

THE NABOKOVIAN

Published semi-annually
at the University of Kansas
by the Vladimir Nabokov Society

Editor: Stephen Jan Parker

The Nabokovian serves to report and stimulate Nabokov scholarship and to create a link between Nabokov scholars in the USA and abroad.

Subscriptions: individuals, \$19 per year; institutions, \$24 per year. For postage to Canada, add \$5.00; for postage to anywhere else outside the USA add \$12.00.

Back issues: individuals: \$10.00; institutions, \$15; for postage to Canada, add \$2.50; for postage anywhere else outside the USA add \$6.00. Issues #1, 5, 7, 11, 14, 17, 23-29, 32, 33 are out of print.

Checks should be made payable to the Vladimir Nabokov Society.

Address all inquiries, submission of items, and subscription requests to:

Vladimir Nabokov Society
Slavic Languages & Literatures
2134 Wescoe Hall
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66045 USA

THE NABOKOVIAN

Number 69

Fall 2012

CONTENTS

News	3
by Stephen Jan Parker	
Notes and Brief Commentaries	4
by Priscilla Meyer	
“Nabokov’s Tribute to His Father by Way of Fet’s Poetry in <i>Mary</i> ”	4
Gavriel Shapiro	
“Nabokov On Tour—Part II”	10
Samuel Schuman	
“Concerning <i>Laura</i> ’s Origins: The Case of Muhammad Al-Nefzawi’s <i>Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delights</i> ”	18
Stanislav Shvabrin	
Recent Work on Nabokov	25
Annotations to <i>Ada</i> 36: Part I, Chapter 36	29
by Brian Boyd	
2011 Nabokov Bibliography	78
by Sidney Eric Dement and Kylie Kristafer Malyszek	

NEWS

by Stephen Jan Parker

Nabokov Society News

The membership/subscription figures in 2012 are somewhat lower than a year ago. And it still remains unfortunate that the input is less than the costs of putting together and printing the editions, as well as paying the annual local taxes and costs of maintaining the Vladimir Nabokov Society. But remarkably, this year the Vladimir Nabokov Foundation contributed a significant amount in honor of Dmitri Nabokov, who had passed away, and that contribution brought financial stability to the Vladimir Nabokov Society and this publication for the current year.

But as for the future, the same membership problems are continuing, and it remains to be seen what the Society and the *Nabokovian* will do. But we do know that the *Nabokovian* and the Vladimir Nabokov Society will indeed continue to function in 2013. And for our continuity, we owe very special thanks to Ariane Csonka Comstock for her remarkable assistance in raising supporting funds. And we hope that all our current members will sign up again for the upcoming year.

And once again, as I have done for the past 33 years, I wish to express my greatest appreciation and gratitude to Ms. Paula Courtney for her remarkable on-going, essential assistance in the production of this publication.

NOTES AND BRIEF COMMENTARIES

By Priscilla Meyer

Submissions, in English, should be forwarded to Priscilla Meyer at pmeyer@wesleyan.edu. E-mail submission preferred. If using a PC, please send attachments in .doc format. 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, some slight editorial alterations may be made. References to Nabokov's English or Englished works should be made either to the first American (or British) edition or to the Vintage collected series. All Russian quotations must be transliterated and translated. Please observe the style (footnotes incorporated within the text, American punctuation, single space after periods, signature: name, place, etc.) used in this section.

NABOKOV'S TRIBUTE TO HIS FATHER BY WAY OF FET'S POETRY IN *MARY*

Alongside Pushkin and Tiutchev, Afanasy Fet (1820-1892) was among the "favorite poets" of Nabokov's father, Vladimir Dmitrievich (*Speak, Memory* 177). The senior Nabokov "had an amazing knowledge of Fet's poetry" ("izumitel'no znal Feta"; *Perepiska s sestroi* 58). V. D. Nabokov's appreciation and knowledge of Fet's poetry are manifest in his essay on the centenary of the poet's birth, which Nabokov mentions in his memoirs (see *Speak, Memory* 177). In this essay, Vladimir Dmitrievich calls Fet "the most wonderful, intimate, pure Russian lyricist whose soul and poetry are so saturated, so permeated throughout with the mysterious delight of life, whose creation from early poems to the inspired *Eventide Lights* touched only the tenderly or passionately sounding strings of

the soul, who lived his poetic life as if in some kind of *turris eburnea*." ("chudesneishim, intimnym, chistym russkim lirikom, ch'ia dusha i poeziia tak nasyschena, naskvoz' proniknuta tainstvennoi prelest'iu zhizni, ch'e tvorchestvo, ot rannikh stikhov do vdokhnovennykh 'Vechnikh Ognei,' kasalos' tol'ko nezhno ili strastno zvuchashchikh strun dushi, kto zhil svoei poeticheskoi zhizn'iu slovno v kakoi-to *turris eburnea*"; V. D. Nabokov, "Fet. [K stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia]," *Rul'*, December 5, 1920, 6).

Elena Sikorski, Nabokov's youngest sister, recalls that V. D. Nabokov's favorite poem from which he recited a few days before his death was Fet's "In the Quiet and Murk of Mysterious Night" ("V tishi i mrake tainstvennoi nochi," ca. 1864; see *Perepiska s sestroi* 48). And Nabokov reminisces that as a youngster (ca. 1914) he had a bet with his father: while he erroneously claimed that the poem "The Night Was Shining" ("Siiala noch'," 1877) was written by Alexei Apukhtin, V. D. Nabokov correctly attributed it to Fet (*ibid.* 58).

