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NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

IMPORTANT NEWS: This is the first time in the 33 years of this publication that the fall issue has not appeared in mid or late December. Indeed this issue was not sent out until late January/early February. The reason for this is that Stephen Jan Parker, the creator, editor, and publisher of *The Nabokovian*, had a severe accident in Chicago where the ankle of his right leg was crushed and broken in various places. Most fortunately in Chicago he came under the care of Dr. Brian Toolan, a truly remarkable surgical specialist at the University of Chicago Medical Center. Following multiple treatments and superb surgery, the ankle now is in the process of returning to normal. So in effect it was a horrible experience but in a most fortunate locale where this masterful doctor of surgery prevails. I would simply say that if anyone ever has a severe problem with a leg or foot in the area of Chicago, or knows of someone with such problems, Dr. Brian Toolan is the person to contact.

So please accept my apology that this issue, beyond my control, was late in publication – but as you will note, it still remains a truly fine issue of *The Nabokovian*.

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Odds & Ends

1. Some recently published VN related works include Gavriel Shapiro's *The Sublime Artist's Studio: Nabokov and Painting*, Northwestern University Press, a fascinating treatment of the centrality of painting in Nabokov's writings. Another recently published work is David S. Rutledge's *Nabokov's*

Permanent Mystery: The Expression of Metaphysics in His Work, McFarland and Company, a critical examination of the ways in which Nabokov "structured his works to encapsulate his metaphysical beliefs."

2. Brian Boyd announced at the International Nabokov Conference in Kyoto in March 2010 that he would be staging another International Nabokov Conference at the University of Auckland from January 7 to 10, 2012, with the provisional title "Nabokov Upside Down." Robert Alter has agreed to give the keynote. Further details will be announced as they are settled.

3. The Russian journal *Snob* published a generous selection of Nabokov's letters to his wife, edited and selected by Olga Voronina (Bard College) and Brian Boyd (University of Auckland), "Pis'ma k Vere," *Snob*, November 2010, 176-208. The selection from 1923 to 1975 was illustrated with photographs of Nabokovian sites made by Gennady Barabtarlo (University of Missouri, Columbia), who also assisted as editor. A volume of *Letters to Véra*, edited by Voronina and Boyd, will be published in English by Knopf in 2011.

4. Dieter E. Zimmer has edited the first full annotated edition of *Ada* in any language, bringing the Nabokov *Gesammelte Werke*, which he has been editing since the 1980s, now up to date: *Ada oder das Verlangen: Eine Familienchronik* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2010). Zimmer revised with Uwe Friesel the 1974 translation by Friesel and Marianne Therstappen, with input from Vladimir and Véra Nabokov. In addition to Zimmer's afterword there are also almost three hundred pages of notes (pp. 849-1142) and 36 mostly color plates.

5. Symposium has issued a second edition of Brian Boyd's Nabokov biography. *Vladimir Nabokov: Russkie gody*. Trans. Galina Lapina. 2001. New Foreword. St. Petersburg:

Syjmposium, 2010. 695 pp. *Vladimir Nabokov: Amerikanskie gody*. Trans. Maya Birdwood-Hedges, Alexandra Glebovskaya, Sergei Il'in and Tat'yana Izotova. 2004. Second edition with new Afterword. St. Petersburg Symposium, 2010. 950 pp. The books were launched at the Nabokov Museum in St. Petersburg, with Brian Boyd answering questions from those present via Skype.

*****

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

Introduction to *"The University Poem" and Other Poems*

by Dmitri Nabokov

"The University Poem" is based on VN's experiences at Trinity College, Cambridge, which he attended from 1919 to 1922.

The poem is fundamentally a tribute to Pushkin. It consists, like *Eugene Onegin*, of 63 14-line stanzas and is written in iambic tetrameter. Its character, however, is very different. The antique town of Cambridge, practically to this day, is basically unchanged, as are many of the customs of the college. The small suite of rooms where VN lived, and where I lodged when participating in a Nabokov Festival at Cambridge, is very much as it was in my father's day. An important change, however, was the disappearance of the black-clad little crones who would enter quietly to light the morning fire, and put the rooms in order when the students went off to class. Even the local girls were repetitious. Every year they would encounter a new suitor, knowing full well that the fling was going to be temporary and that next year a replacement beau would come along. Violet, whom our student meets at the vicar's tea, and with whom he has a brief romance, seems destined for the same kind of bittersweet, menial, uncertain future – rejecting a succession of suitors, awaiting next year's crop. Meanwhile, Violet's best years were passing. Besides this touching theme, there are many other charming nuances; then, in a quite different tone, comes the unexpected virtuoso conclusion:

Before our parting, I ask only one thing:
as you fly, swallowlike, now lower,
now on high: find one plain word within this world,
always swift to understand you, where moth and rust do
not corrupt,

cherishing each instant,
blessing each motion,
do not allow it to freeze still, perceive the delicate rotation
of the slightly tilted earth.

A word is in order regarding certain principles of poetic translation. As he did in his original prose and poetic writings, Vladimir Nabokov experimented, over the years, with various solutions in translating a poetic line. There, too, certain references and allusions are easily recognizable, while others are distant and abstruse. Some range from an accurate reproduction of meter and rhyme scheme, with less attention devoted to precision of meaning, to an unwavering, undaunted fidelity to the author's sense. The latter approach represents the essence of Nabokov's translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin.* The purpose of that translation was to provide a faithful version for the purpose of teaching Nabokov's Cornell classes. It was, as he explained on many occasions, a "pony" in which English locutions reproduced the Russian as closely as possible, even if that meant using difficult words to express complex ideas. Nabokov's explanations failed to protect him from attacks from many quarters, ranging from the eminent critic Edmund Wilson to a more recent criticule named Hofstadter. In the translation that follows, I have adhered to Nabokovian principles with regard to prosody as well. That means I have dispensed with rhymes (unless they happened to fall into my lap) and exact meter, while maintaining, nevertheless, a semblance of poetic rhythm.

A word of appreciation is due to M.E. Malikov and her editorial assistants for much useful information to be found in her excellent collection *V.V.Nabokov* (Akademicheskii Proekt, St. Petersburg, 2002). A major contribution to the present volume came from *Vladimir Nabokov, Stikhi*(*Poems*, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1979), compiled and introduced by my late mother Véra Nabokov on the basis of a preliminary list left by Vladimir Nabokov.

An English translation of Véra Nabokov's preface follows: This collection is a nearly complete anthology of the poems written by Vladimir Nabokov. Excluded from it are only, in the first place, the very earliest works; secondly, those whose form or style excessively resemble those of others; and, thirdly, those poems whose form Nabokov considered defective. The selection was made by the author himself, who had intended to inspect them more closely, but lacked the time.

Now, as I submit this collection for publication, I would like to call the reader's attention to Nabokov's main theme. No one else seems to have commented on it, yet it permeates everything he wrote, like a kind of watermark symbolizing all of his creativity. I refer to "otherworldliness", as he himself termed it in his last poem, "Being in Love". This theme is already traced in such early poems by Nabokov "I still keep mute and gather strength in silence..." transpires in "How I love you ("...and slip stealthily into eternity"), in "Evening on a vacant lot" ("... because it is not shut tightly, and already cannot be forced open..."), and in many other works. He came nearest to defining it in the poem "Fame", where he describes it quite frankly as a mystery that he carries in his soul, which he must not and cannot betray. He was concerned with this mystery for many years, almost without acknowledging it, and it was this that endowed him with imperturbable joie de vivre and lucidity even in the direst circumstances, and made him totally invulnerable to the silliest and most hostile attacks:

"That main secret tra-tá tra-tá tra-tá
and I must not be overexplicit"

In order to understand even better what is meant I suggest that the reader acquaint himself with Fyodor Godunov – Cherdyntsev's description of his father in the novel *Dar* (The Gift) (p.130, par. 2, continuing on p. 131).

Nabokov himself felt that all of his poems could be broken down into several categories. In his preface to the collection *Poems and Problems* he wrote: "What could be called somewhat grandiloquently the European period of my poetic composition seems to fall into several distinct phases: an initial one, consisting of banal love poems (not present in this edition); the period reflecting total rejection of the so-called October Revolution; and a period, lasting far beyond 1920, of a certain private retrospective-nostalgic curatorship, as well as a striving to develop Byzantine imagery (some readers erroneously perceived in this an interest in religion – an interest that for me was limited to literary stylization); thereafter, for a decade, I considered it my task to have every poem contain a subject and its development (this was a kind of reaction to the limp, feeble "Parisian school" of émigré poetry); and finally, in the late 30s and during the following decades, there came a sudden liberation from these constraints accepted of my own free will, resulting in reduced output and the belated discovery of a firm style." Nevertheless, such poems as, for example "Evening on a vacant lot" (1932) or "Snow"(1930) also belong more properly to this last period.

Nearly all the poems collected here were printed in émigré newspapers and journals soon after their composition. Many of them appeared in print two or three times. Many were subsequently included in the collections *The Return of Chorb* (24 poems and 14 stories, Berlin, Slovo, 1930; *Poems_1929-1951,* Paris, Rifma, 1952); *Poesie* (16 Russian poems from the Rifma edition and 14 English poems in Italian translation, with the original text *en regard*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1962; *Poems and Problems* (39 Russian poems with English translations, 14 English poems and 18 chess problems, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1970).

The tilting earth continues to rotate and the great men of Cambridge – Newton and the others – remain in their niches and on their pedestals, one day, perhaps, to be joined by Nabokov.

Two unpublished VN poems

A Poem

When he was small, when he would fall,
on sand or carpet he would lie
quite flat and still until he knew
what he would do: get up or cry.

After the battle, flat and still
upon a hillside now he lies –
but there is nothing to decide,
for he can neither cry nor rise.

11 November 1942
St. Paul, Minnesota

Lunar Lines

Spell "night". Spell "pebbles": Pebbles in the Night.
Peep, crated chicks on lonely station ! This
Is now the ABC of the abyss.
The Desperanto we must learn to write.

28 April 1966

DEATH AND PATTERNS IN *THE GIFT* (FIVE NOTES)

by Yuri Leving

> Enjoy the destruction but do not linger over your own ruins lest you develop an incurable illness, or die before you are ready to die.
>
> --V. Nabokov, *The Original of Laura*

1. Roses and Samovars

In Nabokov's *The Gift*, the unperceptive critic Linyov has reviewed the poet Koncheyev's book and "inadvertently," as Nabokov puts it, "extricated something more or less whole." Nabokov follows with a two-line fragment, which begins "Days of ripening vines!" (170). Alexander Dolinin recognizes this as a quasi-quotation from Boris Poplavsky ("Kommentarii k romanu *Dar*," V. Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii* Vol. 4, St. Petersburg: Symposium, 2000, 692), and Boris Maslov attributes it to Osip Mandelstam ("Poet Koncheyev: Opyt tekstologii personazha," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 47, 2001, 172-86). Nabokov does not stop with this allusion. He continues: "-- and it was as if the voice of a violin had suddenly drowned the hum of a patriarchal cretin."

