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# Vladimir Nabokov and the Russian Poets

## (From the book *Visiting Nabokov*)

As a prose writer, Nabokov was always far easier on poets than on writers. "My personal impression is that despite political hardships, the best poetry (and the worst prose) produced in Europe over the past twenty years has been written in Russian," he said in 1941.[1] [Mikhail] Zoshchenko, [Ilya] Ilf and [Evgeny] Petrov, and Iurii Olesha did win his praise for their comic gifts, but their humor—warm, compassionately Russian, not disparaging but empathetic—presented no real and present danger to the sarcastic talent of Nabokov the novelist.

At that time, moreover, Russian prose was still unresponsive to the challenge of surviving in today's open world. It was as impractical as it had ever been, as "clueless" as the skills of Chekhov's intellectuals had been in an earlier time. Though an asset to survival under the harsh conditions of the Soviet regime, it was no help in ordinary life. Survival in [Mikhail] Bulgakov, [Andrei] Platonov, Zoshchenko, and Ilf and Petrov was survival in a hypothetical, typically Russian, metapractical reality, survival from death but not an outlet into life. Half a century later, Russian prose was still stuck on the Chekhovian rung of the ladder. Nabokov's contemporaries, as they approached

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Notes renumbered for this edition.—Ed.

mid-century, may not have wanted to stay in the cherry orchard, but they could not seem to get out of it. That was why Nabokov so categorically dubbed Russian prose "the worst"—because it was failing to respond to the open space that he now knew stretched beyond the bounds of Russia's groves and orchards.

It is no wonder that Nabokov's life ambition was to become a master of world prose rather than of world poetry (is there such a thing?)—to teach the emotionally metaphorical world of Russia to live "like normal people." Rational America, for instance, respects poetry but is not particularly interested in it. Poetry is a personal art, frequently untranslatable, figurative and overly emotional. Although the self-absorbed American culture ought, it would seem, to respond to the poet's individual "I," the first person in whose name poetry is written is no more than a token of individuality (of personality), rather than a token of the necessary individualism. It would, of course, be stupid to write "We remember a wondrous moment," but even "I remember a wondrous moment" is still lyrical and therefore never translates into pragmatism and practicality. Americans simply have neither the time nor, more important, the soul for such lyricism (or, for that matter, for love itself).

Thus, long before his American period, Nabokov's prose—American in its ways, although still expressed in Russian—rejected all that Byzantine "soulfulness" and, by manifesting itself in strict forms, sought to reflect those forms in all the world's mirrors.

## Osip Mandelstam as Cincinnatus C.

Among the few poets whom Vladimir Vladimirovich did not bait, and perhaps the least baited of all, are [Alexander] Pushkin and [Osip] Mandelstam. Well, and [Vladislav] Khodasevich, although even Khodasevich did not escape ignominy, albeit personal rather than literary: "I remember Vladislav Hodasevich, the greatest poet of his time, removing his dentures to eat in comfort, just as a grandee would do in the past"—for all the world as though likening "the greatest poet" to "a grandee . . . in the past" could nullify the unflattering account of his human shortcomings.[2]

In 1969, Nabokov wrote the article "On Adaptation"[3] in which he analyzed the American poet Robert Lowell's translation of

Mandelstam's poem, "For the resonant valor of ages to come" [Za gremuchuiu doblest´ griadushchikh vekov]. In many respects that article is reminiscent of Nabokov's commentary on *Eugene Onegin:* "In translating its 5,500 lines into English I had to decide between rhyme or reason—and I chose reason."[4]

In both works, he explains at length why the translation should follow as accurately as possible the patterns of the original. The translation is duty bound to be a literary reproduction, maintaining all the "rigor of fierce fidelity."[5] "Lowell's may be a good English poem," Nabokov averred, but the adaptation of a genuine work of art is "something very like cruelty and deception."[6]

Nabokov employs similar expressions in assessing Osip Mandelstam's political fate. Indeed, he especially extols Mandelstam *because* of his political fate: "In my boyhood . . . I also knew him by heart, but he gave me a less fervent pleasure [than Alexander Blok]. Today, through the prism of a tragic fate, his poetry seems greater than it actually is."[7]

