”), Ania finds herself in a hybrid world, much like Ada’s Antiterra. A brass plaque in Nabokov’s Wonderland still says “Dvorianin Krolik Trusikov (Nobleman Rabbit Bunnyson)” where Carroll has only “W. Rabbit.” Pet’ka and Iashka (Carroll’s Pat and Bill) call the White Rabbit “Vashe blagorodie” (Your Nobleness), a form of address long gone in Soviet Russia of 1923. Isn’t that a Pet’ka from Alexander Blok’s *The Twelve* (1918)? Just a few years ago in the Crimea, nineteen year-old Nabokov wrote a long, still unpublished poem, *The Two*—his anti-Bolshevik reply to the formerly beloved Blok.

Here, I must quote a quaint “Victorian” parody of *The Twelve* by Edmund Valpy Knox (1881–1971), a satirical poet, editor of *Punch* in 1932–1949, and the father of Penelope Fitzgerald:

I said to the moon, “The night goes soon;
Katya is false to me;
She is mine from her pointed head to her shoon
By a Soviet law’s decree,
And she flirts with Petka, the lousy loon,
And Vanka the bourjoo-ee...”

Nabokov in Cambridge could have easily seen this verse, published in *Punch* on February 23, 1921 under the pen name “Evoe.”

A number of the studies listed above, in English and Russian, discuss Nabokov’s *Ania* in some detail. These works mainly focused on Nabokov’s old-fashioned Russification of the text, on his ebullient rendering of Carroll’s endless puns, wordgames, nonsense, names, and verse parodies. However, none of these authors, to my knowledge, noticed Nabokov’s peculiar translation of a key paragraph in the last scene of the last (12th) chapter, “Pokazanie Ani” [Ania’s Evidence]:

“Pust’ prisiazhnye obsudiat prigovor,” skazal

Korol'... "Net, net," previala Koroleva. "Sperva kazn,' a potom uzh prigovor!"

("Let the jury discuss the sentence," said the King... "No, no," interrupted the Queen. "Execution first—sentence afterwards!").

In Carroll's original text, the Queen says something quite different: her famous line is "*Sentence first—verdict afterwards!*"

In her commentary to *Ania's* parallel edition with the original *Alice*, Nina Demurova (1992, 310–311) explains the paradox contained in the words of the Queen, which should be "easily noticeable to anybody familiar with the English judiciary system... The Jury, after deliberations, makes a decision (Russ. *reshenie*--V.F.) of being guilty or not guilty (*verdict*). Then the judge announces the *sentence* (Russ. *prigovor*--V.F.) based on the decision of the jury."

Carroll's Queen switches the steps of the traditional judiciary procedure, hence the logical nonsense: how could one be sentenced before the guilt is established? Well, we in the USSR knew how—but the British citizen Alice with centuries of tradition behind her is fuming: "Stuff and nonsense! The idea of having the sentence first!"

However, in Nabokov's translation the procedures are not only switched but also moved one notch up, which changes the situation rather dramatically. Nabokov says: "*Execution first – sentence afterwards!*"

This, indeed, is "stuff and nonsense." A *sentence* could be appealed or commuted, even without a jury system. An absolute monarch could do that (one recalls Dostoyevsky's case). But *execution*, once done, can hardly be appealed.

I am inclined to think that Nabokov's "enhanced" translation of the "Sentence first" phrase was an intentional modification. However, this shift in the Queen's line caused an obvious error in the first line of the quoted paragraph (the King's words), which is translated "Let the jury discuss the sentence." Carroll's

King, of course, says "Let the jury consider their verdict."

Later Russian translators also had some difficulties following Carroll's legal terminology in this paragraph. Demurova's translation (1967) reads:

"Pust' prisiazhnye reshaiut, vinoven on ili net, skazal Korol'"... "Net!" skazala Koroleva. "Pust' vynosiat prigovor! A vinoven on ili net, potom razberemsia!" ("Let the jury decide whether he is guilty or not," said the King... "No!" said the Queen. "Let [them] announce the sentence! We'll figure out afterwards whether he is guilty or not!")

Here, we see a mix-up in the Queen's line similar to Nabokov's version of the King's line: it appears that the Queen orders the *jurors* to announce the *sentence* instead of the *verdict*. But the sentence must be announced by the judge, and the King himself is this judge, as the text clearly states earlier. The King keeps bothering the jury because he wants to hear their verdict in order to be able to announce the sentence.

In Vladimir Orel's translation (1987) the situation is even less clear:

"Pust' prisiazhnye vynosiat prigovor," povtoril on... "Net uzh!" zaiavila Koroleva. "Ty im sperva skazhi, kakoj prigovor vynosit', a potom pust' sebe vynosiat na zdorovye."

("Let the jury announce the sentence", repeated he [the King]... "No way!" – declared the Queen. "You tell them first which sentence to announce, and then let them announce it as much as they wish.")

A retelling by Mikhail Blekhman has (independently?) the same shift as in Nabokov's translation:

"Prisiazhnye, oglasite prigovor!," prikazal on...

"Net," vmeshalas' Koroleva. "Snachala pust' privedut v ispolnenie, a potom prigovarivai sebe skol'ko khochesh'."

("The jury, announce the sentence!" ordered the [king]... "No!" the Queen interrupted. "Let him be executed first – afterwards he can be sentenced as much as one wishes.")