In spite of this juvenile mistake, Nabokov also became a true aficionado and connoisseur of Fet's poetry. In his poem "Mists Were Floating After Mists" ("Za tumanami plyli tumany," 1921), written on the occasion of Alexander Blok's death, the young poet describes how the soul of Fet, alongside those of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tiutchev, is greeting Blok's soul in Paradise. Nabokov calls Fet "a carmine ray in the temple," describes his shadow as clad "in the fine raiment, in red roses," and imagines how he will sing "about roses in the eternal temple" ("rumianyi luch vo khrame," "v rize tonkoi, v rozakh krasnykh," "o rozakh v vechnom khrame" (Vladimir Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii russkogo perioda v piati tomakh*, 1:449-50). He also dubs the poet "the spirit of the air, a wispy cloud, a butterfly fanning its wings" (*Verses and Versions* 300).

Nabokov greatly appreciated Fet's poetry. In his opinion, Fet's lyrics are a tuning fork, "a good way to test whether a Russian understands poetry or not by finding out whether he

appreciates Fet...." (ibid. 301). The writer elaborates on the essence of Fet's poetry as follows:

The matter-of-fact critics who cursed Fet because he did not describe the sufferings of the Russian peasant in blunt manly measures, those critics were particularly maddened by Fet's verse slipping as it were between their fingers, verse which became intangible when placed in a coarse medium of their own world, for in their world mental curves were as illegal as the roundness of the world was in the days of the flat-footed logicians who were firmly planted on a flat beach, where every grain of sand voiced, unheeded, the claim of its circular shape. A poem by Fet seemed to hem meaningless, because for them the meaning of things was limited by the square angles of their immediate use—city squares where crowds gather with square flags, square shoes, square prison cells, square tombstones. But Fet looped his loop and was suddenly somewhere in the milky way just when he was expected to come home with some reasonable explanation of his behavior. (ibid. 301)

Similarly to his father, Nabokov perceived Fet as "a pure lyricist." To Nabokov's mind, Fet's oeuvre is the quintessence of poetry and a litmus test of poetic sensibility.

In *The Gift*, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev asserts that, whatever Fet's drawbacks may be, he should be forgiven for lines such as "rang out in the darkening meadow," "dew-tears of rapture shed the night," and those about "the wing-fanning, 'breathing' butterfly" (*Gift* 73). And it is telling that more than fifty years after the bet with his father, Nabokov calls the poem "The Night Was Shining" "glorious" and provides an English translation of its first stanza (*Ada* 436). Nabokov's fondness and deep knowledge of Fet's poetry are evidenced by its recurrent mention not only in his verse and prose but also in his lectures and correspondence, as well as by his translation of Fet's

poetry into English (See Hannah Green, "Mister Nabokov," in *Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute*, 39-40; *NWL* 103-4; Vladimir Nabokov, trans., "Three Poems by Fet," *The Russian Review* 3, no. 1 [Autumn 1943]: 31-33).

Nabokov's tribute to his father by way of Fet manifests itself in Ganin's recollection of his romance with Mary. In particular, Nabokov recounts how the novel's protagonist, sitting "on the window ledge of that lugubrious lavatory" was longing for Mary, while waiting "for a nightingale to start trilling in the poplars as in a poem by Fet" (*Mary* 46). Curiously, "that moment Ganin now rightly regarded as the highest and most important point in his whole life" (ibid. 46-47). Here Nabokov alludes to Fet's most famous poems—"Whispers, timid respiration, trills of nightingale" ("Shepot, robkoe dykhan'e, treli solov'ia," 1850), which the writer later cites in *The Gift* (*Gift* 240), and "The Nightingale and the Rose" ("Solovei i roza," 1847). The former became one of the most popular romances, being set to music by a number of composers, including Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1897), Mily Balakirev (1904), and Nikolai Medtner (1911); the latter was considered the hallmark of Fet's lyrics, so much so that the poet was habitually referred to by his contemporaries as "the singer of the nightingale and the rose" (cf. P. P. Pertsov, *Literaturnye vospominaniia. 1890—1902 gg.* [Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002], 97-98).

As Nora Buhks has astutely noted, the reference to "The Nightingale and the Rose" suggests the unlikelihood of a Berlin encounter between Ganin and Mary (Nora Buhks, *Eshafot v khrystal'nom dvortse*, 7-15). In addition, it could be argued that while Mary's image may be connected to the obliterated Russia (cf. *Mary* 69), Ganin's persona appears to bifurcate into associations with the author and his father. The former association is manifest by way of the protagonist's physical characteristics (handsome looks and athletic attributes), his artistic sensibilities and equally young age as well as the description of his romance with Mary, modeled on the writer's

own romance with Valentina Shul'gin. The latter association may be perceived through Ganin's pre-exile actions and through his name: like Nabokov senior, Ganin actively participated in the struggle against the Bolsheviks, albeit not politically but militarily. The protagonist's name and patronymic, **Lev Glebovich**, "a name like that's enough to twist your tongue off" (ibid. 1), correspond to Nabokov senior's no less tongue twisting, **Vladimir Dmitrievich**. The surname Ganin evidently stems from the verb "gonit'" or "ganit'." According to Vladimir Dal', it means "to set or to offer a riddle" ("zagadyvat'") (V. I. Dal', *Tolkovyi slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, 4 vols. [St. Petersburg Moscow: Izdanie M. O. Vol'fa, 1882; rept. 1980], 1: 373-74). On the one hand, this surname, then, adds to the mysteriousness of the character, and on the other, deftly alludes to Nabokov's clandestine tribute to his father.