Nabokov's auto-commentary to this passage on the margins of the typescript of the English translation of his novel (Berg Collection, New York Public Library) elucidates an unidentified reminiscence: *Allusion to Turgenev's (samovar)*. The note obviously concerns an excerpt from Ivan Turgenev's poem in prose, "Kak khoroshi, kak svezhi byli rozy…" ("How beautiful, how fresh were those roses…"): "and Laner's waltz cannot deafen the grumbling of a patriarchal samovar…"

Composer and conductor Joseph Franz Karl Laner (1800-1843) became famous for the composition of dance music, waltzes in particular, in which the leading themes typically were entrusted to violins.

2. Beneath the Blot: Why was Danzas at the dentist's office?

> "…[she] managed to push her spitting pen between la Princesse Toumanoff, with a blot at the end, and Monsieur Danzas, with a blot at the beginning…" (18)

In the first chapter of *The Gift*, a Monsieur Danzas' appointment with the dentist, Lawson, directly follows those of Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev and his sister Tanya. The last name Danzas evokes Konstantin Karlovich Danzas (1801-1870), a Russian officer and Alexander Pushkin's friend, notorious for his role as a second in the poet's duel with baron Georges d'Anthès (1812-1895), an adopted son of the Dutch ambassador in Russia, Jacob van Heeckeren. But what does the name Danzas have to do with the dental office in *The Gift*?

The answer is in Danzas' memoir (first printed in 1863), which Nabokov probably read, since he was interested in his family's relationship to him. Danzas was a distant relative of the Nabokovs, as he mentions: "Ekaterina Dmitrievna Danzas (my father's first cousin and a grandniece of Colonel K. K. Danzas, Pushkin's second in his fatal duel)" (*Speak, Memory*, 256). The memoirist describes in detail the circumstances leading to the fatal duel between Pushkin and lieutenant d'Anthès:

> Concerning d'Anthès' assuming of Heeckeren's last name someone, as a joke, set a rumor afloat in town that the Cavalry regiment soldiers allegedly mangling the names of d'Anthès and Hekkern were saying: 'What happened

to our lieutenant, he used to be a *dentist*, and now all of a sudden turned *healer.*' (K. K. Danzas, "Poslednie dni zhizni i konchina A. Pushkina v zapisi A. Ammosova," *Pushkin v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov* Vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1998, 395; italics in the original)

A word play in Russian based on the auditory similarity of the names and medical professions is less obvious but still discernable in English–*dentist* (d'Anthès) and *healer* (Heeckeren) ("Chto eto sdelalos' s nashim poruchikom, byl *dantist*, a teper' vdrug stal *lekarem*"). It was speculated that Heeckeren and d'Anthès were lovers. In *The Gift*, the gossip that surrounded d'Anthès' marriage to Pushkin's wife Natalya Goncharova's sister is exploited in reference to Dobrolyubov's intrigue with Nikolai Chernyshevksi's spouse. Dobroblyubov similarly wanted to marry Olga Sokratovna's sister (who had a fiancé) to conceal his affair (260).

Another less probable candidate for a possible namesake of the character (though considering *The Gift*'s abundant transportation and travel motifs, in itself not absolutely meaningless) could be the entrepreneur, Louis Danzas. He fought for Napoleon at Waterloo before starting a world famous freight company in the mid-nineteenth century; the firm had numerous branches across Europe at the time Nabokov was composing *The Gift*, and it still bears Danzas' name today. The iconic embodiment of the transportation motif is set off on the first page of the novel, which features a peculiar van with the inscription *Max Lux* painted in blue letters and shaded in black ("a dishonest attempt to climb into the next dimension"), that Fyodor observes in front of his new apartment on 7 Tannenberg Street. Moving house, or motion generally, is one of the novel's chief concerns for a variety of reasons: emigration, a father's adventurous travels across Asia, Nikolai Chernyshevski's exile in Yakutsk. Everything is

in motion, and when characters do sit still, it is with the purpose of contemplating the motion around them, or imagining still greater departures and arrivals (Stephen Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel: Nabokov's Art and the Worlds of Science*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009, 147). According to Blackwell, if one treats a Cyrillic reading of the first word as another kind of "next dimension," *Max* would be pronounced "makh," pointing to Ernst Mach, Einstein's revered predecessor (ibid.). To Blackwell's shrewd suggestion we might add that both "Maks" and "Luks," if read in reverse, conceal perfectly homophonous "scam" and "school," plus Nabokov winking at the reader in between. One needs to be especially cautious with these absorbing word games, as they seem to continue ad infinitum.

Based on the description of the font running along the moving van's entire side--"the name of the moving company in yard-high blue letters, each of which (including a square dot) was shaded laterally with blue paint" (3)--Dieter E. Zimmer suggests that it could belong to the A. Schäfer moving company. The ad that Zimmer reproduces is convincing indeed ("Nabokov's Berlin" [presentation at the International Vladimir Nabokov Symposium, St. Petersburg, July 15, 2002]: http://www.d-e-zimmer.de/Root/nabberlin2002.htm). First of all, it comes from the illustrated Russian art magazine *Firebird* (*Zhar Ptitsa*), to which Nabokov himself contributed in the mid-1920s, so it is obvious that the company was catering to the Berlin émigré community. By coincidence, Zimmer adds, ten years later the company's head office was in the "Universum" cinema that Nabokov passed every time he walked from Nestorstrasse to Kurfürstendamm. Secondly, and even more importantly, the way A. Schäfer is inscribed on the van as seen in the ad matches the description on the opening page of *The Gift*–the title letters are shaded on the left side to give a three-dimensional effect.

All of these suppositions are close but still short of

hitting the bull's eye. It has recently been established that the moving company's name is not fictitious at all–it did in fact exist in early twentieth-century Berlin (Gavriel Shapiro, *The Sublime Artist's Studio: Nabokov and Painting*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009, 146). In addition to duplicating a photograph of an advertisement for the Max Lux firm, Shapiro picks up a visual thread and proposes that, by way of the conspicuous Roman letters in the moving company's name, Nabokov evokes the mystical painter Gabriel von Max (1840-1915). Max's painting *Light* depicts a blind girl garbed in a light-colored dress; she proffers a lit oil lamp to a person clad in black. Nabokov purportedly alludes to this artwork in order to underline the perspicacity of blind Fate, whose "attempts" the protagonist was able to appreciate only toward the end of the novel (Shapiro 148). This is in line with the earlier suggestion that the idea of light in Max Lux hints at inspiration, which for Fyodor is connected to earthly delights like travel, exploration, sunbathing, or even gardening. Furthermore, the name of Fyodor's father's biology professor in Cambridge is "Brait" in the Russian version of *Dar*, translated by M. Scammel as "Bright" in *The Gift* (98) and endorsed, as seen in the typescript, by Nabokov (Anat Ben-Amos, "The Role of Literature in *The Gift*," *Nabokov Studies* 4, 1997, 123).

Real as it was, Nabokov could nonetheless use the Max Lux firm's name as a playful reference to the final words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who allegedly uttered "Mehr Licht!" (More Light!) when dying in 1832. In one of only two fleeting appearances in *The Gift*, the German poet-philosopher is tellingly cited in connection with flickering empyreal light: "remember how Goethe said, pointing with his cane at the starry sky: 'There is my conscience!'" (178).

Motifs of motion and dental surgery seem to be distant from Pushkin, but they are tied together in a poem which Fyodor, one tooth now missing, composes on his way home from the

dentist's office. The blot of ink (an iconic representation of a blood stain as, for example, in Eisenstein's *Strike* (1924); Fyodor watches this film with his mother in the Berlin theater) and the means of transportation evoke Pushkin's tragic death: after being mortally wounded, Pushkin was brought from the duel scene on Chernaia rechka (Black rivulet) to his Petersburg apartment in his adversary's wagon. The fact appears to be reflected in an unintended parody when Fyodor half-consciously imagines himself as a reduced version of the great wounded poet:

> What will it be like to be sitting
> Half an hour from now in this brougham?
> With what eyes shall I look at these snowflakes
> And black branches of trees?

The often-quoted passage in *The Gift* states: "Pushkin entered [Fyodor's] blood" (98). Via Danzas, Pushkin's blood was metaphorically infused into Nabokov's creative circulatory system.

3. Browning in "seven shots"

> A Browning had once been fired at [a birch-lyre] by his English tutor–also Browning–and then Father had taken the pistol, swiftly and dexterously ramming bullets into the clip, and knocked out a smooth *K* with seven shots. (79)

John Moses Browning (1855-1926) was an American firearms designer who developed varieties of firearms, cartridges, and gun mechanisms, and is considered the key figure in the advance of modern automatic firearms (his first patent was granted in 1879). The seven shots necessary to make a smooth *K* require the maximum capacity of the *Browning M1903* pistol

(7 rounds, 9mm, Belgium). In Europe, the M1903 became a favorite police pistol, and was adopted by several armies, as well as by the Imperial Russian security forces (about 700,000 units were produced from 1900-1911). The previous model of this reliable, accurate, and comfortable to carry and fire semi-automatic pistol was used by Eugen Schauman in his 1904 assassination of the Russian Governor-General of Finland at the time, Nikolai Ivanovich Bobrikov.

There is a self-referential layer in this passage: the theme of firearms in *The Gift* is connected to Yasha Chernyshevski's suicide, and Fyodor's mother is also the owner of "a little mother-of-pearl revolver" (105). Nabokov was always extremely attentive to minute technical details. In a 1944 letter to Edmund Wilson he quotes from Richard Connell's detective fiction: "'What about your other pistol?' 'That is an ordinary five-shot automatic of a well-known American make.'" (*The Nabokov–Wilson Letters: 1941-1971*, Ed. Simon Karlinsky, New York: Harper and Row, 1979, 144). In his preparatory notes to *Lolita*, Nabokov will later painstakingly draw Humbert's 1940 model *Colt* automatic, 32 caliber pistol, checking the exact capacity of the deadly weapon's cartridge (The index card with the pistol sketch is reproduced in Brian Boyd, *V. Nabokov: The American Years*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, 226-27).

Yet more intriguing here is a literary allusion: Nabokov's doubling of the English tutor's last name evokes Robert Browning's (1812-1889) poem, "Incident of the French Camp" (1842), also dealing with the deadly shooting motif:

You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two. <...>

"You're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
"I'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside

Smiling the boy fell dead.
(*The Poetry of Robert Browning*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971, 66)

The poem is written in iambic meter (five stanzas, eight lines each), as are most poetic segments in *The Gift* itself (ten of them vary from eight to twelve lines in length). Nabokov names Browning among the poets whom he enjoyed mostly in his teens (*Strong Opinions*, 42). Browning's wife, Elizabeth, was also a well-known poet who died on June 29, 1861; *The Gift* ends on June 29. Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov (1870-1922) was shot twice and died instantly in Berlin while defending the politician, historian, and former ally Pavel Miliukov.