On the other hand, Boris Zakhoder in his retelling (1972), while omitting the difficult term "verdict," follows Carroll's text very closely:

"Udaliates' na soveshchanie!" skazal Korol'... "Nechego tam!" skazala Koroleva. "Sperva prigovor, posoveshchaiutsa potom."

("Withdraw for your deliberations!" said the King... "No need!" said the Queen. "Sentence first, deliberations afterwards.")

A precise translation was offered by Alexander Shcherbakov (1977) who used the word *reshenie* (decision), in this context synonymous with "verdict":

"Pust' prisiazhnye vynesut reshenie," ...povtoril Korol'... "Net," skazala Koroleva. "Snachala prigovor – potom reshenie."

("Let the jury announce [their] decision," repeated [the King]... "No," said the Queen. "Sentence first – decision afterwards.")

Other recent translators (A. Kononenko, Iu. Nesterenko) use "verdikt" and therefore easily manage to follow Carroll's exact words, "Sentence first – verdict afterwards."

Close meanings and little-known legal terminology confused some of the translators. Such a confusion is obviously related

to the absence of trial by jury in the USSR, where "prokuror daval srok" ("the prosecutor gave one a jail term"), somewhat like Carroll's Snark who (in the Barrister's Dream) serves as a defense attorney but also reads the verdict for the jury, and declares the sentence for the judge.

The trial by jury (introduced in Russia only by Alexander II in 1864, in Carroll's time) was so alien to Soviet language that Boris Zakhoder tried to pun with his children readers: "Do not confuse jurors (*prisiazhnye*) with trace horses (*pristiazhnye*), and you will have as much reason to be proud of yourself as Alice. Even more: both are found these days much less often than a hundred years ago."

The expression "[*gosпода*] *prisiazhnye* [*zasedateli*]" ("gentlemen of the jury") was mocked as outdated and ridiculous already by Ostap Bender (I. Il'f & E. Petrov's *Twelve Chairs*, 1928), ten years after the Bolsheviks did away with the former judiciary system. Zakhoder's Aesopian pun – unnoticed by the censorship – is very bitter: it was during that time (1970s) that Soviet judges handed down sentences to political dissidents. In the West, meanwhile, jurors did not disappear along with trace horses. Indeed, one of the most emotional shocks for a Soviet émigré in the USA is the discovery of universal *jury duty*. Good or bad, the verdict here indeed is decided by a dozen often ill-educated Bill the Lizards ("Iashki-iashcheritsy") rather than by a *troika* of "state judicial counselors" or "commissars in dusty helmets." Not much has been changed in the Russian system where "the poor little juror (it was Bill, the Lizard) could not make out at all what had become of it..."

Let us recall who read *Ania* in 1923: children born during the Great War, who escaped with their parents from Soviet Russia only three or four years ago. ("It was much pleasanter at home," thought poor Alice.") At that time, Berlin housed several hundred thousand Russian refugees. Many of them had served as jurors in Russian pre-revolutionary courts, where they regularly used to acquit terrorists. They understood the

direct, bitter meaning of Nabokov's puns as they read *Ania* to their children and grandchildren in Berlin and Prague, Sofia and Belgrade. These children were to face more suffering when they grew up, and had few rabbit-holes to hide in; many of them indeed went right through the Earth, ending in "New Zealand or Australia."

It is often mentioned, quite tactlessly, how *Lolita* brought fame and wealth to her author. Not everybody knows, however, that *Ania* also played a crucial role in the fate of Nabokov who fled with his family from the Communists in 1919 to Europe and from the Nazis in 1940 to the USA. Nabokov wrote in 1970: "I recall with pleasure that one of the accidents that prompted Wellesley College to engage me as lecturer in the early forties was the presence of my rare *Anya* in the Wellesley collection of Lewis Carroll editions." This was Nabokov's first more or less permanent job in America, which he held until 1947.

The show trial of the Knave of Hearts, Vyshinsky-style, takes place in Chapters 11 and 12. We know from earlier chapters that the Queen orders beheadings left and right for everybody without any trial. It is not clear, though, that any executions actually take place: "Alice heard the King say in a low voice... 'You are all pardoned.'" The Gryphon also comments "It's all her fancy, that they never executes nobody."

At the same time, Carroll wrote: "I pictured to myself the Queen of Hearts as a sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion—a blind and aimless Fury." Her medieval "off with their head" motif is elaborately developed in Nabokov's *Priglasenie na kazn'* (1934, published 1935-36), which only in 1959 became known to the world as *Invitation to a Beheading*. As often noted, the novel's famous ending rhymes with the finale of *Alice in Wonderland*: "the whole pack [of cards] rose up into the air and came flying down upon her," and Alice woke up.

The beheading motif was a reality in Soviet Russia. Ellen Pifer (*Nabokov and the Novel*, Harvard Univ. Press, 1980, 182)

notes: "Both Nabokov's and Solzhenitsyn's treatments of the totalitarian state's mock trials call attention to the nightmarish logic made famous by Carroll's Victorian fantasy, in which the Queen of Hearts appropriately calls for the 'Sentence first—verdict afterwards'." Both Anna Akhmatova and Ariadna Efron (daughter of Marina Tsvetaeva) compared their life in the USSR with the world of *Through the Looking-Glass* (traditionally translated by the potent Russian neologism "Zazerkalye," Behind-the-Mirror-Land, invented by Vladimir Ashkenazi who published the first Russian translation of *Through the Looking-Glass* under the pen name "V. Azov" in 1924, and emigrated to Paris in 1926). As the literary scholar and translator Evgeny Vitkovsky recently wrote: "We were told that we lived in Wonderland, but it was a demagogical lie: for almost the entire twentieth century we lived Behind the Looking-Glass" ("Russkoe Zazerkalye," www.vekperevoda.com).