Nabokov subtly pays the tribute by means of an allusion to Fet's poetry that his father surveys in his centenary essay. In this essay, the very first two quotations, fittingly but not surprisingly, come from the two aforementioned poems—"Whispers, timid respiration, trills of the nightingale" and "The Nightingale and the Rose." Most importantly, V. D. Nabokov's essay may be perceived, to a great extent, as the life guide to both the novel's protagonist and its author. Ganin makes the shift in accordance with the suggestion offered by Nabokov senior: he leaves behind the bloody violence of the Civil War, the boredom and dreariness of his Berlin émigré existence, and through the ennobling remembrances of the romance with Mary, of which Fet's poetry is an essential part, aspires to open a new chapter in his life. In his centenary essay, Vladimir Dmitrievich queries: "Who had the strength for a transition, from the daily unfolding pictures of reality—now bloody, now vulgar and filthy—to these lofty summits [...]?" ("Komu byl pod silu perekhod ot ezhdnevno razvertyvaiushchikhsia kartin deistvitel'nosti—to krovavykh, to poshlykh i griaznykh—k etim vysochaishim vershinam [...]?»; V. D. Nabokov, "Fet"). As an answer, Nabokov senior offers

his readers a refuge and brief respite from cruel existence by advising them to plunge into the depths of Fet's poetry: "But try to make this transition, and if you still have the books of *Eventide Lights*, or if Fet resounds in your memory, submit yourself to his magic power and you will be momentarily happy" ("No poprobuite sdelat' etot perekhod, i esli u vas sokhranilis' knizhki 'Vechernikh Ognei,' ili esli v pamiati vashei zvuchit Fet,—otdaites' ego volshebnoi vlasti—i vy na mig budete schastlivy"; ibid.).

As though following V. D. Nabokov's advice, Ganin submits himself to the power of his recollections, permeated with Fet's poetry, and experiences momentary happiness (cf. *Mary* 43 and 93). (As we recall, the working title of *Mary* was *Happiness*; see Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 241). In *Mary*, Nabokov shows the beneficence of his father's advice: this momentary happiness, greatly enhanced by Fet's poetry, not only refreshes Ganin but also fosters hope and perseverance, allowing him to start over, to strive for a new beginning.

Thus while in the poem "Mother" ("Mat'," 1925) Nabokov covertly expressed his inconsolable grief over the tragic death of his father (see Gavriel Shapiro, "Pictorial Origins of Three Biblical Poems by Vladimir Nabokov," *Slavic Almanac* 15, no. 1 [2009]: 53), in his first novel, written about the same time, he employs his father's recipe for overcoming grief and despondency: to find comfort in the poetry of Fet, and broader still, to find comfort in the magic of verbal creation. This way, Nabokov pays an everlasting tribute to his father's memory by taking his advice as the guiding principle for his own entire life.

—Gavriel Shapiro, Ithaca, New York

NABOKOV ON TOUR – PART II

This is the second of three compilations of comments upon and reactions to Nabokov's lecture and reading tour of seven Southern and Midwestern colleges in 1942, sponsored by the Institute of International Education and recorded in Boyd's *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* and in VN's letters to Vera printed in "The Russian Professor" in *The New Yorker* (June 13 and 20, 2011). In Part I (*The Nabokovian*, Number 68, Spring 2012, pp. 43-52) I described the first two stops on the tour, Coker College in South Carolina and Spelman in Georgia, both women's schools. Here I consider materials from student and community sources covering the next two legs of his journey.

I.

The third stop on the Southern leg of Nabokov's tour was Georgia State Woman's College (also the third women's college VN visited) in Valdosta, GA. GSWC evolved from South Georgia State Normal College, and evolved into today's Valdosta State University, a co-ed 13,000 student institution within the University System of Georgia. There is some confusion regarding the name of the institution in 1942, but the current website records it as above. Valdosta is just north of the Florida state line, roughly equidistant from Tallahassee and Jacksonville. Nabokov found it "very Southern." It appears that GSWC had a rather energetic public relations department in the 1940's, and an equally vigorous archival department today, headed by Deborah S. Davis, since the institution has an unusual wealth of valuable information about VN's visit, which began on October 13.

Prior to his arrival, Nabokov's forthcoming visit was previewed in the October 2 edition of the student newspaper, the *Campus Canopy*, which identified VN as a visiting professor

at Harvard University. "Some of his lecture subjects are: A Century of Exile, The Strange Fate of Russian [sic] Literature, The Artist and Common Sense, and The Art of Writing. Also among his subjects are talks on the four greatest Russian writers of the past: Preshkin [sic], Lermontov, Gogol [sic] and Tolstoy [sic]." VN is "now acclaimed by many as the greatest Russian novelist writing today and contains promise of even greater achievement." One of his novels is "Machenka." A second preview article, also in the campus paper, describes him as a Russian author and lecturer, and the first of several speakers coming to Valdosta through the Institute of International Education. This article contains more amusing misprints, not atypical of student publications: VN attended the "Tinishev" School. One paragraph reads: "The following fifteen years fere [sic] spent in Berlin teaching languages to private pupils. Some eight-five [sic] years passed, but this work came to an end in 1937 when he found it necessary to leave Germany." The next paragraph mentions "Czechoslovakia." We then discover that he "translated 'Alice in Wonderland,' by Rupert Brooks" and that he published "two collelctions [sic] of short stories." A final, errorless, preview article from October 12 adds that "Valdostans are cordially invited to attend the lecture on Wednesday morning and the forums..." Student newspapers are an easy target to mock, but they often make up in sincerity for what they lack in accuracy.