It must be acknowledged that for Nabokov, praise of that nature was a rare exception. He never cut anyone any slack, never allowed a tragic fate to become an excuse. On the contrary, he always prided himself on his apolitical anti-historicism: "Nothing bores me more than political novels";[8] "My second favorite fact about myself is . . . that since my youth my political creed has remained as bleak and changeless as an old gray rock."[9]

Of Boris Pasternak, for instance, Nabokov said that he "deeply sympathized with [his] predicament in a police state; yet neither the vulgarities of the *Zhivago* style nor a philosophy that sought refuge in a sickly sweet brand of Christianism could ever transform that sympathy into a fellow writer's enthusiasm."[10]

Many of us, perhaps, will agree with his literary appraisal of *Doctor Zhivago* (whose name he elsewhere, in *Ada* [1969], wittily morphs into Doctor Mertvago ["Dr. Alive" becoming "Dr. Dead"—Trans.]), but the fact of the matter is that Pasternak's complex fate never caused Nabokov to overestimate his oeuvre.

After reading Andrei Sinyavsky's *On Socialist Realism* [O sotsialisticheskii realizm; published under the pseudonym Abram Tertz—Ed.], Nabokov approached even him, an inmate of the camps, coldly and competitively. According to Brian Boyd's

biography, Nabokov acknowledged that Tertz had stated his case ably and intelligently, while pointing out that he, Nabokov, had long been telling his students the same thing, as if there were any point of comparison between the calm quadrangles of Wellesley, Harvard, and Cornell and the socialist-realist barracks of the Dubrovlag camp.[11]

Nabokov apparently had no desire to engage in or write about politics and felt no sympathy for political martyrs unless they were characters he had created. In fact, we encounter the fate, both poetical and political, of Osip Mandelstam in *Invitation to a Beheading* [Priglashenie na kazn′] (1938), "Tyrants Destroyed" [Istreblenie tiranov] (1938), and *Bend Sinister* (1947).

This intertextual reading of human lives and literary destinies, which wove Mandelstam's fate into Nabokov's works, will be clarified when we compare the characters of Vladimir Nabokov and Osip Mandelstam as writers.

To begin with a generality, both Nabokov and Mandelstam, in different ways, aspired toward the rational individualism of the West. As a result of a geographical transposition, Nabokov, a Russian writer, passed beyond the intent of becoming a Western writer and actually became one. Mandelstam, a Jew, did his best to overcome the inhospitable Russianness with which he was physically surrounded by effecting a spiritual escape into a Westernism that was first Protestant and later Catholic.

In his "Notes on Petr Chaadaev" [Zametki o Petre Chaadaeve] (1914), Mandelstam writes, "Only a Russian could discover a West that is more concentrated, more concrete than the historical West."[12] Then he adds: "How many of us have emigrated spiritually to the West! How many among us are living unconsciously divided, with their bodies here but their souls over there!"

For Nabokov, the émigré, life in the physical "West" "confirms me in my favorite habit—the habit of freedom."[13,*] He also shared Chaadaev's dream of individual freedom, but while Nabokov's "body" was fortunate enough to be "over there," Mandelstam, like Chaadaev, was forced to create internal freedom, relying exclusively

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*Actually it is "living in hotels" that "simplifies postal matters, . . . eliminates the nuisance of private ownership, [and] confirms me in my favorite habit—the habit of freedom."—Trans.

on his own spiritual strength: "But I love my poor land / Because I have known no other" ("The Stone" [Kamenʹ], 1908).

In *Other Shores* [Drugie berega] (1954), the exiled Nabokov makes the mournful statement that "A person always feels at home in his past."[14] For Mandelstam, even that assertion would have been a luxury. The harshness of the Soviet regime forced him to go beyond the framework of his personal past and his personal home, seeking a connection with the time or, surmounting the time, a connection with the universe, rather—not for his own benefit but in the hope that his solitary suffering would not serve as an unconditional confirmation of the maxim that all must suffer.