The poet Olga Sedakova says: "For me, Nabokov's fantasy, his combinatorial imagination, undoubtedly bears the mark of *Alice*. This could be why many people see him as a "non-Russian" writer, too alienated from 'soulfulness'." Numerous traces of Carroll can be found in all Nabokov's novels, Russian and English. Humbert can be read as a slimy parody of the White Knight. The red-clad King of Zembla on his run from Ekwilists, as Brian Boyd noted (*The American Years*, 452; *Nabokov's Pale Fire*, 182), reminds us of the solipsist Red King from *Through the Looking-Glass* (as Tweedledee explains to Alice, "...you're only a sort of thing in his dream!"). The King of Zembla's first name, Charles, is the real name of Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson). Antique, so-called "pre-Staunton," chess sets were red and white, but Russian translations follow modern chess colors: the Red King becomes a Black King, and the Carrollian connection of *Pale Fire* is less obvious.

Years later, Ada and Lucette appear behind another mirror; their teacher is one Krolik (Russian for Rabbit); but how distant they are from the Liddell sisters with their good old Wonder-

land! Simon Karlinsky's sharp eye noted already in 1970 that there is an Ada in *Ania*, who comes intact from the original *Alice* text. "Some exegete should be able to make something of this," remarks Karlinsky (*op. cit.*, 312), and I am tempted to try a little bit of rational exegesis.

Nabokov's Ania tries to distinguish herself from both Ada and Asia; the latter substitutes for Carroll's Mabel. Carrollian experts point at a possible word game (Ada + Mabel = Adam + Abel). Natalia Vid (2008) suggested that Nabokov replaced Mabel with Asia "emphasizing Alice's doubt about her identity by establishing sound similarity between the names": *Ania-Ada-Asia*. In my view, Nabokov clearly offers an additional word game: he implies here a sequence of a Doublets game invented by Carroll in 1877 (which is the same as *Pale Fire's* Word Golf). The permutation is possible since each of these three names has three Cyrillic letters (ADA-ASIA-ANIA). A missing Word Golf link in Russian can be only "Adia," a rare but possible abbreviation of also rare Adelle (known from Pushkin's poems) or Adelaida (Ada Veen's full name): *Ada-(Adia)-Asia-Ania*.

It has been noted that one of the reasons Nabokov changed Alice to Ania in the first place might have been that the Empress Alexandra of Russia (born Princess Alix of Hesse) was commonly known as Alice ("Alisa"), a very foreign name for a Russian ear. "It may be that Nabokov wanted to avoid the name of the unfortunate woman who was murdered by the Bolsheviks in Ekaterinburg on the night of 16–17 July 1918" (Demurova, 1995, 15; *id.*, 2003, 184). As for Asia, it is not a full name but an abbreviation of Anastasia (equally commonly abbreviated as Nastia); Asia was the family name of Anastasia Tsvetaeva, Marina's sister. There is a "Princess Asia Ratmirova" in Lidiia Charskaia's *Volshebnaia skazka* [*A Magic Tale*] (1915). The most famous Anastasia in 1923 was the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna, murdered by in 1918 along with her siblings and parents. In a way, therefore, "Princess Asia" is a daughter of a "Queen Alisa," and Ania's frantic search for her personality

could reflect the rumors that the Grand Duchess Anastasia survived.

On the other hand, the most famous Asia in Russian literature is Turgenev's eponymous young heroine (*Asia*, 1858) who, in fact, also happens to be an Ania! Turgenev's narrator ("N.N.") says: "her name was properly Anna; but Gagin [her brother--V.F.] always called her Asia, and I shall allow myself that privilege." Asia is a very unusual diminutive of Anna. It was also used, clearly under the influence of the novel, by Asia (Anna Alekseevna) Turgeneva (1890–1966). She was a second cousin twice removed of Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev and the first wife of the poet Andrei Bely.

Says Ania: "*Ia naverno znaiu, chto ia ne Ada... ia ubezhdena takzhe, chto ia i ne Asia, potomu chto ia znaiu vsiakuiu vsiachinu, ona-zhe-akh, ona tak malo znaet!*" ("I'm sure I'm not Ada ... and I'm sure I can't be Asia, for I know all sorts of things but she—oh, she knows so little!") Indeed, if only Asias and Lizas of Turgenev's (i.e. Carroll's) time knew as much as their granddaughter Ania would know in Berlin in 1923!

I thank Stan Kelly-Bootle for his comments on this note.

--Victor Fet, Marshall University

ON THE ORIGINAL OF CHEEPLY: NABOKOV AND POPULAR CULTURE FADS

The original version of *Kamera obskura* (written 1931, published 1932–1933), but not Nabokov's reworking of the novel as *Laughter in the Dark* (written 1937, published 1938), opens:

Round about the year 1925 an amusing little animal enjoyed world-wide popularity. It is now almost forgotten, but for a period of some three to four years it was to be seen every-

where: from Alaska to Patagonia, from Manchuria to New Zealand, from Lapland to the Cape of Good Hope—in a word, in every region accessible to picture post cards. This little creature rejoiced in the seductive name of “Cheepy,” and it was a guinea-pig.