Meanwhile, an article in an unidentified newspaper (perhaps *The Atlanta Constitution* which covered other aspects of Nabokov's visit) reports that GSWC president Frank R. Reade announced Nabokov will be coming to GSWC at the same time as duo-pianists Mario Braggiotti and Jacques Fray. This piece correctly identifies those four great Russian writers as "Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, and Tolstoy."

An October 14 article initiates a series of misspellings of "Nabokov" as "Nobokov" and reports again the speech on The Artist and Common Sense, a guest appearance at the Rotary

Club and a dinner given by the AAUP. It also notes a scheduled forum with students and that "he will be guest speaker at a meeting of the Readers Forum." A more flamboyant spelling error is found in the headline of the October 15 piece in *The Valdosta Times*: "Professor Nabovok, Russian Lecturer, Guest Speaker at Wymodausis Club." The report states that "Mrs. John Odum graciously introduced the speaker, Prof. Nobovok who read a group of poems from Russian authors of the last century, which he had translated into English. He closed by reading two of his own poems. His interpretation of these poems delighted the audience." VN was less delighted: in his letter to Vera, he reports that "at four o'clock [I] was delivered to a very funny and very vulgar ladies' club, where I read several verse translations."

Also on October 15 there is a lengthy report of the lecture on common sense headlined "GSWC Students Enjoy Speech - Russian Lecturer Brings Highly Entertaining Message on Artist And Common Sense to College." VN had a "delightfully whimsical manner" and students, faculty and townspeople's "imagination were sharpened and refreshed."

Reporting on the visit, the campus newspaper headlined "Versatile Mr. Nabokov Speaks of Writing and Science and Politics," in an October 16 piece. It says VN "first claimed the attention of G.S. W.C students with his brilliant metaphors [sic] in a speech at the assembly hour," that he has spoken to several groups on campus, and that he also addressed a meeting of the Math-Science club, where he is quoted: "Entomology is a hobby of mine," he told students." An undated article describes a reception for both the dual pianists and "Mr. Vladimir Nobokov" held on campus.

A report in the student newspaper of October 16 is effusive:

A visitor on the G.S.W.C campus yesterday afternoon would have noticed the group of students gathered around

a tall, animated young man on the lawn of Senior Hall. Quite a usual sight, one would think at first glance - but on looking a second time one would see that the students were listening and speaking with uncommon interest, for at the center of the group was Vladimir Nabokov, the genial Russian author who in his three days at G.S.W.C. has been both inspiration and delight to all who have heard him.... [He has] been in constant demand for almost every club at the college as well as in Valdosta. And generously, untiringly, and with the happy spontaneousness [!] which never fails to leave his audience refreshed, he has granted the many requests of students and townspeople....[He has] spent several of his free hours in the parks and fields in and around Valdosta collecting insects common to south Georgia....Mr. Nabokov is considered to be the greatest Russian author writing today.

Another newspaper report of October 17 covers Nabokov's appearance at the Readers Forum at the Daniel Ashley hotel. Here, VN was introduced by Dr. Frank Reade, president of GSWC, in "his usual witty manner. He said that 'people usually look like what they are, but our guest did not have a long beard or long hair, nor did he wear high boots, but nevertheless, he is still a Russian.'" The article gushes:

To say that Professor Nobovok charmed his audience, would be stating it mildly. He held them spellbound, as he spoke of the famous Russian poet, Pushkin, writer of the eighteenth century. He gave a colorful and vivid account of the life of the great poet, with such a wonderful flow of words, as only an author, writer of plays and poet, as he himself is, could muster to his command....On a mere technicality, he [Pushkin] was sentenced to fight a duel in which he was killed. Professor Nobokov, who has written several plays, gave a most dramatic and feeling description of the duel,

climaxing his biography of the poet by reading the poem, Mozart and Salieri, which the speaker had translated into English, telling of the poisoning of the great musician Mozart by his friend, Salieri.

An October 19 short article in *The Constitution* briefly describes Nabokov ("internationally known Russian writer, translator and lecturer") as conducting a series of lectures and forums. It notes "The Artist and Common Sense" as the subject of his main address to students and also reports that "he was guest speaker at a dinner given by the American Association of University Professors and also addressed the Valdosta Rotary club at their last meeting." The article concludes: "Mr. Nabokov expects to visit the Okefenokee Swamp before going to Suwanee College in Tennessee..."

Nabokov obviously made a lasting impression at GSWC. A year-end summary article in the April 12, 1943 *Campus Canopy* ("World Famous Artists Brought to Students on Campus") cites his visit, and a photo of him, apparently studying a collection of mounted butterflies and surrounded by three intent admirers, appears in the *Pinecone* yearbook of 1943 (p. 72). This is, perhaps, the same tray which appears in a photo in Boyd's *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* with the caption "Nabokov on his lecture tour, October 1942, showing a tray of mounted butterflies to President Frank Reade of Georgia State College for Women, Valdosta. Reade rates a mention by name in *Pnin*" (p. 226).

The GSWC archives contain four letters of some interest to Nabokovians. The first is from President Reade to Nabokov, of October 20. He jocularly addresses VN as "McNab." He discusses some of the photos taken during VN's visit, and notes that

All of us here, as you undoubtedly gathered, were delighted that you could come to see us and that you could stay on

for several days. You must come again, whenever you can, and for as long as can....Perhaps you can get down to our Virginia mountains next summer and do some collecting.

President Reade identifies a blond girl in a photo with VN and suggests naming a butterfly for her!

Four days later, President Reade writes to Vera, back at Craigie Circle in Cambridge: "May I take the liberty of telling you that everyone here thinks you have a most charming husband! When he gets back home, you must persuade him to pay us another visit this spring, and to bring you with him."