While Nabokov, in Edmund Wilson's opinion, was unhappy and therefore ascribed unhappiness to everyone else, Mandelstam was, on the contrary, footloose enough to be generous to mankind, sparing it, if only in verse, from a horrible, tragic fate and bringing all misfortunes to a conciliatory, fairytale conclusion:

> It is cold in Europe. In Italy, it is dark.
> Power is repulsive, like a barber's hands.
> . . .
> Dear Ariosto, perhaps an age will pass,
> And in one broad and brotherly sky blue
> We shall pour together your cerulean and the blackness of our sea.
> . . . And we were there. There we drank mead.
> ("Ariosto" [Ariost], 1933)

In "The Poet on Himself" [Poet o Sebe] (1928), Mandelstam writes: "The October Revolution necessarily influenced my work, since it took from me my 'biography,' my sense of personal significance. I am grateful to it for having once and for all put an end to my spiritual well-being and my existence as a cultural annuitant."

In "The Noise of Time" [Shum vremeni] (1923), he acknowledges, "I want to speak not of myself, but to track the age, the noise and the germination of time. My memory is inimical to all that is personal. If it were up to me, I would only frown when remembering the past. I have never been able to understand the Tolstoys and the Aksakovs, the Bagrov grandsons so enamored of family archives with their epic domestic reminiscences. I say again—my memory is not affectionate

but hostile, and it functions not to reproduce but to dismiss the past."

Nabokov, too, had to decide whether or not to reconstitute himself on those "other shores" after the Revolution, to forgo his own cultural (which is to say aristocratic) dividends. But, unlike Mandelstam, he was by no means "grateful" to the October Revolution for what he had lost. After the revolutionary tragedies that had deprived him of his heritage—material, spiritual, and genealogical—Nabokov could not trust history, but relied only on his talent to reconstitute himself and Russia up to 1917 so that he could go on living.

*Speak, Memory* (1966) and *Other Shores* represent a meticulous reconstruction of Nabokov's personal past, a statement of the Nabokovs' political, historical, cultural, and aristocratic significance; their noble heritage; their Batovo estate where, legend has it, Pushkin dueled with Ryleev. Then we encounter an excerpt from an interview: "Our house was one of the first where young Shalyapin sang, and I have foxtrotted with Pavlova in London half a century ago."[15]

Mandelstam, though lacking a distinguished aristocratic heritage, had no shortage of suffering that was neither nostalgic nor poetic nor projected into the past like Nabokov's ("In a way Nabokov went through all the sorrows and delights of nostalgia long before the Revolution had removed the scenery of his young years") but was entirely concrete, since he was under direct threat of physical annihilation.[16] The expectation of an inevitable end allowed him to be kinder to people and even to the sadistic Soviet regime: "Amid the world's strident gait, / What an airy bed! / Well, then, since we cannot cobble out another, / Let us age on with this age" ("No, I was never anyone's contemporary" [Net, nikogda nichei ia ne byl sovremennik], 1924). Because of his own sufferings, his sympathy for the martyr is positively Christ-like: "The formidable bureaucrat, face like a mattress, / There is nothing more pitiful, more absurd than he" ("The Armenian language is a wild cat" [Dikaia koshka—armianskaia rech′], 1930).

While weaving the retrospective of his life, Nabokov explained that "to discover and follow throughout one's life the development . . . of thematic patterns is . . . the chief task of the memoirist" (*Other Shores*), because life finds its justification only when it becomes

an ineluctable design in an endless, deathless universe, providing a background and a canvas for a personal history.

Mandelstam, though, had to trust not to his own history, but to the history of all mankind, in hopes that it would ultimately be justified for no other reason than that it is impossible to trust the cruel present. For him, death was justified only when it was but part of an ineluctable design in a measureless historical universe: "Not many live for eternity, / But if you are preoccupied with the passing moment / The lot you draw is terrible and your house unsound" ("Falling is the constant companion of fear" [Padenʹe—neizmennyi sputnik strakha], 1912).

Mandelstam wrote that poem as a young man, in 1912—anticipating, as it were, Abram Tertz's later formulation: "[D]o we see in action here the ancient literary convention according to which fate mysteriously makes short work of an author, using the texts of his works as a blueprint?"[17]

Nabokov is superb because he wants to appear superb and he knows how to make the reader believe that he is. A great conjuror, an unexcelled illusionist, he has the ability to ensnare us, enchant us, leave us engrossed in admiration, but even his most artful constructions are lacking the freedom with which Mandelstam handles universal concepts.