The origin of its rise to fame is said to have been connected with the question of vivisection. . . . a month after this conversation, when Horn was trying to think of a subject for a series of drawings which an illustrated paper had commissioned from him, he recalled the advice of the tender-hearted physiologist—and, on that same evening, the first paper guinea-pig was swiftly and painlessly born. The public was immediately charmed with the sketch. The sly expression of the round, twinkling eyes, the plump little figure of the guinea-pig, with its stout hind-quarters, the sleek head, the skin with its patches of black, brown and yellow, and above all, the creature’s delicious and comical sprightliness, won it extraordinary popularity. For Horn had succeeded in hitting off the characteristic outline of the animal, emphasizing its drollness and yet at the same time investing it with something curiously human. One of his guinea-pigs, for instance, was holding in its small paws the skull of a rodent and exclaiming: “Alas! poor Yorick!” Another was shown lying on its back on the bench of a laboratory and trying to do fashionable gymnastic exercises—feet to head (and you can imagine how far it could reach with its short hind legs); a third was calmly trimming its claws with a suspiciously fine pair of scissors, surrounded by cotton wool, a lancet, needles, and all sorts of other instruments. . . . [ellipsis in original]

Very soon, however, the allusions to vivisection were dropped, and the guinea-pig appeared in quite unexpected positions—dancing the Charleston, burning itself quite black in the sun, and so on. These guinea-pigs were reproduced on picture post cards and in film cartoons, as well as in

solid form, for soon there grew a demand for guinea-pigs in plush, cloth, wood and clay.

(*Camera Obscura*, translated by Winifred Roy, London: John Long, 1936, 5-7)

Like others, I had assumed that Nabokov here invents a craze for a particular cartoon image on the basis of such fads in general. In fact he seems to have modelled Cheepy and the craze he causes on a particular figure, Bonzo, and the craze *he* caused from the end of 1921 to the early 1930s.

Bonzo was the creation of the Englishman George Ernest Studdy (1878-1948). Studdy, an illustrator for magazines and children’s annuals, persuaded *The Sketch* to trial “The Studdy Dog.” It ran first on November 2, 1921 and became an instant hit. At first the dogs Studdy depicted reflected recognizable breeds but the images soon converged and morphed into a stylized, softly squarish, cartoon pup. In response to readers clamouring for a name for the dog, Bruce Ingram, the editor of *The Sketch*, christened him Bonzo, in the issue of November 8, 1922. Bonzo images were collected in a series of booklets, the *Studdy Dog Portfolios*, issued between 1922 and 1925.

I owe all my information about Bonzo, and the two images below, to Reg Richardson. On his remarkably comprehensive Bonzo website, www.studying-with-bonzo.co.uk, he writes that as Bonzo’s popularity bloomed, others rushed to share in the figure’s instant recognizability. From 1923 he

appeared in many advertisements, selling everything from tobacco, cars, soap, and polish to confectionery and pickles. He was also featured among the first neon signs put up in London’s Piccadilly Circus, when the area was developed to rival that in Times Square, New York, in 1924.

The postcard side also continued strongly, with George drawing up to 500 images for Valentine’s alone. Images of

Bonzo appeared everywhere. There were glass perfume bottles and inkwells, china figures, jugs, ashtrays, plates, cups & saucers, condiment sets, soft toys and metalware, and at the top end of the range there were porcelain figures from both the Royal Doulton and Royal Worcester factories. Spears produced several games featuring the dog—including a variation on Snakes & Ladders called ‘The Bonzo Chase Game’, and jigsaw puzzles were made by A.V.N. Jones & Co.

In October 1924 the Producer William A. Ward collaborated with George Studdy to produce the first of 26 films featuring Bonzo for New Era Films. These required hard work by George and ten other artists to create the thousands of drawings needed for each film. They ran for about ten minutes each, and were released throughout late 1924 and till the end of 1925.

Bonzo’s popularity was by now also growing in other countries. By the mid 1920’s he had appeared in continental Europe - France, Germany & Austria, Denmark, Norway, and Czechoslovakia. At the same time, Bonzo had gone transatlantic, and was syndicated by King Features Inc., appearing in many US Sunday newspapers’ supplement, ‘The American Weekly’, and a new series of small hard-back books published by McLoughlin Bros., Inc. in 1929.

(<http://www.bonzo.me.uk/bio.htm>)

Even without the clinching evidence to come, the resemblances in timing and trajectory between Cheepy and Bonzo would be obvious. The animated film versions of Bonzo are particularly pertinent, given the movie theme so prominent in *Kamera obskura* and *Laughter in the Dark*, and the shift from Robert Horn as creator of Cheepy in the Russian version to Axel Rex as the artist solicited to realize the hero’s idea of animating Old Master paintings in Nabokov’s English revamp.