4. Why was Zina killed?

Irina Guadanini was an amateur poet whose texts have occasionally appeared in Russian émigré literary magazines, resulting in a small book of poetry, *Pis'ma* ([*Letters*], Munich, 1962). Although her Russian verses are no better than Fyodor's apprenticeship (critics pointed out both their charm and weakness; see L. Strakhovskii, "Novye knigi stikhov," *Sovremennik* 6, 1962, 75), some of these texts are of interest to Nabokov scholars since they might bear factual traces of Guadanini's relationship with Nabokov. The poems contain not an objective reflection of what happened but rather a personal point of view of the author's experience.

One of the thirty-six poems in Guadanini's book is entitled "Dar" (*Gift*) (*Pis'ma*, 35). The poem is a reflection on the gift of oneself to another person. The main themes of *The Gift*–inspiration, mirrors, otherworldly shadows, and transparent dreams–are amalgamated in this disturbing declaration and expression of eternal love:

"The Gift"	"Dar"
Like a glimmer of past life, An echo of highest empyrean inspiration, Only a feeling remains… My hands–for you, dear. In the glint of the eyes, mirror-like, beckoning –A cup full of unearthly reflection– Eyes full of the shadow of embodiment… My eyes – for you, dear. By rare and flashing dreams of clarity, And babbling reams of lovely words, and plain, The soul, imbued in rapturous of admiration… My heart–for you, dear.	Kak otblesk zhizni predydushchei i ekho samykh vysshikh vdokhnovenii, ostalos' razve tol'ko oshchushchen'e… Ruki moi–tebe. I otrazhen'em glaz, kak v zerkale zovushchikh, –kak chashei polnoiu nezdeshnikh otrazhenii– glaza polny lish' ten'iu voploshchen'ia… Ochi moi–tebe… Mel'kan'em snov, prozrachnykh, neobychnykh, Struen'em slov, liubimykh slov privychnykh, dusha napoena v vostorge voskhishchen'ia… Serdtse moe–tebe.

The triple repetition of the words *otrazhenie* (reflection) and *otblesk* (reflection; gleam, sheen, vestige) deliberately evoke the synonymous *mertzanie* (twinkling, glimmer, flicker), which is also the semantic root of the character Zina Mertz's last name in Nabokov's *The Gift* ("Half-Mnemo*syne*? There's a half-shim*mer* in your surname too" [157]). Guadanini plays with both notions imbedded in *mertzanie* – irreversible memories and shining events of the past constitute the major motif of her poem.

Guadanini never forgot her liaison with Nabokov and cherished its memories until her death. As Zina Mertz did with Fyodor's poems (or Véra Slonim with Sirin's), the emotional

blonde religiously copied and cut out all of Nabokov's published works–both before they met and long after they had separated. A quarter of a century after their initial encounter, Guadanini quotes generously from Nabokov's letters to her in her short story, "The Tunnel." The story appeared in the Canadian Russian-language émigré journal *Sovremennik* (1961) under the pseudonym *Aletrus* (which can mean either an English pun "Alert us," or the Russian address "Ale, trus"–e.g. "Hello, coward" [the latter interpretation belongs to A. Dolinin; private communication]). The title refers to the "accidental young lady reading a Russian translation of Kellerman's *The Tunnel*" in the émigré bookstore in *The Gift* (167).

Guadanini's short story presents a slightly camouflaged history of the narrator's romance, and focuses on the lovers' dramatic last meetings in Cannes. As they stroll toward the port, the hero explains to his female companion that he loves her, but cannot bring himself to slam the door on the rest of his life. At nightfall the heroine passes by his house, but the sight of a woman's shadow in the window deters her from intruding. At the entrance to the train tunnel she throws herself on the tracks (Stacy Schiff, *Véra (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)*, New York: Random House, 1999, 91).

The aesthetic qualities of Guadanini's prose are questionable, but it is significant that she integrates both identified quotations from Sirin's poetry (epigraphs to sections of this short story) and non-attributed citations from Nabokov's personal letters to her. Here is just one example of such use: "You always keep coming out of every corner of my thought with your puppy-like gait!" / "Ty vsegda vykhodish' iz-za kazhdogo ugla moei mysli svoei shcheniachei pokhodkoi!" ("The Tunnel," 8). Irina made her living in emigration by working as a dog groomer.

Some biographical background and unpublished works preserved in the writer's archive help to illuminate the

juxtaposition of Guadanini's poem, "The Gift," with her short story, "The Tunnel." According to Boyd and Schiff, Nabokov first met Irina in Paris in January of 1937, during a public reading of two excerpts from *The Gift*. The fact that Nabokov had a tormenting forbidden liaison while working on *The Gift* should not be overlooked, inasmuch as Nabokov was at work on Chapters three and five of *The Gift*, a novel that has been described as his ode to fidelity, during the latter half of 1937. Stacy Schiff writes: "Vladimir appears to have been perfectly aware of the chasm that separated the reality of his fiction from the fiction of his reality. <...> Véra was battling a figure who was dangerously, splendidly flesh and blood, but Irina was playing a far more arduous game, having to run competition with a rival who existed partly in prose" (*Véra*, 91). The same technique of blending reality and fiction to a point beyond recognition is used in Nabokov's depiction of Fyodor's love affair with a prostitute, Yvonne, in the unrealized second volume of *The Gift*. Fyodor is "using art to preserve the erotic intensity of sensation and keep 'moral revulsion' at bay. Finally, when he has succeeded in transforming Yvonne from object of desire into subject of aesthetic contemplation her actual presence becomes unnecessary, superfluous" (Jane Grayson, "Washington's Gift: Materials Pertaining to Nabokov's *Gift* in the Library of Congress," *Nabokov Studies* 1, 1994, 37). Vladimir confessed to Irina that he had had a series of fleeting affairs–including an infidelity with a student, who possibly made it into the text of the novel ("a schoolgirl in a black jumper, whom he sometimes felt like kissing on her bent yellowish nape" [60]). Véra's biographer believes that Nabokov "listed these to prove to Irina that she was in a category of her own. He does not appear to have mentioned the earlier transgressions to Véra" (*Véra*, 92).

As we learn from the draft of the unpublished sequel to *The Gift* (dated 1939), in a section under the working title, "The Last Chapter" (Posledniaia glava), Zina Mertz was to be run over by a car and killed:

> He left the building with Zina, parted company with her at the corner... returned home, saw the landlady's back heading out into the street, found a note by the telephone: the police had just called (from such-and-such a street) and asked him to present himself forthwith... There, on a leather sofa, wrapped in a sheet (where did they get that sheet?) lay Zina, dead. In those ten minutes she had managed to alight from a bus and tumble straight under a car. And there too was a vaguely familiar lady, who had chanced to be on that same bus, now playing the vulgar role of comforter. He shook her off at the corner. Wandered around, sat in square after square. (Transl. mine; quoted in A. A. Dolinin, "Zagadka nedopisannogo romana," *Zvezda* 12, 1997, 218)

The theme of "fate's methods" (362) provides the novel with a hidden framework. The role of fate's envoy is assigned to the driver of the car. Shchyogolev's idea for a story involving a pubescent stepdaughter has often been cited as a glimpse of the future *Lolita*. Here is yet another preliminary sketch that will later materialize in the car accident scene in *Lolita*: "the laprobe on the sidewalk... concealed the mangled remains of Charlotte Humbert who had been knocked down and dragged several feet by the Beale car as she was hurrying across the street..." (103). The same accessories accompany the scene: the note, the telephone call in which a man is asked to come and identify the body of his wife, importunate comforters, etc.). The driver in *Lolita* relieves Humbert of his nymphet's mother, but it becomes the reader's (and the character's) hermeneutic metatask to try to orient himself in the text, to detect correctly the "agent of fate" amid the "intricacies of the pattern," something Nabokov probed earlier in his unrealized continuation of *The Gift*.

The topos of the traffic accident becomes the Nabokovian variant of the will of happenstance, which has perplexed

every writer from ancient times to the present. It serves as a banal method of killing off a character without fuss or muss, a kind of narrative euthanasia (Yuri Leving, "Filming Nabokov: On Visual Poetics of the Text," *Russian Studies in Literature* 40.3, 2004, 6-31). The writer probed the same device earlier with the death of Nina, the frivolous protagonist of the short story "Spring in Fialta" (1936), and uses it again with Zina.

The Z-*ina* / N-*ina* / Ir-*ina* combination shares the same sound pattern; what is more, Véra's name definitely fails to fit the triad. Mrs. Nabokov always made sure to distance herself from Mertz ("Of course I am not Zina, she would say dismissively"; *Véra*, 91). *The Gift* is the single major piece that Nabokov originally did not dedicate to his wife, but instead to his late mother.

As he was finishing the book, Nabokov wrote to Irina asking her to return his letters. He claimed that the letters contained mostly fictions. The last chapter of *The Gift* was written in January 1938; a letter went out to Irina in February (Ibid, 94). Thus life and fiction overlapped.

But why, after all, was Zina doomed to perish under the wheels of an automobile? This is a question that should trouble readers of the never-published second part of *The Gift*. She is not Mrs. Humbert; on the contrary, Zina is one of the most touching, kind-hearted, selfless female characters Nabokov ever created. Apparently Guadanini, who had a lively sense of humor and took great joy in playing with words, had certain grounds to recognize herself in Zina Mertz. On the other hand, she was known as a femme fatale, while Zina and Fyodor are chaste; Irina was aggressive, while Zina is severe and aloof. To reconcile this discrepancy would be tantamount to finding the beginning or the end of the Möbius strip associated with *The Gift*'s very structure.

The clue is not in Nabokov's cruelty: any traces of Guadanini had to vanish in order to keep Vladimir and Véra, Nabokov's true Muse, together. Tender Zina had no choice but

to die along with some inconvenient memories.

5. Suicide, Cremation

As Anne Nesbet has determined, the story of Yasha's suicide provoked by an unhappy ménage à troi (the three young students Yasha Chernyshevski, Olga G., and Rudolph Baumann hopelessly fall in love) was based in fact. On April 18, 1928, newspapers in Berlin circulated reports of a lovers' drama in the Grunewald involving young Russian émigrés ("Suicide as Literary Fact in the 1920s," *Slavic Review* 50.4, 1991, 829). Indeed, in the 1920s the problem of suicide was understood to be typical of a certain kind of society. According to Nesbet, suicide works as an awkward joint not only between life and death, but between life and text (*cf.* Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* published in 1929). In addition to real life sources, Monica Greenleaf insists on the fictional background of Yasha's story. The scholar suggests that Nabokov borrows certain features from the plot of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Yasha, the Germanophile Russian student; Rudolph, the man-about-town; and the contemporary feminine cliché, Olga, recreate a modernistic decadent version of the Lensky-Onegin-Olga triangle, with its culmination in the callow automatism of the duel on the one hand and the "fatality" of the suicide pact on the other. In both cases it is as if the fashionable automatism of their elegiac poetry has spawned a violent nemesis that is equally typical of the "spirit of the times" (M. Greenleaf, "Fathers, Sons and Impostors: Pushkin's Trace in *The Gift*," *Slavic Review* 53.1, 1994, 151).