Mandelstam, for his part, is superb in his Pushkinian "sense of life as something endowed with meaning," which "was quite astonishing—as was his view of the word as a settled abode when one considers how totally he failed to achieve any form of domesticity for himself."[18]

For both Nabokov and Mandelstam "the habit of freedom" required solitude and the ability to be an individual, a need to think differently from everyone else. Nabokov constantly told people that any "communal aura involuntarily prejudices me against a novel."[19] In "The Fourth Prose" [Chetvertaia proza] (1930), Mandelstam insisted "a real writer is the mortal foe of literature."

Both Mandelstam and Nabokov, each in his own way, stood out from the crowd. (Although what artist—writer, painter, creative spirit of whatever kind—ever blends in? There is a famous photograph of Joseph Brodsky in a crowd, surrounded by the backs of people's

heads; and Brodsky, his back to the crowd and his face to the camera, is trying to fight his way to us.) But there is a great difference between Nabokov's understanding of individualism and Mandelstam's.

Nabokov stands apart from the world for his own sake: "Isolation means liberty and discovery";[20] "Philosophically, I am an indivisible monist."[21] Mandelstam stands apart from the world for the world's sake. Even before the Revolution, he was writing, "There is a spirit-peopled / Freedom, the lot of the select few" ("ENCYCLYCA," 1914), going on to say, in the mid-1930s, at the height of the purges: "And your textbook, infinity, / I read alone, with no one else around" ("Octets: [11] 'And I emerge from empty space'" [Vos′mistishiia: "I ia vykhozhu iz prostranstva"], 1933–35). "Do not compare, what lives is incomparable," he insisted, later predicting in "Lines on an Unknown Soldier" [Stikhi o neizvestnom soldate] (1937): "I will be a light to the world."

Mandelstam's type of solitary selectivity and banishment is not a geographical but a spiritual exile—not Nabokov's external exile but a heroic internal exile, akin to that visited on Cincinnatus C. (in *Invitation to a Beheading*) and Adam Krug (in *Bend Sinister*).

No distinction, of course, should be made between heroic and unheroic varieties of exile or between degrees of suffering—since "every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"—but Mandelstam's inner emigration is probably among the most salient (in Russia, at least) examples of spiritual displacement into the fortress and stronghold of personal creativity.

Mandelstam admired Chaadaev for having striven to "avoid like the plague that formless paradise"—the paradise of Russia with its "great Slavic dream . . . of universal spiritual disarmament, after which will come a state that may be dubbed 'peace'" ("Notes on Petr Chaadaev").

Mandelstam's whole life was a spiritual emigration into historical eternity, a fugue from the "formless paradise" of the Russian communal world that frequently took the form of a police state precisely because it was so formless. "We cling to form because we have not enough of it; probably it is the only thing we have not enough of; we have never had and never can have either hierarchy or structure (we are too spiritual for this), and move freely from

nihilism to conservatism and back again," is how Tertz explained Russia's routine transition from the idea of universal love to the idea of exerting universal control over that love.[22]

For want of any alternative, Mandelstam preferred to live not in that indeterminate land, but in history as in air, in the cosmos as in time. That inauguration into a historical meta-reality demanded an exceptional, outstanding, sui generis courage. In "On the Nature of the Word" [O prirode slova] (1922), he proclaims: "Unlike the old civic poetry, the new Russian poetry should nurture not only citizens but 'men.' The ideal of perfect manliness is cultivated by the style and the practical demands of our epoch. Everything has become heavier and more unwieldy, and therefore the person should become more steady, should be, as a person, the steadiest thing on the earth and be to it as a diamond is to glass. The hieratic—which is to say the sacred—nature of poetry is determined by the certainty that the person is steadier than anything else in the world."

Nabokov, too, confirms the need for that manliness, that courage, in the contemporary poet: among the three best things men do, he listed "to be fearless."[23] But his fearlessness is less audacious than Mandelstam's courage.

Osip Mandelstam's political fate matched his poetic fate. As man and poet, though weak and suffering, he is nevertheless kind and noble. Mandelstam himself was a hero, but Nabokov rewarded his heroic characters—Martin (in *Glory* [Podvig], 1932), Cincinnatus C., Adam Krug—with gallant deeds, while admitting that "As a human specimen, I present no particular fascination."[24] The strong and bold Nabokov—a great writer but not a great person—was fearless but not courageous, was afraid to own up to his fears and pain, and compensated by finding weakness in others.