Nabokov may well have been aware of Bonzo as early as 1922, since he lived in Cambridge until the beginning of June 1922 before leaving to join his mother and his family in Berlin. If he missed Bonzo in Cambridge, he would have encountered him in Berlin, where the monthly *Das Magazin* featured Bonzo almost every month or more from 1925 to 1932, sometimes on the cover. In any case by 1925 Bonzo was as ubiquitous and inescapable as Garfield, the hero of Jim Davis’s comic strip, would become in his heyday in the 1980s.

On September 13, 1927, Nabokov sent a postcard (private collection) to Sergey Kaplan, a youth whom he had tutored for the previous two years, first in English, then also in French. The postcard was the first (number 1000) in The ‘‘R.P.S.’’ Series Post Cards of Bonzo: the pup, with a bandaged right front wrist, smiling sleepily atop a pillow he has been merrily shredding, above the caption ‘‘Every Day in Every Respect: I am getting Better and Better’’ (appropriately chosen by Nabokov to send to Kaplan, who was recuperating on holiday from the school year). This image of the bandaged pup seems particularly close, visually and thematically, to Cheepy the guinea pig surrounded by signs of vivisection in Horn’s first images.



Every Day in Every Respect: I am getting Better and Better.

Nabokov explicitly refers to Bonzo, and to another image in the R.P.S. series, in his story “Sovershenstvo” (“Perfection,” written May 1932). Perhaps Bonzo was a theme between him and Kaplan (had the postcard that Kaplan sent *him*, before he replied with a Bonzo image, also had a Bonzo flipside?), for this story features a tutor and his pupil. Ivanov muses on David’s apparent lack of imagination:

With such adorable eyes as he has, a boy cannot possibly keep thinking only about the prices of various mechanical gadgets or about how to save enough trading stamps to obtain fifty pfennigs’ worth of free merchandise at the store. He must be saving up something else too: bright childish impressions whose paint remains on the fingertips of the mind. He keeps silent about it just as I kept silent. But if several decades later—say, in 1970 (how they resemble telephone numbers, those distant years!) he will happen to see again that picture now hanging above his bed—Bonzo devouring a tennis ball—what a jolt he will feel, what light, what amazement at his own existence. Ivanov was not entirely wrong, David’s eyes, indeed, were not devoid of a certain dreaminess; but it was the dreaminess of concealed mischief.

(*Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, edited by Dmitri Nabokov, New York: Knopf, 1995, 337)

The Bonzo image evoked here is R.P.S. postcard number 1014, Bonzo tearing up another tennis ball, above the caption “Fred the ball boy.” (Studdy himself did not care for the name Ingram had foisted on his dog images.) Nabokov has evoked Bonzo aptly, since “the dreaminess of concealed mischief” that he, if not his character Ivanov, can discern in David would aptly describe the charm of Bonzo, who often causes mild mayhem simply by being himself, often with a dreamy gaze.



Fred the Ball Boy.

Nabokov’s main reason for citing Bonzo here is to emphasize the gap in time between the early 1930s and the 1970s, and to offer the kind of accidental and dateable trigger to memory that, Ivanov generously thinks, might make the David of the future recall with exultation and love the present he seems barely to notice—that might make him treasure what now he takes for granted. Ivanov himself at the end of the story will be rewarded in death for *his* noticing and treasuring all he does in life, when his private treasury somehow carries over into the next world. Nabokov has expressed the sentiment implicit here, minus its metaphysical trappings, most fully in “Putevoditel’ po Berlinu” (“A Guide to Berlin,” written 1925):

The horse-drawn tram has vanished, and so will the trolley, and some eccentric Berlin writer in the twenties of the twenty-first century, wishing to portray our time, will go to a museum of technological history and locate a hundred-year-old streetcar, yellow, uncouth, with old-fashioned curved seats, and in a museum of old costumes dig up a black, shiny-buttoned conductor’s uniform. Then he will

go home and compile a description of Berlin streets in bygone days. Everything, every trifle, will be valuable and meaningful: the conductor's purse, the advertisement over the window, that peculiar jolting motion which our great-grandchildren will perhaps imagine—everything will be ennobled and justified by its age.

I think that here lies the sense of literary creation: to portray ordinary objects as they will be reflected in the kindly mirrors of future times; to find in the objects around us the fragrant tenderness that only posterity will discern and appreciate in the far-off times when every trifle of our plain everyday life will become exquisite and festive in its own right: the times when a man who might put on the most ordinary jacket of today will be dressed up for an elegant masquerade. (*Stories* 157)

Bonzo, Nabokov knew, however ubiquitous in the lifetime of a boy of David's age in 1932, would be remotely distant by the time of David's old age, and would acquire a new patina of the rare and precious—as indeed Bonzo has become for those who collect Bonzo images and objects now. Perhaps the decline in recognizability of Bonzo even by 1937 may have helped prompt Nabokov's decision to change the opening of his novel, to drop Cheepy and to introduce his hero before his illustrator-villain.

Alfred Appel, Jr., liked to stress in Nabokov his attentiveness to and love of popular culture, and not just the high culture the writer has perhaps more obviously mastered. High culture can be ageless; popular culture can therefore in some ways be more indicative and evocative of a particular age.