Upon his death, Alexander Chernyshevski's body is committed to the flames in a crematorium on the corner of Kaiserallee, and the very choice of the procedure is another fashionable mark of the epoch (Fyodor is amused by the "German seductivity" of a miniature model crematorium in the mortician's window [312]). About one-fifth of the

obituaries published in Berlin newspapers in 1926 announced that the bodies of the deceased would be cremated. A large majority of these bodies were male. Obituaries published in the newspapers referred almost exclusively to members of the upper middle class. Analyzing this new European trend, historian Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht observes that to have oneself cremated was an act of sobriety and worldliness:

> Whoever supports cremation seems an independent thinker and an ethically responsible person trying to live up to the demands of the Kantian categorical imperative… Most important, perhaps, choosing cremation presupposes the courage to face the fact of one's own death before this death occurs. (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997, 64)

The most frequently cited reasons for cremation were its considerably lower cost in comparison with traditional burial, a concern for public hygiene, and an attempt to reduce the expansion of cemeteries (Ibid, 63).

Gumbrecht also notes that judging by the names in the obituaries, a number of German Jews chose the option despite the fact that most Jewish communities continued to resist this practice as representing the logical conclusion of "emancipation," of abandoning their cultural roots, and of integration into lay society. The case of the converted Catholic A. Y. Chernyshevski belongs to the same category. Nabokov, the husband of a Jewish-Russian émigrée, however, seems to be deeply skeptical regarding the prospective results of such emancipation. Yasha Chernyshevski is in love with a German youth, Rudolph; his attempted conversion through cultural and religious renunciation is doomed, and ultimately brings destruction upon his whole family.

The final farewell sequence prior to the cremation of

Alexander Chernyshevski's body continues to serve the connection between life and death/life and text. In this scene the intertextual links lead to Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych" (1886). Nabokov included this short story in his analyses of Russian prose when he taught university courses. The descriptions of both deceased male characters and their widows are similar. Tolstoy's dead man's "yellow waxen brow with bald patches over his *sunken temples* (*na vvalivshikhsia viskakh*) was thrust up in the way peculiar to the dead, the protruding nose seeming to press on the upper lip" (L. Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories*, Chicago: Signet Classics, 2003, 96). In *The Gift* Fyodor "forever remembered the white bristle on [Chernyshevski's] *sunken cheeks* (*na vpalykh shchekakh*), the dull shade of his bald head" (312). This is Nabokov's description of the widow: "Mme. *Chernyshevski did not hold a handkerchief but sat motionless and straight, her eyes shimmering through the black crepe veil* (*Chernyshevskaia platka ne derzhala, a sidela nepodvizhno i priamo, s mertsaiushchimi skvoz' chernyi fler glazami*)". Here is Tolstoy's widow:

> Praskovya Fyodorovna, a short, fat woman… dressed all *in black, her head covered with lace* (*vsia v chernom, s pokrytoi kruzhevom golovoi*)… on her way to the sofa *the lace of the widow's black shawl* (*chernym kruzhevom chernoi mantilii*) caught on the carved edge of the table… When this was all over she *took out a clean cambric handkerchief and began to weep* (*ona vynula chistyi batistovyi platok i stala plakat'*). (*Death of Ivan Ilych*, 98)

Nabokov follows Tolstoy in accentuating the estrangement and inner discord in the mood of the funeral ceremony guests. Mostly it is conveyed by the liveliness of their eyes in contrast to the ostentatiously constrained body language. Compare the descriptions:

> The faces of friends and acquaintances bore the guarded expressions usual in such cases: *a mobility of the pupils* (*podvizhnost' zrachkov*) accompanied by a certain tension in the muscles of the neck... the ladies who had used to visit the Chernyshevskis all sat together...there were many people whom *Fyodor did not know* (*Fyodoru neznakomykh*)–for instance, a prim gentleman with a *blond little beard* and *unusually red lips* (*chopornyi gospodin s belokuroi borodkoi i neobyknovenno krasnymi gubami*). (312-13)
>
> Two ladies *in black* (*v chernom*) were taking off their fur cloaks. Peter Ivanovich recognized one of them as Ivan Ilych's sister, but the other was *unknown* (*neznakomaia dama*) to him. His colleague... Schwartz's face, with his *Piccadilly whiskers* (*s angliiskimi bakenbardami*)... The ladies went upstairs to the widow's room, and Schwartz with seriously *compressed lips but a playful look in his eyes* (*s ser'ezno slozhennymi, krepkimi gubami i igrivym vzgliadom*), indicated by a twist of his eyebrows the room to the right where the body lay. (*Death of Ivan Ilych*, 95-96)

The Tolstoy source is carefully refracted through other fictional allusions (including those from Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* earlier in the episode) and Fyodor's peculiar modus operandi with his perception of reality tinted by fixation on literary phenomena. Fyodor the character is not completely aware of the complex background of the scene with its intertextual renderings. It is up to a reader of Nabokov to reactivate the hidden relationships in *The Gift* with the literary traditions upon which it is constructed.

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.

HAZEL'S SHADES

Nabokov's *Pale Fire* is a hyper-allusive novel preoccupied with ghosts and haunting, so it should pique our interest when an old ghost story surfaces that in many ways parallels one of its major plot points and also bears some Nabokovian style markers. In the summer of 1919 Hazel Crance died under somewhat mysterious circumstances in Ithaca, New York. (All references to Crance's death come from the coverage in the *Ithaca Daily News* [*IDN*] for July and August, 1919, which District Attorney Arthur G. Adams collected in a scrapbook, now located in the archives at the History Center in Tompkins

County; the story also received much briefer coverage in the *New York Times*). Not unlike *Pale Fire*'s Hazel Shade, Crance drowned in a lake while on a date with a Cornell fraternity brother, Donald W. Fether. Lochan Neck, where Hazel Shade drowns, likely refers to Lake Cayuga, the principle lake in the Ithaca region, where *Pale Fire* clearly takes place. The name "Cayuga," means, in the Cayuga language (part of the Haudenosaunee linguistic family), "the People of the Great Swamp," and Hazel Shade sinks into "a crackling, gulping swamp" (*Pale Fire*, New York: Vintage International, 1989, 51). Hazel Crance's ghost, it is said, still haunts Cayuga's murky waters (Lucy Li, "Violent History Belies Ithaca's Peaceful Aura," *Cornell Daily Sun*, Nov. 17, 2009).

The similarities between the two drownings don't end there, and while I have found no direct evidence that Nabokov had any knowledge of Hazel Crance or her alleged ghost, it is certainly conceivable that he might have. After all, Nabokov lived in Ithaca for twelve years, and *Pale Fire* is arguably his most geographically specific novel. That "New Wye" is a pseudonym for Ithaca (or at least the up-state *New York* area) and "Wordsmith University" an alias for Cornell, is as manifestly obvious as Kinbote's observation that the Peter Dean of John Shade's poem is "really" Peter Provost. Nevertheless, there are plenty of other sources for Nabokov's rendering of Hazel Shade's death: Ophelia, for example, or L'Inconnue de la Seine (My thanks to Gavriel Shapiro for pointing this out to me; see D. Barton Johnson, "L'Inconnue de la Seine and Nabokov's Naiades," *Comparative Literature*, 44.3 [Summer 1992], 225-248, for a fuller analysis). However, that images of drowned women fascinated Nabokov, as Johnson demonstrates, suggests that the Hazel Crance case would have interested Nabokov if he did know about it.

It might be just as remarkable if Nabokov didn't know about Hazel Crance and we read this coincidence as potentially other-worldly. The novel is already oversaturated

with ghosts–but not of this sort. The principal ghosts of *Pale Fire* are characters within the novel, most notably Aunt Maud, who haunts the Shade family, but also, if you accept Brian Boyd's arguments (*Nabokov's* Pale Fire*: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), John Shade's ghost haunting Charles Kinbote, or even Hazel Shade's ghost haunting variously her father and Kinbote. I don't intend here to either endorse or refute Boyd's interpretations; suffice it to say that since *Pale Fire* is in many ways a novel about haunting and the potentiality of life-after-death, all potential ghosts should be taken into consideration (see also W.W. Rowe, *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981). But, like many of Nabokov's novels, *Pale Fire* has other "ghosts," the intertextual specters that lurk behind the tremendous number of allusions (See Steven F. Walker, "Nabokov's *Lolita* and Goethe's *Faust*: the Ghost in the Novel," *Comparative Literature Studies* 46.3 [2009], 512-535, for the most recent example of this sort of argument, in which the author attempts "to demonstrate that *Lolita* is, if not inhabited, at least *haunted*, by the ghost of Goethe's *Faust*" [512]). But unlike the ghost of Hazel Crance, these are mostly literary allusions, and the novel distances itself from specific historical markers relating to Ithaca; the novel is by no means a *roman à clé* or a satire of academic politics specific to Cornell. To be haunted by a very specific and "real" ghost thus imparts to the novel a very different kind of *hauntology*.

The story of Hazel Crance's death is so full of stranger-than-fiction twists and fantastic turns, as well as a striking preponderance of double and alliterating names, that it reads, in many ways, more like a work of fiction by Nabokov than historical reportage. Crance drowned late on the moonless evening of July 19th, 1919. An eighteen year-old girl who lived with her parents at 123 Prospect Street, she had been on a date with Donald W. Fether, a twenty-one year-old member of the Sigma Alpha Phi fraternity at Rockledge, whom she

had known less than a week. They went out with three other couples: Robert Clark and Irene Boswirth, Irene Briggs and Albert "Si" Pete, and Roger Williams and Marguerite Harden (who would, in a later interview, reject the idea that Crance's death had been anything other than an accident). At some point, Fether and Crance went down to the beach for a breath of fresh air and she was never seen again. Fether was found in the lake next to an overturned canoe, treading water and calling for help. He was unharmed but "divested of all his clothes except his undergarments and shoes and socks" ("Fether is Held for Grand Jury," *IDN,* Aug. 18, 1919). According to one principal witness, Bert T. Baker, the water that night was "calm as glass" (ibid). Fether claimed that he had "kicked off the trousers while struggling in the water after the canoe tipped over" ("Knotted Trousers Deemed Vital Clue in Crance Case," *IDN,* Aug. 15, 1919) and that when he surfaced she was already gone. He later admitted that the canoe capsized while he and Crance were kissing. This seems a more-or-less believable story, since the two had been drinking ("Drinking Liquor Prefaced Drowning of Hazel Crance," *IDN,* July 28, 1919), and, according to her best friend, Marguerite, Crance did not know how to swim ("Chum Scorns Crime Theory," *IDN*, undated, probably August 1919, based on its position in Adams' scrapbook).