The heroic fate of the outwardly puny Osip Mandelstam corresponded to the literary fate of Cincinnatus C., the lonely, fragile, tongue-tied, word-wary poet in *Invitation to a Beheading,* which Nabokov called his "dreamiest and most poetical novel."[25] "Oh no, I do not gloat over my own person, I do not get all hot wrestling with my soul in a darkened room; I have no desires, save the desire to express myself—in defiance of all the world's muteness. How frightened I am. How sick with fright. But no one shall take me away

from myself,"[26] says Cincinnatus, the invitee to a beheading.

In those words we recognize Mandelstam's paralyzing fear: "Animal fear pounds the keyboard, animal fear proofreads gibberish on sheets of toilet paper, scribbles denunciations, hits people when they're down, demands that prisoners be executed" ("The Fourth Prose"); "O iridescent sheath of fear!" ("As the orphaned nightingale praises" [Kak solovei sirotstvuiushchii slavit], 1933–34) he exclaimed during the fearsome 1930s.

The epigraph to *Invitation*—a quotation from [the apocryphal—Trans.] Delalande's *Discours sur les ombres*: "Comme un fou se croit Dieu, nous nous croyons mortels" ("As a madman believes himself to be God, so we believe ourselves to be mortal")—resonates to the fear of shadows in Mandelstam's poetry: "Unhappy he who, like his shadow / Fears the barking and is mown down by the wind, / And poor is he who, only half-alive / Begs alms from the shadow" ("You are not dead yet, you are not yet alone" [Eshche ne umer ty, eshche ty ne odin"], 1937).

Mandelstam's distrust, even hatred, of silver-tongued writing that "here, there, and everywhere fulfills only one purpose in that it helps commanders keep soldiers obedient and helps judges inflict punishment on the doomed" ("The Fourth Prose") is experienced in *Invitation* by Cincinnatus, who is at once a poet and an adversary of literature. On the one hand, he burns with the poetic desire to become an artist on a par with Pushkin: "I want to think about something else, clarify other things . . . but I write obscurely and limply, like Pushkin's lyrical duelist";[27] " 'My words all mill about in one spot,' wrote Cincinnatus. 'Envious of poets.' "[28] But on the other hand, he recognizes that it is impossible to write when "there is in the world not a single human who can speak my language; or, more simply, not a single human who can speak; or, even more simply, not a single human."[29] In the same way, Mandelstam too feels bewildered on this earth—a mute and helpless alien: "I am a Chinaman. No one understands me" ("The Fourth Prose").

Mandelstam's recurrent images of closed, mute, helpless lips and empty words could equally well have been written by Cincinnatus. It makes perfect sense that the inarticulacy of the Mandelstam family described in "The Noise of Time" is akin to Cincinnatus's own

aphasia. "[A]ll my best words are deserters and do not answer the trumpet call, and the remainder are cripples," he complains.[30]

Mandelstam the poet agrees: "The pain of seeking seek the lost word, / Raising sick lids / And, with lime in the blood, gathering night grasses" / For an alien tribe" ("January 1, 1924" [1 ianvaria 1924], 1924 and 1937).

Even so, he is more likely to falter, to keep his silence, to praise the caesura, the omitted word, "the hole in the doughnut," the breathing voids of "Brussels lace" ("The Fourth Prose")—the air, the perforations, the unauthorized absences that hold the pattern together. When everyone is soothingly eloquent, like M'sieur Pierre, Cincinnatus's executioner, inarticulacy becomes a marker of singularity, rigorous thought, and selectivity: "Jailers love to read books and need literature more than anyone" ("The Fourth Prose").

Like Mandelstam in "The Fourth Prose," Cincinnatus also falters on a word as he struggles to express himself: "[B]etween his [a man in a childhood memory—Trans.] movement and the movement of the laggard shadow—that second, that syncope—there is that rare kind of time in which I live—the pause, the hiatus, when the heart is like a feather. . . . And I'm wrong when I keep repeating that there is no refuge in the world for me. There is! I'll find it! A lush ravine in the desert! A patch of snow in the shadow of an alpine crag! . . . What anguish, oh, what anguish."[31]

When asked about his last request before execution—"'To finish writing something,' whispered Cincinnatus half questioningly but then he frowned, straining his thoughts, and suddenly understood that everything had been written already."[32] "[D]eath" was the last word he wrote, and he immediately crossed it out.[33] The word became the deed, the act.