High culture preserves itself in high culture; popular culture can fade rapidly, as its own very success, at first the cause of its viral spread, leads to saturation or resistance. In mid-1927 *The Sketch* decided to rest Bonzo for a spell in case readers were tiring of him, and by the end of the decade his peak was well past. Nabokov was fascinated not only by the particulars

of popular culture, but also by the patterns of its fads: the slow uptake, the rapid spread beyond a certain critical threshold, the ubiquity that invites others to feed off and share in the current success, the saturation and the decline into obscurity. He had seen some of this in the fierce winds of what he called "Hurricane Lolita": the slow start, the rush up the bestseller lists, the *Lolita* jokes, cartoons, film, posters, spinoffs, the *Lolita* dolls. He parodied the sequence, perhaps recalling popular-culture Bonzo rather than high-culture *Lolita*, in Van's *Letters from Terra*, forgotten at its publication, a global craze after its adaptation to film:

L.F.T. tiny dolls, L.F.T. breloques of coral and ivory, appeared in souvenir shops, from Agony, Patagonia, to Wrinkleballs, Le Bras d'Or. L.F.T. clubs sprouted. L.F.T. girlies minced with mini-menus out of roadside snackettes shaped like spaceships. From the tremendous correspondence that piled up on Van's desk during a few years of world fame. . . .

(*Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, written 1965-68, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969, 582)

Notice how close this first sentence is to the intonations of the second sentence of *Kamera obskura* and to the success of Bonzo, and how the third sentence, like the explicit reference to Bonzo in "Perfection," implies the evanescence of this celebrity and ubiquity. Nabokov was alert to the natural world, and to the human world, to high culture and to popular culture, and to their particulars and patterns, all his life.

--Brian Boyd, Auckland, New Zealand

LEHMANN'S DISEASE: A COMMENT ON NABOKOV'S
THE REAL LIFE OF SEBASTIAN KNIGHT

She [Virginia] died of heart-failure (Lehmann's disease) at the little town of Roquebrune, in the summer of 1909.

- [Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (New York: Vintage International, 1992, 9)]

I suppose Sebastian already knew from what exact heart-disease he was suffering. His mother had died of the same complaint, a rather rare variety of angina pectoris, called by some doctors "Lehmann's disease" (87).

In the commentaries to the Russian translation of "The Real Life of Sebastian Knight," we read the following:

The mention of Lehmann's disease <...> opens a whole series of complex and subtle associations. Sebastian's mother dies from the Lehmann's disease on the shores of the Lake Léman (the French name for the Geneva Lake). (At the same Lake Geneva, Nabokov himself died in 1977.) (Vladimir Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii amerikanskogo perioda v 5 tt.*, St. Petersburg: Simposium, 1997, 1.555)

It is true that Nabokov wanted words to cast shadows, and playing with names was one of the means towards this end. But Nabokov's word shadows are meaningful. The question is: what does it add to the meaning of the text if *Lake Leman* is reflected in *Lehmann's disease*? For an association for the sake of association is hardly Nabokov's game.

The quest of the novel *Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is to salvage the protagonist's real life from under the piles of verisimilitudes, simulacra, and outright falsities of the *Tragedy of Sebastian Knight* written by his biographer Mr. Goodman. The former secretary of Sebastian who claimed most immedi-

ate knowledge of the subject treated Knight through the prism of trite general notions. He interpreted him as one of the *lost generation* (a notion coined by the cultural historians of the post-World War One period) and thus erased his personality and his uniqueness. The narrator, V., interrupts at one point his recapitulation of Mr. Goodman's book with the following remark: "I have not yet done with *The Tragedy of Sebastian Knight* or rather—*The Farce of Mr. Goodman*" (68). There is more here than meets the eye in this renaming.

. . . the very idea of his reacting in any special "modern" way to what Mr. Goodman calls "the atmosphere of post-war Europe" is utterly preposterous. He [Sebastian] was intermittently happy and uncomfortable in the world into which he came, just as a traveller may be exhilarated by visions of his voyage and be almost simultaneously seasick. Whatever age Sebastian might have been born in, he would have been equally amused and unhappy, joyful and apprehensive, as *a child at a pantomime* now and then thinking of tomorrow's dentist. (64, emphasis added.)

First of all, the word *pantomime* requires a comment. By *pantomime* Nabokov means not the ancient Greek art of miming, as the bare word may suggest, but a sort of spectacle practiced within the culture of fairground popular entertainments known in Russia of the 19th century under the name of *balagan*. In Nabokov, the word *balagan* occurred in his very first novel *Mary*. In Nabokov's oeuvre, *balagan* attributes occur on the lexical level of inconspicuous local metaphors, and are consistently used as recurrent motifs, until the whole concept breaks out into the open in *Look at the Harlequins! Balagan*, a Turkic word signifying "barn," was used for a primitive theatrical structure swiftly knocked together from still fresh lumber on a fairground during Russian folk festivities. It became a generic name for the entire culture of popular fairground entertainments.

In small-size *balagans*...were staged: military-historical scenes, folkloric plays, fairy tales, *vaudevilles* and farce, pantomimes about brigands and every-day life, living pictures and displays of exotic men, domestic animals and wild beasts. Puppet masters, magicians, singers, dancers and musicians performed...

The actor's performance...had to be distinguished by exaggerated expression; *gesticulation and making faces always prevailed over text. While text was reduced to a minimum, pauses were almost eliminated.* (E.A. Lepkovskii, *45 let v teatre: Stat'i i vospominaniia*. [Mosow] 1930: 49-53 via A.M. Konechnyi, "Peterburgskie balaganshchiki" // *Peterburgskie balagany*, Konechnyi A.M., ed., St. Petersburg: Giperion, 2000: 8-9; emphasis added.)