Nabokov writes warmly to President Reade later that year. He addresses the president as "Dear Reade" and informs him of his appointment at Cornell. He adds, "If you plan more travelling during this year, why not plan a grand tour of New York State leading right through this ancient historical center? You would enjoy its castles and cathedrals, and we would enjoy your company." Nabokov signed the letter and added hand-drawn little butterfly. Then, in an appended hand-written note, he adds: "Yes *diana* is a wonderful butterfly – one of the most remarkable representatives of the nearctic fauna – a relic from a glorious past, found only in the S. E. states, which are not rich in endemic butterflies."

Finally, on a more business-like note, President Reade wrote VN in December, reporting that his treasurer tells him Nabokov never cashed the check for \$80 given him several weeks earlier. He reiterates his invitation to return: "we are all hoping that you can pay us a little visit sometime in the near future and you must try to bring your wife with you."

The Nabokov visit to Valdosta was noted in the *Valdosta Times* a quarter century later in a brief "25 Years Ago Today" piece: "Vladimir Nabokov, internationally known Russian author, was spending a few days at Georgia State Woman's College."

Then, in 1975, a flurry of articles recalled Nabokov's visit. Mrs. Jean Reade, the widow of President Reade (who died in

1957) had purchased the March 17 issue of *People Weekly*, which featured her favorite actor, Alan Alda on the cover. Inside was an article entitled "An Old Magician Named Nabokov Writes and Lives in Splendid Exile" (pp. 60 ff). The article reminded Mrs. Reade of VN's visit, according to a press release issued by the college entitled "Nabokov's Butterfly Sketch Turns Her Calendar to '42." Mrs. Reade recollected that VN made for her a sketch of a butterfly, and signed it. That sketch was done on letterhead from the Roosevelt Restaurant in Valdosta. The drawing is about 1 ½ inches high by 2 ¼ inches wide. Beneath it, VN has written "Oeneis incognita Nabokov 18-X-42 Valdosta del. Vladimir Nabokov." The college press release recounts other stories of VN's butterfly hunting while in Valdosta, and also mentions a snapshot of VN and Dr. Reade, probably the one cited above which appears in Boyd's biography. The college release was picked up by a number of regional newspapers, including *The Florida Times-Union* (Jacksonville, April 7, 1975, p. B-1), *The Spectator* (a renamed campus newspaper from Valdosta State, April 16, 1975, p. 3), the *Savannah Morning News* (April 11, 1975, p. 4) and in a column called "Pepper Mill" from the *Valdosta Times* (?).

It seems clear that Nabokov's visit to Georgia State Woman's College in Valdosta, like his earlier stop at Spelman, made a substantial impact on the campus. It is equally clear from the reactions of students and others there that he was more than successful in working to be charming. The somewhat distant, aloof VN of fatter, more famous days was obviously not in evidence during these appearances. Indeed, it seems somewhat surprising how warmly undergraduate students responded to him, and how accessible and winning he was with them.

II.

Boyd reports that after his stay in Valdosta, Nabokov was tired, and eager to return to Vera and Cambridge. He had,

however, one more stop on his southern tour, at Sewanee, Tennessee at the University of the South (a men's college, after the three women's institutions). On the road between Valdosta and Sewanee, he paused briefly again in Atlanta and re-visited Florence Reade of Spelman. Only two articles have surfaced concerning VN's visit to Sewanee, both from *The Sewanee Purple*, the college newspaper. (My thanks to Annie Armour at The University of the South for locating these items.) On October 16, the paper previewed "Russian Lecturer, Author To Speak at University Oct. 21." It recounts the standard biographical facts (including the "Tenishew" school), and concludes that "Mr. Nabokov, under his pen name of "Sirin," is considered the greatest Russian novelist writing today, and contains infinite promise of even greater achievements." This is, as far as I can reconstruct, one of the relatively few citations of "Sirin" in the publicity surrounding the tour.

On October 23, the same newspaper reports on VN's talk: "Nabokov Lectures at Sewanee: Russian Novelist speaks on 'The Creative Mind and Common Sense'." The article reports, in some detail, Nabokov's speech, with several direct quotations familiar from the essay as published in *Lectures on Literature*. For example "The best place for the creative writer... is the much abused ivory tower, provided he has a telephone, an elevator and plenty of gadgets. Before we ascend this ivory tower we must kill some elephants, particularly one that is a cross between an elephant and a horse, his name is 'Commonsense'." The report concludes, as does the piece in the *Lectures*, "... and firmly push out of the house as we go the monster of grim commonsense that is lumbering up the steps to whine that the book is not for the general public, that the book will never—And right then, just before it blurts out the word s, e, double l, false commonsense must be shot dead." Curiously, this article consists entirely of the summary of Nabokov's talk: no evaluative or descriptive or other supplementary material whatsoever is included. The same issue of the student paper notes, in the same tone, that Mr. Allen Tate is currently making his home adjacent to the University.

It is worth noting that Nabokov's reception appears to have been far more rousing positive at the three women's colleges than at the University of the South, where, judging by the rather cool and somewhat perfunctory tone of the student newspaper articles, he was but one in a parade of distinguished visitors.

Following his visit to Sewanee, Nabokov returned briefly to Massachusetts. A second round of lectures and readings began a few weeks later, in early November, 1942, focusing on the Midwest. A report on that phase of his travels is forthcoming in a future issue of *The Nabokovian*.

Errata from Part I: The name of "Spelman" college appears sometimes as "Spellman." In one place, the location of that institution is identified as "TN" rather than "GA."