Two veteran grapplers, assisted on the boat by Hazel's father Edward Crance, were commissioned to drag the lake in search of Crance's body: William Leonard and Leonard Bloom. After several fruitless attempts at dragging the lake, their hope was buoyed when a vaudeville showman known as Daredevil Johnny Reynolds offered to brave the two-hundred-foot-deep water and dive for the body. Negotiations with local police and the City of Ithaca ensued, and a deal was struck with high hopes. Unfortunately, funding could not be secured for the expensive diving apparatus Reynolds required, and the plan fell through. Leonard, Bloom and Mr. Crance continued

undaunted, however, and on August 14th there was a major break in the case, which resulted in Fether being arrested on suspicion of murder. What happened is not entirely clear, since the testimonies of Leonard, Bloom and Edward Crance all conflict. The three agree that they felt a heavy object on the line, which at some point fell off, leaving only a pair of trousers on the hook by the time they hauled it to the boat. But their accounts differ in two important respects: to what extent the trousers were indeed knotted, and how certain they were that the heavier object initially on the hook was Crance's body. The knottiness of the trousers would come to constitute the major crux of the case. Some who saw the trousers claimed they were tightly double-knotted ten inches from the crotch, but the presiding judge, Justice Michael Kiley, claimed they were not "knotted" at all, but rather "folded" (The knottiness of the trousers probably constitutes the most Nabokovian motif in the Crance case: a punning semantic problem linked to the double-knotting of a pair of trousers, which were removed, it would seem, for the purpose of either coitus, strangulation, weighing down the body in the water, or, most disturbingly, a combination of all three).

The case was put to District Attorney Arthur G. Adams, and Fether hired the legal team of Cobb, Cobb, McAllister, Feinder & Heath. The list of witnesses included, in addition to Bert T. Baker, a Professor Ogden and an Ogden Kerr, as well as an Alderman Hoare and one Clayton Cousens (note how many names have either an external double or alliteratively double themselves; Alderman Hoare especially sounds like a character in *Pale Fire*, and uncannily recalls Kinbote's comment to Line 662: "This line, and indeed the whole passage [653-664], allude to the well-known poem by Goethe about the erlking, *hoary* enchanter of the elf-haunted *alder*wood" [239, my emphasis]). Most of the witnesses agreed that they thought they heard a woman's voice as they approached the boat, which directly conflicted with Fether's

story about Crance's immediate disappearance. Furthermore, several witnesses stated that they at first thought the cry for help was a joke because of its quiet, non-urgent tone. All this looked pretty bad for Fether, who then brought in his uncle John R. Sauerwein to help advise him. Meanwhile, Fether's brother Kenneth simultaneously got into trouble with the law in California for the Humbertish crime of "luring a girl to Los Angeles." Eventually, however, with no body and no real evidence, Fether was released on a writ of Habeus Corpus, in part because, according to Justice Michael H. Kiley, there wasn't a "shadow of a motive" ("Fether Gains Freedom After Long Hearing," *IDN*, Aug. 20, 1919).

The links to *Pale Fire* are clearly compelling. The coincidence is striking on several levels, and it gestures towards the way this novel so thoroughly mirrors not only itself and other literary works, but also reality and history. Many critics, understandably, foreground the novel's metafictionality over its realism or verisimilitude, but the otherworldly presence of Hazel Crance in *Pale Fire* suggests a more direct link between the novel and the world outside its hazy borders. It asks us to take more seriously the seemingly ludicrous position that reality might actually mirror this novel, that the real world is more similar to *Pale Fire*'s patterned universe than we might think. In other words, our desire to imagine the fictive world of *Pale Fire* as supernatural and irrational is to some extent disrupted when the historical reality it might be referencing seems just as much governed by coincidence, doubling, and alliteration.

The correspondence of the two drownings thus raises two questions: what does *Pale Fire* do to our reading of the story of Hazel Crance? and what does the story of Hazel Crance do to our reading of *Pale Fire?* As for the first question, besides the obvious point–that it renders visible a tragic story from the past, recuperating a potentially lost voice from history–it also, in a way, *validates* her ghost story. Hazel Crance's ghost

is alive, or at least, undead–and actively haunting; perhaps we've simply been wrong about who is being haunted: not the denizens of Cayuga's shores, but the readers of *Pale Fire*. As for what this does for our reading of the novel itself, Crance drowned exactly forty years to the day before John Shade concludes the third canto of *Pale Fire* and begins Canto Four; he finishes lines 797-809 on the sixty-fifth card, Kinbote says, sometime "between the sunset of July 18 and the dawn of July 19" (258); Kinbote comments that on July 19th he himself went to two churches, hoping for salvation "despite the frozen mud and horror in [his] heart" (258). This provides a very strange moment of haunting, the still-living Shade seeming to already haunt Kinbote: "I heard with absolute distinction, as if he were standing at my shoulder and speaking loudly, as to a slightly deaf man, Shade's voice…" (258)). Crance's death thus does not coincide with Hazel Shade's; rather, it coincides, in anniversary at least, with the final days of John Shade's life, almost as if Hazel Crance, not Hazel Shade, were haunting John Shade. Such a reading would confirm this highly self-reflexive novel's relation to a reality outside itself, but it also suggests that the novel imagines that reality to be as patterned and supernatural as Nabokov's novels. The idea that the novel is inhabited by the ghost of Hazel Crance creates more questions than it answers, and leaves us at a central impasse: the impossibility of sorting out who's haunting whom, who's writing whom, and even who *is* who in *Pale Fire*. Part of the point of the novel is this very impossibility, but imagining the novel as haunted by Hazel Crance's ghost adds to it another layer of the sort of cryptogrammic fascination that constitutes so much of *Pale Fire*'s pleasure and achievement.

--Nicholas Roth, Cornell University

NABOKOV'S TROPOTOS
AN APPROACH TO THE THEME OF NABOKOV AND THE CLASSICS

Chapter 5 of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *The Gift* (1937-38, complete Russian edition 1952) contains, among other things, a number of (fictional) reviews written in response to the publication of *The Life of Chernyshevski*, by the novel's protagonist Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev. The reviews are intended to show the reaction of the émigré community to its publication. Among them is a "detailed analysis" by a Professor Anuchin of Prague University,

> … (a well-known public figure, a man of shining moral purity and of great personal courage--the same professor Anuchin who in 1922, not long before his deportation from Russia, when some revolvered leatherjackets had come to arrest him but became interested in his collection of ancient coins and were slow in taking him away, had calmly said, pointing to his watch: "Gentlemen, history does not wait.") (V. Nabokov, *The Gift*. Vintage, 1991. 305)

The Anuchin review is then cited extensively. The book seemed repellent to the reviewer because its author failed to pay due attention to the ideological and intellectual importance of the figure in question, N.G. Chernyshevski, but also because the author had an "impressionistic" view of history.

> A certain epoch has been taken and one of its representatives chosen. But has the author assimilated the concept of 'epoch'? No. First of all one senses in him absolutely no consciousness of that *classification of time*, without which history turns into an arbitrary gyration of multicolored

> spots, into some kind of impressionistic picture with a walking figure walking upside down against a green sky that does not exist in nature. (Nabokov 1991, 307)

Then, commenting on the factual accuracy of The Life, Anuchin writes:

> In his book, which lies absolutely outside the humanitarian tradition of Russian literature and therefore outside literature in general, there are no factual untruths (if one does not count the fictitious 'Strannolyubski' already mentioned, two or three doubtful details and a few slips of the pen), but that 'truth' which it contains is worse than the most prejudiced lie, for such a truth goes in direct contradiction to that noble and chaste truth (an absence of which deprives history of what the great Greek called '*tropotos*') which is one of the inalienable treasures of Russian social thought. (Nabokov 1991, 307)

This is one of the few occasions when we find a Greek word in a Nabokov text. A. A. Dolinin in his commentary to the Russian *Gift* writes that *tropotos* appears to be a false pseudoscholarly reference, since in ancient Greek it is a seldom-used word meaning "a leathern thong for fastening oars on the galley ship" (V. Nabokov, *Sobr. soch. russkogo perioda v 4 tt.* St. Petersburg, Symposium, 2004. Vol. 4, 759). I have not been able to find the word in this morphological form that would correspond to the cited lexical meaning. However, the Liddell and Scott lexicon contains words *tropós* and *trōpotēr* in the sense of a "twisted leathern thong with which the oar was fastened to the thole," *tropós* being the epic equivalent (with two citations in the *Odyssey*) of the later *trōpotēr* (Aristophanes, Thucydides). Whatever the actual form of the word may be, its meaning obviously does not fit the context. Before we conclude that *tropotos* is a

pseudoreference, we should look for a prototype of the word.

There are two possibilities: 1) *tropotos* is a Greek word, a philosophical or historical term used by some well-known (cf. "the great Greek") ancient author; and 2) *tropotos* is a pseudoreference, which could be a) *vox nihili*, or b) a pointer to some other word in some other language.

The context in which the word *tropotos* is used in the novel requires a meaning in the range from "dignity, value" through "order, sense" to "conscious movement, development"– a characteristic which distinguishes a "traditional" view of history and art from an "impressionistic" or "modernist" one. We will refer to this range of meanings as the *contextual meaning* of the word *tropotos*.

Formally, *tropotos* can well be a Greek word. The ending suggests a masculine noun or adjective. If spelled *tropotos* in Latin transliteration (which it is in the English and French versions of the novel), the word should be a derivative of *trépō* "I turn." In Pierre Chantraine's *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque* (vol. IV-1, 1977), there are two philosophical terms listed among the derivatives of *trépō* with an "e" in the root: *treptós* – in Aristotle, "causing change in"; *treptikós* – in Plotinus, "liable to be turned or changed," cf. the name of the third Moira in Gr. mythology: *Atropos*, "the Unbending One," she was the one who cut the thread of a human life. But the meanings of both are incompatible with the contextual meaning of *tropotos*, and their morphology is too dissimilar. Among the derivatives with an "o," the best candidates are *epítropos* "guardian, protector" (but it has a prefix), and *tropikón* "minor premise of a hypothetical syllogism" in Stoic logic (but it is too technical). There is, in addition to the aforementioned *tropós* ("leathern thong"), the much more common word *trópos* which has six primary meanings, according to Liddell and Scott: "direction"; "manner, fashion"; "a way of life, habit"; "mode (in music)"; "style (in writing)"; and "mood (of a syllogism) in logic."

These seem too broad in application, but *trópos* could be used as a term in music, logic, and writing. The meaning "style" or "tenor" can be said to correspond to the contextual meaning of *tropotos*. Furthermore, the 2nd-century BCE Greek historian Polybius used the phrase: *ho tēs pragmatikēs historías trópos* ("the manner of pragmatic history") in the beginning of his *Histories* (1.2). Polybius is often credited with inventing the term "pragmatic history," i.e., factual, based on facts (Oxford Class. Dict., 3rd ed., 1210), but the term has nothing to do with trópos. Also, for all his importance, the name of Polybius does not immediately come to mind when one hears the phrase "the great Greek." To summarize, neither the Liddell and Scott lexicon (revised 9th edition, Oxford, 1996), nor I. Kh. Dvoretsky's Greek-Russian dictionary (Moscow, 1958), nor A.D. Veisman's Greek-Russian dictionary (5th edition, St. Petersburg, 1899), nor Chantraine's *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque* (Paris, 1968-80), nor Hjalmar Frisk's *Griechisches Etymologisches Woerterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1960-72) lists *tropotos*, and the morphologically similar words that they list *sub vocibus trépō* and *tréphō*, which would give an alternate stem in *threp-*, do not conform to the contextual meaning of *tropotos* in any satisfactory way.