As this actor's memoir explains, pantomime was the dominant element of the fairground culture of entertainment, thus the expression "a child at a pantomime" should be understood in this broader sense, as a reference to a balaganesque performance.

To what extent Nabokov's usage of *pantomime* implies its broad, generic meaning can be gleaned from the extensive presence of references to various forms of *balagan* in *RLSK*. (The translator of *RLSK* into Russian, S.B. Il'in, recognized this non-classical and generic usage of *pantomime* and replaced it with a term more accessible to the contemporary reader: "like a child at the circus" (*Sobr. soc. amer. perioda*: 1.78.) We have already mentioned the *farce* of Mr. Goodman. In order to make sure that this personage is a balaganesque figure, he is presented at the interview with V. wearing a black mask, an attribute of Harlequin. Sebastian at the end of his life contemplated writing a fictitious biography of a protagonist named Mr. H. (Nabokov in a way fulfilled this intention by later writing *Look at the Harlequins!* in which he travestied his own writing career in the style of Mr. Goodman.)

Harlequin is a representative figure of *commedia dell'arte*,

an indispensable core genre of fairground arts. (When the use of spoken words was prohibited in the *commedia dell'arte* in 17th century France, the *commedia* became a pantomime, which was the beginning of the new usage of this word). Both the early life of Sebastian's and his death are marked by *commedic* circumstances. Sebastian's mother Virginia (who died from Lehmann's disease) is an unfaithful wife, a Columbine of the *commedia*. Her behavior causes Sebastian's father to duel with one Palchin—the name reminds us of *Pulchinella/Punchinello*, another personage of the *commedia*, but also associated with the Russian word *palka* "club," the most prominent attribute of Harlequin and his descendants—the English *Punch* and the Russian *Petrushka*, whose main exploit was clobbering somebody to death. As suits a *commedia* personage, Palchin was a victorious rival of Sebastian's father, but in his turn was abandoned by the woman. Sebastian's father died from a wound inflicted in a duel. In this story, the presence of the contours of the *commedic* triangle Columbine—Pierrot—Harlequin is emphasized throughout.

The whole line of Nina Toorovets, alias Mme Lecerf, the fatal love of Sebastian, is also fashioned after the cruel and unfaithful beloved of *commedia*. While guessing her origin, V. all of a sudden and without any reason asks himself: "Did she come from the Midi, I wondered. From Arles perhaps. But no, her accent was Parisian" (166). The association of Nina with Arles is telling: Arles was thought to be the provenance of Harlequin. Her doll-like behavior ("He [Sebastian] told her bitterly that she was cheep and vain and then he kissed her to make sure that she was not a porcelain figure" [157]) drives him to the grave.

More importantly, the artistic world of Sebastian Knight is throughout balaganesque. But his artistic *balagan* is of a different nature.

As often was the way with Sebastian Knight he used parody as a kind of spring-board for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion. J. L. Coleman has called it "a clown developing wings, an angel mimicking a tumbler pigeon," and the metaphor seems to me very apt. (89)

Clown, tumblers, spring-board, parody—all of these are attributes of Sebastian's sublime *balagan*. Treating the world as a *balagan* arena is the essence of Sebastian's artistic method of achieving victory over the dreadful *balagan* of gravity and common sense. This explains V.'s choice of words when speaking of his brother's writings: "Sebastian Knight had always liked juggling with themes" (174), juggling being one of the *balagan* arts. Sebastian's novels are full of balaganesque tricks, travesties, theatricals, miracles and comic figures, like Mr. Nosebag/G. Abeson (a vaudeville character acting out matters of life and death), Mr. Silberman (who, in addition to his ability perform magic, has a nose "whose form made one wonder whether he had not lost his hump somewhere" [102]; both the nose and the hump being, of course, attributes of Petrushka), and a nameless magician without a rabbit who lurks in the wings of the story. One of Sebastian's characters suggests a balaganesque existential formula: "'But can't you see,' he whispered, 'can't you see that happiness at its very best is but a zany of its own mortality?'" (97); the main emphasis of this phrase is carried by the word *zany* which is a derivative of the Italian *zanni*, younger characters of *commedia dell'arte*. In his own artistic *balagan*, Sebastian overcomes the heaviness of the *balagan* of life and death. The understanding of this duality of *balagan* sheds light on the words of the narrator:

Who is speaking of Sebastian Knight? ...His best friend and his half-brother... And where is the third party? Rotting peacefully in the cemetery of St. Damier. Laughingly alive in five volumes (50).