--Samuel Schuman, Asheville, NC

CONCERNING LAURA'S ORIGINS:
THE CASE OF MUHAMMAD IBN MUHAMMAD
AL-NEFZAWI'S *PERFUMED GARDEN OF SENSUAL
DELIGHTS*

Owing to its fragmentary state, *The Original of Laura* stands a good chance of remaining Nabokov's most mysterious work. The most tantalizing of its riddles are not likely to be solved, the trajectories of its developing, interconnected plotlines may not be computed with any degree of certainty; all the more reason to chart whatever information can be deduced from this text with as much precision as possible.

"Slick, but true," as Nabokov might have preceded the following observation: *The Original of Laura* is the swansong of his celebrated allusiveness. Like any mature Nabokovian work, *Laura* is both referential and self-referential; like in any other mature work, any given instance of its referentiality

is based on and triggered by an association springing from a specific point of departure. This quickly became apparent in the final round of the preparation of *The Original of Laura*'s manuscript for publication. To cite but one example: in the Sutton College fragment, the summary of Flora's Russian literature test culminates in an abbreviated reference to Tolstoy's "Death of Ivan Ilyich" (see p. 93 in Vladimir Nabokov, *The Original of Laura*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). What is misleadingly labeled "a banal bouquet of probabilities" (see p. 91, *ibid.*) by this fragment's narrator proves to be hiding a carefully planted reference to a by no means accidental literary subtext that, as Nabokov's lectures on Russian literature demonstrate, had been the focus of his contemplation. Obvious as it may seem now with the added benefit of a helpful footnote, this reference was not so easy to establish at first; a realization that Nabokov's own contemplation of death as the subject of an artistic work might be referring to what was his literary precedent of choice in this thematic vein had to be matched with a knowledge of Nabokov's handwriting, since his "I-s" can be mistaken for "L-s" (in a preliminary transcript this abbreviated reference to "[van]. I[lyich]" had been transcribed as "L.L."). In his lecture on Tolstoy's novella Nabokov resorts to a pun in interpreting the significance of Tolstoy's protagonist's patronymic as a *nomen omen*: "...Ilyich is pronounced Ill-Itch – the ills and itches of mortal life" (see Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, New York, 1981, p. 237); this same pun, the reader of *The Original of Laura* realizes, is revisited on the second index card of the fragment entitled "Chapter Five," which introduces "the Polish artist Rawitch, pronounced by some Raw Itch, by him Rah Witch" (*The Original of Laura*, p. 109; see also Philip Wild's reference to "the painter Rawitch, a rejected admirer of my wife, of whom he did an exquisite oil a few years ago" [p. 219]). A game of world golf is well underway; the implicit invitation to juxtapose *The Original of Laura* with what Nabokov calls "the philosophy of the story

‘The Death of Ivan Ilyich’” can hardly be ignored.

Given the prominence Nabokov affords Tolstoy (not to mention the thematic similarity between the two texts discussed here), the presence of “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” on the index cards carrying the unfinished story of Laura’s transmutations is hardly surprising. Numerous additional references seem to follow a far less straightforward course. The one introduced below, however, has the potential of providing more information on Nabokov’s playful use of yet another of his numerous, if by no means countless, literary parallels.

As Philip Wild’s manuscript (see p. 193) turns to an account of his conjugal travails, the first-person narrative of the fragment is abruptly abandoned in favor of the third-person mode of storytelling. By this point Wild’s obesity – this “enormously fat creature’s” “unattractive exterior” – has been stressed on more than one occasion; Wild’s corpulence is offset by his wife’s frailty. The fragment cited below develops this motif still further:

The only way he could possess her was in the most [] position of copulation: he reclining on cushions: she sitting in the fauteuil of his flesh with back to him. The procedure – a few bounces over very small humps – meant nothing to her [.] She looked at the snow-scape on the footboard of the bed – at the [curtains]; and he holding her in front of him like a child being given a sleighride down a

<index card break>

short slope by a kind stranger, he saw her back, her hip[s] between his hands.

Like toads and tortoises neither saw each other’s faces

See animaux

(*The Original of Laura*, pp. 197, 199)

The elaborateness of this description is sufficiently remarkable to suggest that this shift in the mode of narration is not gratuitous, that it might signal the presence of another parallel. It may be the case that this is an echo of a passage from a medieval Arabic sex manual *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delights* attributed to Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Nefzawi (or Nafzawi, 15 c. A.D.). Working from a French translation printed in 1885, the famous Sir Richard Burton, whose relevance to Nabokov has been discussed in this publication and elsewhere, published his English version of *The Perfumed Garden* in 1886.

The above- cited fragment from *The Original of Laura* resembles a passage from a chapter entitled “Concerning Everything Favourable to the Act of Coition,” which, among many sundry details pertaining to its subject, treats the “coition between two persons of different conformation” in the following terms:

In the cases of the man being obese, with a very pronounced rotundity of stomach, and the woman being thin, the best course to follow is to let the woman take the active part. To this end, the man lies down on his back with his thighs close together, and the woman lowers herself upon his member, astride of him; she rests her hands upon the bed, and he seizes her arms with his hands. If she knows how to move, she can thus, in turn, rise and sink upon his member; if she is not adroit enough for that movement, the man imparts a movement to her buttocks by the play of one his thighs behind them. But if the man assumes this position, it may sometimes become prejudicial to him, inasmuch as some of the female sperm may penetrate into his urethra, and grave malady may ensue therefrom. [FOOTNOTE: “This is a scientific error due to the beliefs of the period during which the work was written. See my remarks on the same subject in a footnote above, on page 129. (A.H.W.)”] It may also happen – and this is just as bad – that the man’s sperm cannot pass out,

and returns to the urethra.