We may conclude that *tropotos* does not exist as a Greek word. But is it a pseudoreference? To find a pseudoreference in a text composed by a person of "shining moral purity" who collected ancient coins (cf. the philosopher and journalist V. V. Rozanov, a great numismatist who translated Aristotle), and was a rigorous scholar and the most meticulous of Godunov-Cherdyntsev's critics (he identifies Strannolyubski as fictitious, notices "two or three doubtful details") is little short of scandalous. In terms of scholarly rigor, Anuchin is presented as a far cry from Mortus-Adamovich who is notorious for his inaccurate and unverified quotations (A. Dolinin, "Tri zametki o romane 'Dar'" In: A. Dolinin, *Istinnaia zhizn' pisatel'a Sirina*. St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2004, 240,

260-61). All of this makes accepting *tropotos* as *vox nihili* the more difficult. Besides, Nabokov was ever careful to avoid using words without referents in his work. The reader is compelled to look for a hidden meaning here. *Tropotos* could be a *portmanteau*-word: *trópos* + *tópos* ("[common] place") or *trópos* + *pótos* ("drinking-bout, carousal", in Plato). It could just as well be a multilingual *portmanteau*-word: *trop* ("too much," Fr.) + *pótos* ("drinking"). Alternatively, as has been suggested by Alexey Sklyarenko, it could refer to a rare Russian word *tropot* (=*topot mnogikh*, "clatter of many feet," according to Dal'). In each of these possible interpretations the connotations are deprecating: a hackneyed commonplace of scholarship; the result of too much drinking on the part of Greek philosophers or their modern-day readers; or the well-tread path of scholarly argument.

In addition to these interpretations, I'd like to offer another solution. In *Invitation to a Beheading* (1935-36) there is the memorable phrase "Mali è trano t'amesti" (V. Nabokov, *Sobr. soch. russkogo perioda v 4 tt.* St. Petersburg, Symposium, 2004. Vol. 4, 107), which Gennady Barabtarlo deciphered as "smert' mila–èto taina" (G. Barabtarlo, *Sverkayushchii obruch*. St. Petersburg: Giperion, 2003, 115-6). A.A. Dolinin studied the manuscript of the novel in the Library of Congress and noticed that Nabokov was indeed composing an anagram. And yet Prof. Dolinin suggested that in Nabokov's anagrams, the key is less important than the fact of its presence: "What is important is that there is a certain message and one can try and understand it" (A. Dolinin, "O nekotorykh anagrammakh v tvorchestve Vladimira Nabokova," in *Kultura russkoi diaspory: Vladimir Nabokov–100*. Tallinn, 2000, 106). In our terms, that means that the contextual meaning of an unreadable phrase is more significant than its actual decipherable meaning. I am not sure how applicable this is to the "mali è trano" anagram: when deciphered it serves an important function, in comparison to which its contextual meaning seems poor. But in the case of

tropotos this appears to be a productive approach. What is the contextual meaning of *tropotos*, then? It connotes something positive: a certain "noble and chaste truth" gives history "what the great Greek called '*tropotos*.'" However, in view of the larger context of the chapter, Anuchin's review shows a deficiency of understanding brought about by his biased position regarding Russian social history. Anuchin is clearly one of those Koncheev has in mind when he describes people escaping from an invasion or an earthquake and carrying away with them a portrait of a long-forgotten relative, and "suddenly someone confiscated the portrait" (Nabokov 1991, 308). Anuchin has an ideological agenda and is stupefied by Godunov-Cherdyntsev's cavalier attitude. Despite his scholarly rigor and great personal courage, Anuchin's authority is compromised. His views on art, for example, are presented as conservative: he does not understand an impressionist "green sky" and cannot comprehend why someone would want to paint a figure walking upside down. The reader will see the Nabokovian key words in the phrase that describes Anuchin's fear: history without a classification of time, without some kind of man-made sense, turns into modernist art, "an arbitrary gyration of multicolored spots." Having read this far, the reader will probably understand that this is what Fyodor wants. Similarly, his reference to *tropotos* is a trap: it seems like a marker of learned discourse but is in reality a fake.

Nabokov's attitude to Classical antiquity underwent a series of subtle changes over the years, but in the main it remained the same. Just as for a 20-year-old Nabokov his personal history and the individual's emotions and memory are more valuable than the history of a civilization (the poem "Son na Akropole"), so for a 39-year-old Nabokov personal style trumps any kind of ideology, even though that ideology uses Classical authors for its support. The ideologically engaged Anuchin who apparently believes in the benevolence

and overall significance of history characteristically appeals to an anonymous tradition ("the great Greek") and, also characteristically, the support that this appeal is meant to elicit is illusionary. *Tropotos* must be a pseudoreference because a fake word serves as a sign of any ideology's weakened authority. It is indeed a characteristic that distinguished the dignified traditional view of history (orderly development) from an apparently undignified modernist one (artistic contingencies, beautiful chaos). But ultimately this characteristic is a mistake, a fake, a misremembered or made-up word, the result of excessive reliance on the automatically accepted tradition of faceless citations from ancient authors. The Classical subtext here is the only detail that weakens the reviewer's factual accuracy.

The applications and contexts of Classical subtexts vary in Nabokov's work; Nabokov himself tried to "estrange" the Classical tradition and to employ it according to his individual poetics as early as 1930. For example, in the novel *Glory*, Martin speaks of Horace and his Rome as his contemporaries, in vivid terms, and thus replaces the pre-packaged Horace of schoolteachers employed by ideologues of all sorts with his own individualized version of the poet. The variety of uses to which Nabokov puts his Classical allusions and some excellent work (most notably by David H. J. Larmour) in that field prove that the Classics in Nabokov can be fruitfully studied as a separate theme.

--Sergey Karpukhin, Madison, Wisconsin

A NOTE ON ONE OF NABOKOV'S RIDDLES

In March 1997, my colleague Julian Connolly, whose research for many years has been devoted in substantial part

to Nabokov, forwarded to all members of our departmental faculty an e-mail communication from D. Barton Johnson to NABOKV-L. The communication, which originated with Dmitri Nabokov, comprised, in addition to an introductory editorial note, a riddle in verse immediately preceded and followed by a note from Dmitri. In the latter, Dmitri states that his father "did" the riddle, previously unpublished, for him, and offers a prize to the first person submitting the correct answer. The riddle itself is an eight-line composition of rhyming couplets in, for the most part, iambic tetrameter with an unstressed ninth syllable in lines 1 and 2. The communication in its totality and as originally formatted is as follows:

> Editorial note: NABOKV-L thanks Dmitri Nabokov for the following electronic "scoop." An unpublished puzzle poem from VN himself. Alas, editorial ethics exclude the editor, his family and NABOKV-L employees from entering the contest.
>
> After a hard day of hockey practice, a little reward for those who have been through my lengthier items – the following from father:
>
> A RIDDLE
> A word there is of plural number,
> An enemy of peaceful slumber*;
> Now if you add an s to this - -
> O magic metamorphosis:
> plural is plural now no more,
> And sweet what bitter was before.
>
> *And if read backward, it may cause
> The cautious mountaineer to pause.
> DN note: Father did this for me. It's not hard – even I

solved it. The first correct answer will get a fax-simile of VN's penciled fiche Bristol (therefore please include fax no. on posting). No shoebox-top required. No connection with Tsvetaeva, although that 1937 poem will be included in a large collection of VN verse.

The solution is *cares*, a word of plural number and, at the same time, an enemy of peaceful slumber. If *s* is added to it, the result, i.e., *caress*, is no longer plural, and a word which is sweet in its connotation, rather than bitter like *cares*. Finally, *cares*, if read backward, is *serac*, defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "a block or column of ice formed by intersecting crevasses on a glacier", and thus denoting a potential danger for unsuspecting mountaineers.

I was unexpectedly reminded of Nabokov's riddle ten years later, in March 2007, when I encountered the following riddle, formatted as presented, in a book on word-play entitled *Word Circus* by Richard Lederer (1998, Springfield: Merriam Webster, 243), who includes the solution (i.e., *cares*):

A word there is of plural number,
Foe to ease and tranquil slumber.
Any other word you take
And add an *s* will plural make,
But if you add an *s* to this,
So strange the metamorphosis:
Plural is plural now no more
And sweet what bitter was before.

The passage of time notwithstanding, I recognized the similarity of the riddle to Nabokov's, and noted the absence of a reference to the solution read backward and its relevance to cautious mountaineers. Lederer, however, attributed the riddle *not* to Nabokov, whose creation in any case had not been available long enough for attribution vis-à-vis the 1998

publication of Lederer's book, but to a George Canning, who lived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century:

George Canning (1770-1828) was a British statesman and for a brief time Prime Minister of England. Along the way, he created one of the most famous of all word puzzles.

It was a simple matter in the computer age to confirm the attribution of the riddle to George Canning, who, in addition to a politician, was a satirist, poet, and writer of light verse. There was also a link to Leman Thomas Rede's *Memoir of the Right Honourable George Canning* (1827, London: G. Virtue), in which the riddle is cited with two additional lines (581), apparently written by Canning, and separated from the riddle itself by the heading *Solution*. With Rede's spelling of *enthrall* as *enthral*, and his italicization of *bitter* and *sweet*, also italicized in the last line of the riddle as he formats it, they are:

Solution.
Though *bitter* cares the wearied mind enthral,
Yet one fond sweet *caress* can banish all.

There was no alternative to the conclusion, in view of Canning's dates and his credentials as a poet, as well as the date of Johnson's e-mail and of Lederer's book, that Nabokov was not, in the strict sense, the author of the riddle he presented to Dmitri. However, it seemed reasonable to assume that, as a speaker of both English and Russian, an aficionado of word-play and riddles, and a riddler in his own right, Nabokov might well have been acquainted with Canning's riddle, especially in view of its description by Lederer as "one of the most famous of all word puzzles." The web lists sources on word play which include it, e.g., *The Book of Indoor and Outdoor Games* (Mrs. Burton Kingsland, New York: Sully

and Kleinteich; 1913, copyright 1904 by Doubleday, Page & Company). Apparently, then, Nabokov adapted the riddle with the intention of presenting it to his son. In this regard, it should be noted that Dmitri's communication provided no information regarding the date of his receipt of the riddle, or the time of Nabokov's first encounter with it. Nor is there any reason to think he had knowledge of the latter. If Nabokov's first encounter with the riddle was during his student years in England (1919-1922), the country of the riddle's author and in which it would have been most readily available, there would have been a period of many years, perhaps twenty-five or more, before presentation. Based on Dmitri's statement that his father did the riddle for him, however, we are justified in assuming that the adaptation was done with presentation in mind, and therefore relatively near it in time.