RLSK on the whole is but a balaganesque pantomime according to the narrator's, V., admission at the end of it:

Thus—I am Sebastian Knight. I feel as if I were impersonating him on a lighted stage, with the people he knew coming and going... And here is Goodman, the flat-footed buffoon with his dicky hanging out of his waistcoat; and there—the pale radiance of Clare's inclined head, as she is lead away weeping by a friendly maiden. They move round Sebastian—round me who am acting Sebastian—and the old conjuror waits in the wings with his hidden rabbit; and Nina sits on a table in the brightest corner of the stage, with a wine glass of fuchsined water, under a painted palm. And then the masquerade draws to a close. The bold little prompter shuts his book... They all go back to the every day life...—but the hero remains, for, try as I may, I cannot get out of my part: Sebastian's mask clings to my face. . . (203)

Now we are prepared to understand the meaning of *Lehmann's disease*. Among the motifs of the *balagan* context, Nabokov uses a special category of signs: he gives the names of prominent actors and historians of *balagan* culture to his characters. These are: Alferov, a historian of Petrushka (*Mary*), Berg, an owner of a famous St. Petersburg *balagan* and Waltz, machinist of the Imperial Theaters (*The Waltz Invention*), Busch, an owner of Berlin circus (*The Gift and Pnin*), Hagen, a historian of German folk theater (*Pnin*). An eminent role in this context belongs to Lehmann. Here are testimonies of eyewitnesses:

A special place in the history of St. Petersburg *balagans* belongs to Christian Lehmann who, in the week following Easter of 1830 for the first time showed to the inhabitants of St. Petersburg a series of pantomime harlequinades... "Transformations comprise one of the most important

parts of the performance,”—said a newspaper report “The Pantomime of Mr. Lehmann and Co.,”—“and everything is performed so swiftly, so deftly that the eye fails to follow the movements, and one does not notice the deception... We have never seen such a classical clown as Mr. Lehmann. (Konechnyi: 6; the embedded quotation is from the newspaper *Severnaia pchela*, 1831, February 17)

The idea of Shrovetide is in our minds inseparable from the idea of Lehmann. To ask someone “How soon will Shrovetide come?” means the same as “How soon will Lehmann start his show?” (*Severnaia pchela*, 1834, no. 48, via A. Nekrylova, “Khristian Leman” // *Peterburgskii teatral’nyi zhurnal* (2000), 48, 37)

This utterly merry theater was filled to capacity by both select society and common people—the laughter did not subside. Italian comedy was staged all the time, and Lehmann played Pierrot in the way nobody did after him. (P.P. Sokolov, *Vospominaniia*, Leningrad, 1930, 66)

The name of Lehman became legendary. Even many years later, the popular name for clowns of the [fairground on] Admiralty Square was “lehmans [leiman]”...“His favorite role was Pierrot, known among the crowd as Lehmann.” (Konechnyi: 101; the embedded quotation is from Prokhorov, “A Sketch from the Life of *Balagan* Performers” [*Peterburgskii listok*, 1870, March 1])

Thus, *Lehmann’s disease* in *RLSK* is a fruit of the same symbolic orchard as the *thirst for the juice of three oranges* (“I am so constituted that I absolutely must gulp down the juice of three oranges before confronting the rigors of day” [Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, New York: Vintage, 1989: 190]). *Love for Three Oranges* is of course the title of the most famous

commedia dell’arte by Carlo Gozzi as well as the name of the magazine published by V. Meyerhold, the director who made a point of bringing *balagan*, including pantomime, to the most refined stage events, whose staging of A. Blok’s “Balaganchik” (“A Little Fairground Booth”) marks the hey-day of Russian modernism, and an author of two articles entitled “Balagan” (for a detailed exposition of the *juice of three oranges* motif in Nabokov, see S. Senderovich and Y. Shvarts, “The Juice of Three Oranges: An Exploration of Nabokov’s Language and World” [*Nabokov Studies* 6, 2000/2001, 75-124]). Both symbols, the *juice of three oranges* and the *Lehmann’s disease*, signify an uncontrollable obsession with clowning, parodying, caricaturing, punning, mystifying, mocking and other forms of producing *balagan*—that kind of artistic *balagan* which fools matter, overcomes gravity and challenges death.

One nuance of paramount importance should be added: Nabokov’s clowning and caricaturing is aimed primarily not at the surrounding world, nor is it done for its own sake, but to bring out the author’s own serious concerns. Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev expressed this in the following way:

I want to keep everything as it were on the very brink of parody... And there must be on the other hand an abyss of seriousness, and I must make my way along this narrow ridge between my own truth and a caricature of it. (Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*, New York: Vintage, 1991: 200)

Similarly, “Sebastian used parody as a kind of spring-board for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion” (89). The artistic obsession of doing so is called *Lehmann’s disease*. The other meaning of this expression, closer to the direct one, should not be missed either. Sebastian is afflicted by the “arrows of flesh” including Lehmann’s disease. He dies of it, and his body is “rotting peacefully in the cemetery of St. Damier,” but he is “laughingly alive in his five volumes” because there is still

another *Lehmann's disease*, of which one may say in the words of Boris Pasternak—"a sublime disease" ("vysokaia bolezn").

Last but not least is the question of the source of Nabokov's knowledge about the *balagan* master Lehmann. As the above quotations show, the contemporary printed testimonies of Christian Lehmann's art appeared in the magazine *Otechestvennye zapiski* and in the newspaper *Severnaia pchela* of 1831, so we venture the following guess. Nabokov approached every subject he touched with the diligence of a scholar, and there should be no doubt that he thoroughly studied the Pushkin epoch in the middle of the 1930's, at the time he was preparing to write *The Gift*, in which Pushkin is one of the main subjects. Thus, he must have read the influential magazine where Pushkin's friends V. A. Zhukovskii, M. P. Pogodin, D. V. Davydov and others published, as well as the paper owned by Pushkin's arch-enemy F. Bulgarin. *RLSK* was the next novel following *The Gift*.

--Savely Senderovich & Yelena Shvarts, Ithaca, NY

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