(see *The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi*.
Translated by Sir Richard Burton and Edited with an
Introduction and
additional Notes by Allan Hull Walton. New York,
Gramercy Publishing Company, 1964, p. 142)

How can we be certain that this close, but hardly exact correlation between *The Original of Laura* and *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delights* represents a reference intended by Nabokov? *Ada* may be of help. Chapter 2, Part Two, offers the following mentions of both Nefzawi and Sir Richard in its summary of the meager critical reception of *Letters from Terra*:

The only other compliment was paid to poor Voltemand in a little Manhattan magazine (*The Village Eyebrow*) by the poet Max Mispel (another botanical name – “medlar” in English), member of the German Department at Goluba University. Herr Mispel, who liked to air his authors, discerned in *Letters from Terra* the influence of Osberg (Spanish writer of pretentious fairy tales and mystico-allegoric anecdotes, highly esteemed by short-shift thesialists) as well as that of an obscene ancient Arab, expounder of anagrammatic dreams, Ben Sirine, thus transliterated by Captain de Roux, according to Burton in his adaptation of Nefzawi’s treatise on the best method of mating with obese or hunchbacked females (*The Perfumed Garden*, Panther edition, p. 187, a copy given to ninety-three-year-old Baron Van Veen by his ribald physician Professor Lagosse). His critique ended as follows: “If Mr Voltemand (or Voltimand or Mandalatov) is a psychiatrist, as I think he might be, then I pity his patients, while admiring his talent.”

(Vladimir Nabokov, *Novels 1969-1974*,
The Library of America, 1996, pp. 274-275)

In this hilarious passage Nabokov supplies those wishing to trace this parallel to its point of origin with just about every detail needed. What seems to be the only missing link is to be found in the Vladimir Nabokov Archive, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, where the writer’s personal copy of *The Perfumed Garden* is preserved. Not surprisingly, Nabokov owned and read a contemporary prefaced and annotated Old-World reissue of Burton’s translation, which happens to be the book alluded to in *Ada: The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi*. With an Introduction by Allan Hull Walton. A Panther Book. London, Panther Editions, 1966. Nabokov’s softbound, compact copy of Nefzawi’s *Garden* bears no traces of excessive use; a marginal pencil mark (“X”) on p. 187, however, unambiguously signals the writer’s interest in the paragraph cited above from an American edition of the treatise identical to his 1966 London edition in every respect but pagination.

It is easy to ascertain that the Antiterranean version of the 1966 Panther book clearly represents something of a crooked-mirror image of the paragraph found on p. 187 in Nabokov’s very real copy of Nefzawi’s *Garden*. In *The Original of Laura* this image is revisited and developed; it may well be that the grotesque likening of the unhappy couple’s joyless intercourse with that of “toads and tortoises” (along with the word “animaux” following this reptilian simile), was likewise suggested by *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delights*, which apart from such chapters as “The Sundry Names Given to the Sexual Parts of Man,” “Sundry Names Given to the Sexual Organs of Women,” and “On the Deceits and Treacheries of Women,” features a short chapter entitled “Concerning the Organs of Generation of Animals.” The fact that it is in French raises the possibility of Nabokov’s acquaintance with the French translation of the treatise that was the source of Burton’s English translation, but this, of course, is only a guess.

In *The Original of Laura* sensuality and corporeality are

counterbalanced by this text's vision of mortality as conjured up by Wild's literal, not metaphorical, self-effacement. Burton's translation of Nefzawi's *Garden of Sensual Delights* seems to have been of good service to Nabokov as he conducted a final survey of the garden of his own creation.

– Stanislav Shvabrin, Princeton, NJ

Recent Work on Nabokov

1) Thomas Karshan, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

In a speech given in December 1925, Vladimir Nabokov declared that “everything in the world plays,” including “love, nature, the arts, and domestic puns.” All of Nabokov’s novels contain scenes of games: chess, scrabble, cards, football, croquet, tennis, and boxing, the play of light and the play of thought, the play of language, of forms, and of ideas, children’s games, cruel games of exploitation, and erotic play.

Play is Nabokov’s signature theme, and that Nabokov’s novels form one of the most sophisticated treatments of play ever achieved. He traces the idea of art as play back to German aesthetics, and shows how Nabokov’s aesthetic outlook was formed by various Russian émigré writers who espoused those aesthetics. Nabokov’s exploration of play as subject and style is traced through his whole oeuvre, outlining the relation of play to other important themes such as faith, make-believe, violence, freedom, order, work, Marxism, desire, childhood, art, and scholarship. The book demonstrates a series of new literary sources, contexts, and parallels for Nabokov’s writing, in writers as diverse as Kant, Schiller, Nietzsche, Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Bely, the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*, Pope, and the humanist tradition of the literary game.

Drawing in detail on Nabokov’s untranslated early essays and poems, and on highly restricted archival material, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play* provides a complete reading of Nabokov’s oeuvre.

2) Vladimir Nabokov, *Collected Poems*, edited with an

introduction and notes by Thomas Karshan (London: Penguin, 2012); same as *Selected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

This volume offers all the poems in the earlier *Poems and Problems*, as well as the nine poems in English which did not appear in that edition, and also contains many poems newly translated by Dmitri Nabokov, including Nabokov's earliest known extant work, "Music", his novella-length *University Poem*, and many more. It also contains a 10,000 word introduction to the poems by Thomas Karshan and full bibliographical notes.