But we need not stop there in speculating on the provenance of Nabokov's previously unpublished adaptation. Although the conception of the riddle was indisputably Canning's, Nabokov, in adapting it for Dmitri, did not merely change it, but *personalized* it. Assuming his interest in riddles and, more generally, English word-play led him to Canning's creation, we may then see the evolution of Nabokov's adaptation as a result, first, of his recognition, undoubtedly providing more than a bit of pleasure to him as a logophile and logologist, of its peculiarity: the solution, *cares*, read backward was a word relevant to mountain climbing, an interest of his eventually to be shared with his son. This recognition may have occurred early, even before Dmitri's birth in 1934. When adaptation for presentation became his goal, he incorporated a reference to the shared interest by re-casting the original. He removed its grammatical thrust, incorporated in the third and fourth lines (i.e., *Any other word you take/And add an s will plural make*), and inserted in their place new lines (i.e., *And if read backward, it may cause/The cautious mountaineer to pause*), not directly, but as an aside, in effect parenthetically, and as

such properly signaled via an asterisk. This required changing the first word of line 5 to *and* from *but* because the riddle was no longer concerned, at least overtly, with the violation of a rule of English grammar. For the same reason, it required the elimination in line 6 of *strange*, which suggested an unusual result from suffixation of s. The replacement chosen was *magic*, a word which did not suggest strangeness, and was much more likely to delight a young person. Although the basis and mechanism of adaptation are relatively clear, the failure to insert the new lines as 3 and 4, and the resulting reduction of the riddle proper to six lines, is less so, assuming that the form of the riddle provided to NABOKV-L was, in fact, the form in which Dmitri received it from his father. It is most likely no more complex in its justification than the feeling on Nabokov's part that the new lines were mildly disruptive, the riddle focusing on *cares* and addition of *s* to it, but having nothing directly to do with *serac*, which was an afterthought. Nevertheless, one can hardly fail to notice that the asterisk forces the reader to pause, just as the cautious mountaineer would at a serac. There is, perhaps unintentionally, a type of iconism. The externalized position of the new lines also highlights them in an appropriate way in view of their importance as the vehicle of personalization.

The adaptation, however, was not limited to the replacement of lines 3 and 4. There are also changes in the second line: substitution of *foe* by *enemy*, a more common word, and elimination of *ease*, which creates an unclear, or less clear, image (i.e., *foe to ease*) in comparison to the image created by *peaceful slumber*, not only more clear and concrete in its denotation vis-à-vis *foe*, but, in the absence of *ease*, creating a single, and thus more effective, image of the detrimental effect of *cares*. Concomitantly, there were metrical changes. Metrically, Canning's version can be read in either of two ways: as iambic but for the second line and the first word of the penultimate, or iambic throughout but for the

first word of the penultimate line. The first reading emerges if the second line is dissociated from the first, making it trochaic (i.e., *Fóe to eáse and tránquil slúmber*). But it can also be read as iambic in conjunction with the first line, which ends in an unstressed syllable (i.e., *A wórd there ís of plúral númber/ Fóe to eáse and tránquil slúmber*). The penultimate line must be read with a stressed initial, as trochaic, since the preceding line ends in a stressed syllable (i.e., *O mágic métamórphosís/ plúral is plúral nów no móre*), followed by a return to iambs. The lone troche provides focus and emphasis in clarifying the nature of the metamorphosis. Nabokov's adaptation, with *enemy* for *foe* in line 2, requires an iambic reading throughout but for the troche at the beginning of the penultimate line. It seems likely that this was simply a result of his replacement of *foe* by *enemy* in line 2. Nevertheless, we cannot eliminate the possibility of the converse, that metrical uniformity with a single troche for emphasis at the beginning of the penultimate line was the motivation for replacement of *foe*.

A final comment on attribution is needed in view of Dmitri's comment that his father "did" the riddle for him. Was Nabokov remiss in failing to mention his source to Dmitri? Few, if any, will fail to agree that, under the circumstances, the answer is an unqualified *no*. The adapted riddle, as Dmitri notes, was unpublished, and we must assume Nabokov never intended to publish it. It was simply a fatherly whimsy presented to Dmitri for his amusement, precisely, I believe, because its solution permitted modification of the original to include a reference to an activity of interest to both father and son. The source, had it been mentioned upon presentation to Dmitri, would have meant nothing to him, and therefore been of no interest. Dmitri's statement that his father did the riddle for him must be understood in that context. It was indeed done for him. Attribution would surely have accompanied the adapted version of the riddle if Nabokov had decided to publish it, or adapted it for purposes of publication rather than

for the entertainment of his son. In view of the personalized nature of the adaptation, he left it unpublished, a state in which it remained until Dmitri brought it to light. In his recognition that *cares* read backward is a word relevant to mountain climbers, a recognition which undoubtedly inspired the adaptation as a present to his son, we have yet another example, if one were needed, of Nabokov's ever present sensitivity to the potential of the written word.

--Mark J. Elson, University of Virginia

OUR NABOKOV: ROMANIAN APPROPRIATIONS

When in Romania, a handful of critics dedicated the World Literature Magazine *Secolul 20/ The 20th Century* to Nabokov in 1980, irrespective of text choices in the magazine, they smuggled in normality, liberty, defiance before the totalitarian, authoritarian, criminal regime which was then in full swing. Beginning with the mid-1990s, there has been a renewal of interest in Romania in the work of the writer, quantifiable in the large number of translations over a short span of time and critical evaluations in the form of prefaces, studies, entries in literary histories and dictionaries. After the year 2000 (about ten years after the fall of communism in the country), there appeared a new temptation for several Romanian writers who decided to appropriate Nabokov's work and genius in various ways: as theatrical performance, in the case of a stage adaptation of *Lolita* (2002); as fictional re-writing of *Lolita* (2003); and as fictional short story evocative of Nabokov's spirit as paradigm of freedom (2005). Although taking on different guises, all three appropriations seem to have grown from some common views underlying

the writers' perception of Nabokov's works. At the level of creative/ writerly agency, they use Nabokov's reconfiguration of the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetical to construct a more faithful articulation of the complexities of the relationship between life and the narratives we tell about it. At the level of critical/ readerly/ spectatorial agency, they adopt Nabokov's stance of intertextualist whose own parodic exercises allow the writer to examine textual presuppositions, evaluate old and new cultural practices, and thus, hopefully, alter consciousness. The two directions require that the readers/audience become involved in the experience as they live the risks of reading and writing through discovering that something in present-day reality is being called into question. The Romanian appropriations thus allow an investigation into the collective unconscious with a view to discerning those events that have led us to constitute and recognize ourselves as subjects of what we do, think, say. They afford new insights into both the cultural past and the cultural present, but mostly, into the undefined work of freedom Nabokov constantly glossed on.

The first appropriation is the 2002 stage adaptation of *Lolita* at *The Little Theatre* in Bucharest, by Mihaela Tonitza Iordache, after Nabokov's screenplay (*Lolita,* Great Britain, director Stanley Kubrick, 1962). The play, directed by Catalina Buzoianu, casts the late Stefan Iordache as Humbert Humbert, Stefana Zamfirescu/ Ana Ularu as Lolita, and Mihai Dinvale as Clare Quilty. The theatre reviews were laudatory, first, of Buzoianu's subtle understanding of Nabokov's text which allows for an equally profound meditation on the nature of good art, writing within a self-generating narcissistic culture; and second, of the actors' performance, especially that of Stefan Iordache whose intellectualized performance was conspicuous. Catalina Buzoianu's *Lolita* carefully builds an almost surrealist atmosphere in which elements of low culture coexist with elements of high culture in the way all arts need to

contribute in recreating Nabokov's polyphonic discourse. The Romanian adaptation insists on the multiplication of characters, of doubles (Humbert Humbert; Annabel-Lolita; Humbert and Annabel as children; the mature Humbert and the child Lolita; Lolita the innocent vs. Lolita the experienced); on the fluidity of consciousness of the characters who, caught in a carousel of projected iconic scenes/ objects, search for themselves in their multiplied identities/ moods/ facets. Humbert Humbert (Stefan Iordache), very much like Nabokov's Humbert, is a master of a wonderfully poetic language, at once self-ironic, romantic, and philosophical, which he creates at will, altering the mood of those around him, audience included. Humbert's dance movements are reflective of his elusive spirit, equally tender and cruel. The live music on stage helps divulge the inner struggle the characters both elude and confront. Thus, through a subtle intricacy of poetic language, seraphic musical background, ostentatiously kitschy sets, torturous dancing, and frolicsome costumes, Catalina Buzoianu makes us see that there are after all qualitative differences between living under a political system where even the disheartening masquerade of consciousness can be enriching, and in a totalitarian state where the freedom of consciousness itself is a masquerade. Moreover, the Romanian *Lolita* succeeds in creating an evocative sense of history as a compelling arena in which different levels of consciousness are generated. This *Lolita* functions as a gauge of Nabokov's struggle with the conflict between aesthetics and politics, wherein politics appears as evidence of an interruption of life, while art appears as evidence of the continuation of life.

However, the short-lived Romanian production of *Lolita* (the theatrical seasons of 2002 and 2003) may be symptomatic of people's ability to distance themselves from issues which seem disturbing or alarming; and/or of Romanians' inertia in making the distinction (between intensified oppositions: conscience and pleasure; the law and nonconformism; masculine and feminine),

while rejecting the supposedly disquieting consequences of it.

The second Romanian appropriation of Nabokov's *Lolita* belongs to the professor, critic, and writer Mihai Zamfir (b. 1940), whose novel *Fetita/ The Little Girl* (Iasi: Polirom, 2003) is a lesson about how re-writing allows the forging of new insights into both the cultural/literary past and the cultural/ literary present. As a specialist in stylistics, Zamfir shows that originality can emerge freely, not anxiously, from the stylization of the past, from a critique of, and reference to one's predecessors. Zamfir's hypertext then focuses with equal force and unique purpose on both displacement and recuperation of meaning from the hypotext (Nabokov's *Lolita*) he both transforms and imitates. In terms of displacement of meaning, Zamfir's novel veers towards cultural exorcism, in the way it constantly activates its subversive potential to appeal to our cultural memory. In so doing, Raluca (Lolita's counterpart), a third-year student in philology at the University of Bucharest, becomes the very opposite of Lolita in her obstinate intent to take hold of her existence against all odds, as well as a desperate melancholy bordering on the tragic caused by her deep understanding of human nature. In terms of recuperation of meaning, Zamfir's novel works like a barometer whereby Nabokov's *Lolita* retrieves its ethical concern from the aesthetic one. Ioan Pavel (Humbert Humbert counterpart), the poet-narrator (now a retired librarian from The Library of the Academy), in telling his story of unwarranted love for Raluca, unleashes the narrative unconscious. By making the "narrative unconscious" conscious through the work of autobiography, Freeman explains, "there exists the opportunity to discern the relationship between those manifest narratives that are often told and those more disruptive counter-narratives that sometimes surge into reflection, infusing one's history with new meaning, complexity and depth" ("Cultural Memory," *Considering Counter-Narratives. Narrating, resisting, making sense,* Ed. Bamberg, Michael and Molly Andrews, Amsterdam/

Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004: 289-90). The manifest narratives of our recent history, in the novel, spell out what the humanist-socialist and national-communist regime of Ceausescu's epoch has signified for Romanians: Dispossession, colonization of people's minds and affect, axiological upset, brainwashing, annihilation of the elite, economic/social/political deprivations. The more disturbing counter-narratives that have yet to be incorporated into each and everyone's story concern the insidious ways of mutilation of the spirit due to the substitution of the "ethos of freedom," as a way of caring for oneself and others, for the psychology of the tyrant, who, out of insufficient care for the self, abuses others, imposing unwarranted power over them. Ioan Pavel's autobiography is then less about his *self* than it is about his/our world, his/our existence as a social and cultural subject. In *The Little Girl,* Zamfir forces the reader, first, to notice how cultural/literary texts, once woven into the fabric of memory, compel the writing subject to move beyond personal life in telling one's own story, into the shared life of culture; and next, to acknowledge that there exist even more disruptive narratives infusing one's history than one is willing to admit. By rethinking the interrelationship of history, self, cultural memory and meaning via the idea of fictional narrative/autobiography, Zamfir's novel facilitates the fuller recognition of the profound continuities between ethics and aesthetics as well as between life and literature.

The third Romanian appropriation of Nabokov as a concept, I propose, refers to Mircea Cartarescu's (b. 1956) short story "Nabokov in Brasov," from the volume *Why We Love Women* (*De ce iubim femeile,* Bucuresti: Humanitas, 2005)—a collection of stories the author has previously published in women's magazines. The claim occasioned by Cartarescu's story reiterates the claim I advanced in connection to Zamfir's novel: autobiography, fictional or not, allows the self to function as an instrument for rendering

the world rather than just being a source or a subject. It is a venture into the cultural memory of a nation whose course of history the self wittingly or unwittingly re-produces. Cartarescu then, in his allegedly autobiographical stories, concerns himself, not unlike his illustrious precursor, with articulating the complexities involved in thinking through the relationship between life and the narratives we tell about it. Cartarescu, the non-realist/thesis writer, admits, however, that life can be exceptionally generous with providing the staple of stories that not even the most imaginative writer can come up with. In the story "Nabokov in Brasov," the reflection is occasioned by the writer's accidentally learning that his former beloved, Irina, lives in Brussels as the wife of a European Parliament member. A former English teacher with a liking for (post)modernist writers such as V. Nabokov, D. H. Lawrence, R. Coover, J. L. Borges, Irina became a Securitate recruit in the '80s, and had a hand in the stifling of the Brasov workers' strike against Ceausescu's economic policies in 1987. Cartarescu's hardly subdued frustration ("... for that's how history is written," p. 36) is a combination of humanly visceral revulsion against what the Securitate came to signify for ordinary Romanians before 1989, and the naïve, illusory fate-resolution ("McFate" as Nabokov would call it) the writer imagines for such perverse entities belonging to the Securitate. Cartarescu thus confesses he has had difficulty envisaging Irina as other than "an alcoholic, haunted by an irrepressible past. A putative homeless person, like the many who stink horribly in trams..." But reality/contingency, in disregard for commonsensical judgements, imposes, as usual, its own resolutions, and "naturally, even necessarily," writes its own ending to a story, as in the case of Cartarescu's long-buried story about Irina—"a pathetic enigma of pathetic times" ("Nabokov in Brasov" 37). The narrative, or rather counter-narrative—which could have been entitled "Robert Coover burning files at Berevoiesti," or "D. H. Lawrence

stigmatizing the intellectuals" ("Nabokov in Brasov" 48-9)—is just another story about how the apocalyptically horrible, monstrous Securitate has been mutilating our lives, and how illusory the articulation of any recovery project is.

Cartarescu, in "Nabokov in Brasov," like Zamfir in *The Little Girl*, carefully creates the narrative unconscious as an implicit growing tension between what-could-have-been sort of life, as normalcy (a democratic society which cares for its members as a dedicated teacher cares for her/his students), versus what can-be-seen-and-felt around, as abnormalcy (the sordidly de-humanized outskirts of Bucharest vs. the blooming Securitate offspring). Freeman calls the same feeling "the presence of what is missing," "absence," in the way "whatever was *there* existed in relation to what was not" ("Cultural Memory" 294).

The three Romanian appropriations of Nabokov's work and genius, while addressing the contemporary anxieties related to a precarious globalization of culture, manage to double-code our understanding of the present in a memorable way: by making aesthetics meet history, and ethics meet politics, they make aesthetics meet ethics, and, in so doing, they raise pending problematic and polemical questions, many of which Nabokov also addressed. These writings, reminiscent of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003), re-enact the story of the transformative power of literature, which can, if not completely change, at least shake the most inflexible dogmas/minds.

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—Maria-Ruxanda Bontila, Galati, Romania

A SEMIPHANTOM IN A LIGHT FOREIGN SUIT: THE ORPHIC SUBTEXT IN *THE VISIT TO THE MUSEUM*

In Nabokov's *The Visit to the Museum*, the author uses the classical myth of Orpheus as a subtext for the protagonist's mission to obtain a portrait. As the quest unravels, the sinister importance of this subtext becomes more apparent as the narrator more parallels the tragic hero in his anguish. The Orphic subtext serves to underscore the destruction of the narrator's very identity caused by his exile and the disappearance of his motherland.

Nabokov explicitly cues the reader to consider the story as an Orphic tale with the appearance of a "bronze Orpheus" (Nabokov 279), just after it becomes apparent that the narrator cannot obtain the portrait. The Orphic narrator's quest to obtain the painting is "but the figment of an unstable mind" and "absolute nonsense" (275), much as Orpheus' mission to Hades is deemed impossible. It is unknown whether the painting, like Eurydice, can be both found and "ransomed" (273). After paying the custodian to enter, he finds the museum, like Hades, to be a place of "gray tints, the sleep of substance, matter dematerialized" (274) in contrast to the world outside. The custodian--who deters Nabokov's narrator from acquiring the painting–evokes Charon, the stygian boatman who does not allow Orpheus reentry to Hades after the hero's failure (Ovid 170). In this scheme, the painting, a "Portrait of a Russian Nobleman" (276), is the narrator's Eurydice. The protagonists, then, undertake their journeys for objects of desire, adoration and love. M. Godard, the museum's director, resembles a "Russian wolfhound," "licking his chops" (276), a Cerberean imagery that befits his role as the protector of the narrator's target. Godard also plays the role of Pluto as the

arbiter of the deal over the painting, parallel to Pluto's deal for Eurydice's life.

For the narrator and his friend, the painting itself, the "portrait of a Russian nobleman," is a representation of the Russia they once knew; for Orpheus, it is Eurydice whom the hero loves and misses bitterly. Although the narrator describes the portrait as "commonplace," painted in "wretched oils" with "vile conventionality" (275), it is tied to the exiled narrator's nostalgia and love for his homeland, and to the Russian aristocracy and empire such a painting romanticizes. Orpheus, in Ovid, beseeches Pluto: "I longed to be able to accept [the loss of my wife], and I do not say I have not tried: Love won" (Ovid 169). Like Nabokov's exile, Orpheus struggles with his longing for what he has lost, seeking to somehow reclaim Eurydice. In the museum, Nabokov's narrator sees "tools bound by a funereal ribbon, 'to dig in the past'" (275), hinting at the hope for resurrection and reversal of the misfortunes of history. Once he sees the painting he is convinced that this is a possibility, and "no power on earth could make [him] doubt its existence" (276). "I enjoyed the thought that the portrait existed," he says. "It is fun to be present at the coming true of a dream" (275). His assuredness that the painting–and what it represents–exists and can be reclaimed again parallels Orpheus' tale when it becomes clear that this is impossible.

After the museum director disappears, the narrator's hopes of obtaining the painting are dashed. He finds himself on the "winding, slimy edges" (279) of a river, much like Orpheus, who "wished and prayed, in vain, to cross the Styx again" (Ovid 170) but cannot. The narrator soon comes across "a bright parlor, tastefully furnished in Empire style, but not a living soul, not a living soul" (279), again expressing the wish to regain the old Russia that is now within the allegorical Hades of the museum, lifeless as the painting yet nevertheless a part of him. From his inescapable exile, lost and bewildered

the narrator eventually emerges in Soviet Russia:

> "I knew, irrevocably, where I was. Alas, it was not the Russia I remembered, but the factual Russia of today, forbidden to me, hopelessly slavish, and hopelessly my native land. A semiphantom in a light foreign suit…I had to… protect my fragile, illegal life…In order to shed all the integument of exile, I would have to tear off and destroy…everything…" (280-81)

He has both attained a return to the homeland he loves, and realized the horrible truth that it is no longer there. His fantasy of the "dream come true" is crushed by "factual Russia." There can be no return to his home, just as there can be no return to Eurydice for Orpheus, until death. Orpheus says to Pluto, "All things are destined to be yours, and though we delay a while, sooner or later, we hasten home" (Ovid 169). Thus in death, both the narrator and Orpheus can have what life has forbidden them. As a "semiphantom," not a true ghost of the museum's Chthonic world but neither wholly living because of what has been taken from him, the narrator realizes that to return home he "would have to tear off and destroy […] everything," and in essence, die.

The protagonist's mortality is earlier indicated by the curator's insistence on telling "the story of the sarcophagus" (275) that dominates the main hall of the museum. Later, the director asks him, "did you appreciate the sarcophagus?" (276). This image of both death and belief in the afterlife is important in the Orphic model, where hubris and the conviction that one can cheat death was the hero's undoing. As Plato's alternate telling of Orpheus from *Symposium* puts it:

> Orpheus, son of Oeagrus, [the Gods] sent back with failure from Hades, showing him only a wraith of the woman for

> whom he came; her real self they would not bestow, for he was accounted to have gone upon a coward's quest, too like the minstrel that he was, and to have lacked the spirit to die as Alcestis did for the sake of love, when he contrived the means of entering Hades alive." (179d)

Thus there was never hope for Orpheus' success, and his struggle was in vain. The object of his love could never be retrieved and was a mere "wraith." In order to regain Eurydice, he must die for love. In this sense, the museum director is right that "there is no such picture" (276), and the Russia that the portrait represents also no longer exists: it is a false promise, another "wraith." Seeking this past is foolish and naïve, and ultimately leads the narrator, like Orpheus, to misery.

Nabokov includes the Orphic subtext in *The Visit to the Museum* in order to explicate the exiled narrator's anguish and loss. The hopelessness of his quest to reclaim his homeland mirrors Orpheus' doomed venture, and emphasizes the experience of his isolation; even if he were able to return to Russia, it has been replaced with an alien country. He is left adrift without a home, without love, and stripped of his identity.

--Max Kaplan, Middletown, CT