3) Vladimir Nabokov, *The Tragedy of Mister Morn*, translated by Thomas Karshan and Anastasia Tolstoy, with an introduction by Thomas Karshan (London: Penguin, 2012).

This volume offers the first translation into English of Nabokov's first major work, his Shakespearean verse-play *The Tragedy of Mister Morn* (1923-4). The play is Nabokov's major reflection on Russian Revolution and on various political-philosophical themes arising from it; it also inaugurates some of Nabokov's fundamental themes of happiness, make-believe, desire and deception, and is the template for later works, especially *Pale Fire*. The translation is in a loose five-stress line and is faithful to the original Russian.

4) Vladimir Nabokov. "Breitensträter - Paolino", translated by Thomas Karshan and Anastasia Tolstoy, with an introduction by Thomas Karshan. *Times Literary Supplement* (August 3, 2012).

A translation of Nabokov's December 1925 essay "Breitensträter - Paolino", which is mostly about boxing, but which begins with a rapturous claim that "Everything in the world plays," which can be read as the young Nabokov's artistic manifesto.

Talks to be presented at AATSEEL, Boston, January 3-6

The two talks are sections of a co-authored article, "Vladimir Nabokov and Virginia Woolf," forthcoming in *Comparative Literature Studies* (August 2013).

5 "Nabokov and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*," Priscilla Meyer, Wesleyan University

Nabokov called Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* "poshlost'," but nonetheless used her novel as a source for his novels *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Pale Fire*. In the first, Nabokov parodies Orlando's poem, "The Oak Tree," in *Quercus*, the novel Cincinnatus is brought from the prison library. The parody is consistent with his pronouncement, mocking the poem's allegedly clichéd recapitulation of history, and is close enough in time and spirit for the parody to be identifiable. In *Pale Fire*, however, Nabokov joins Kinbote in reproducing Woolf's project of recapitulating a large historical period cast in relation to the author him/herself, but without any visible acknowledgment of relationship. Furthermore, Nabokov employs the same device that Woolf playfully lifts from Pope's *Dunciad*: the comic index, which refers equally to historical figures and details from the author's private life. Is this a case of cryptomnesia, in which Nabokov has internalized Woolf's method from 1928 in his 1962 novel? Or of an unacknowledged borrowing? Or is the mad homosexual Kinbote intended as a mirror image of Woolf?

6) "Mrs Dalloway and *The Defense*," Rachel Trousdale, Agnes Scott College

Despite his claim not to admire her, Vladimir Nabokov adapts the fate of one of Virginia Woolf's characters in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) for his own treatment of madness and obsession in *The*

Defense (1929). Woolf's Septimus and Nabokov's Luzhin both commit suicide by jumping from the windows of their apartments. Each suicide is motivated by a desire to escape the imposition of a stifling conformity. Both men have loving wives who understand their decisions, and both, while not artists themselves, become figures for the artist's predicament. For Nabokov, Woolf's novel provides a model of how the personal scale of individual madness is both connected to and quite separate from the political. Tracing Luzhin to Septimus reveals the hidden presence of World War I in *The Defense*, and helps explain Nabokov's elision of it: for Nabokov, as for Woolf, the goal of fiction is to rescue subjective personal experience from erroneous definitions of "human nature."

7) Leona Toker, "Minds Meeting: Bergson, Joyce, Nabokov, and the Aesthetics of the Subliminal." In *Understanding Bergson / Understanding Modernism*, ed. Paul Ardoin, S. E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 194–212.

The paper is devoted to several narrative techniques in Joyce and Nabokov, techniques that can be accounted for by the thoughts and attitudes that these writers shared with Henri Bergson or by Bergsonian ideas from which they occasionally swerved. Bergson's direct philosophical formulations of such thoughts and attitudes can thus be read as indirect commentary on the two writers' poetics. The relationship discussed is a matter of recognized kinship, a meeting of minds, rather than of influence.

Annotations to *Ada*, 36: Part 1 Chapter 36 Brian Boyd

Forenote

On Van's return to Ardis in 1888 he has been frustrated at having to see Ada in the company of others, at the unexpected party winding down as he arrives, or around the swimming pool, or when he and Ada try to avoid Lucette's prying eyes. After Pt 1. Ch 35, where the passionate siblings attain the seclusion of an island on the Ladore, and Van can inspect Ada in the present overlaid with his recollections of her in the past, Pt. 1 Ch. 36 now offers a pause in their lovemaking, a break from their focus only on each other, in the last sustained glimpse of Van and Ada with Lucette at Ardis.

Where other Ardis the Second chapters have focused on the present and the past, this, although it also glances back at Flavita games in their previous summer together, records games in the present, said to help Van in "catching sight of the lining of time" in "portents and prophecies" (227), and therefore, since his hope is "not quite unfulfilled," apparently foreshadowing the future. That poses a riddle for the first-time reader or even a first-time rereader: what can one see, what can Van in retrospect see, in the words in their Scrabble games that signals future events?

The juxtaposition of Van, Ada and Lucette once again highlights the vast difference between brilliant Ada and merely bright Lucette. Comfortably quadrilingual Lucette may be, but she is four years younger than her sister and hopelessly outclassed by her sister's "acumen, foresight" and "phenomenal luck" (224-25) at Scrabble. Even Van—although he at least outclasses Ada to the same degree on the chessboard—finds himself far behind his love on the Scrabble board. In comparison with their exceptional gifts and precocity, Lucette seems ordinary and a child, limitations both elder siblings are ready to reinforce, Ada at the moment and Van in narrative retrospect. As the end of