After writing "We live, not sensing our own country beneath us" [My zhivem, pod soboiu ne chuia strany] (1933), Mandelstam, according to Akhmatova, announced that he was "ready for death."[34] No less courageous was the act of writing "The Wolf" [Volk] ("For the resonant valor of ages to come"), the poem that Nabokov defended so passionately in the article "On Adaptation," calling it "one of the masterpieces of Russian poetry" and insisting on his own translation

of it.[35] That poem came to light during a search of Mandelstam's apartment in 1934, and, like Cincinnatus C., Mandelstam went to his own "beheading" (actually, to exile in Voronezh) fragile, weak, slender, unheroic—and a great hero, "[t]hat steps should sound like deeds" ("Rome" [Rim], 1937).

"The Egyptian Stamp' [Egipetskaia marka] (1927) is the story of the constantly trembling, frightened, hapless Parnok, Mandelstam's third-person parody of himself (or Cincinnatus). But it closes with the first person narrative of a fearless storyteller, of the real "I," of the valiant poet ready for death. A few years after "The Egyptian Stamp" came the reckless, heroic "Fourth Prose."

"The Fourth Prose" could very well have been written by Cincinnatus C., but instead it was written for him by Osip Mandelstam, one of Nabokov's bravest and most tragic heroes: "I have no manuscripts, no notebooks, no archive. I have no recognizable handwriting because I never write. I am the only one in Russia working from what I hear and know, and everywhere you look, you've got dyed-in-the-wool riffraff writing. What the hell kind of writer am I? Get out of here, you simpletons!" ("The Fourth Prose").

In "Tyrants Destroyed," laughter was the only possible means for Nabokov as artist to annihilate tyranny. "Rereading my chronicle, I see that, in my efforts to make him terrifying, I have only made him ridiculous, thereby destroying him—an old, proven method" he writes with satisfaction in the finale of his parody on horror.[36]

In "We live, not sensing our own country beneath us," the act of laughter has become a deed in itself: "In his cockroach moustaches there's a beam / of laughter, while below his top boots gleam . . . / Wherever an execution's happening though— / there's raspberry, and the Georgian's giant torso."*

Real death, which inserts itself between intent and reality, separates Nabokov and Mandelstam. For Mandelstam, laughter was life—or, rather, death. That derisory death later became all too familiar to Adam Krug, the brilliant philosopher of *Bend Sinister*, who, after refusing to kowtow to an envious and stupid dictator, shares the tragic fate of his predecessors, Osip Mandelstam and Cincinnatus C.

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*This translation by A.S. Kline is reprinted in full on p. 102 of this issue of *Russian Studies in Literature*.—Trans.

For Nabokov, though, laughter, like death, was only an artistic stunt pulled by the narrator, albeit a mournful one.

In an interview, Nabokov acknowledged that "One of the saddest cases is perhaps that of Osip Mandelshtam—a wonderful poet, the greatest poet among those trying to survive in Russia under the Soviets—whom that brutal and imbecile administration persecuted and finally drove to death in a remote concentration camp. The poems he heroically kept composing until madness eclipsed his limpid gifts are admirable specimens of a human mind at its deepest and highest. Reading them enhances one's healthy contempt for Soviet ferocity. Tyrants and torturers will never manage to hide their comic stumbles behind their cosmic acrobatics. Contemptuous laughter is all right, but it is not enough in the way of moral relief. And when I read Mandelshtam's poems composed under the accursed rule of those beasts, I feel a kind of helpless shame, being so free to live and think and write and speak in the free part of the world.—That's the only time when liberty is bitter."[37]

**Nabokov as a Twenty-First-Century Pushkin**

A work of art teaches nothing—yet it teaches everything.
—Abram Tertz, *A Voice from the Chorus* [p. 193]

Nabokov would unquestionably have enjoyed being compared with Pushkin: "Pushkin's blood," he said, "runs through the veins of modern Russian literature."[38] Alexander Sergeevich was the only classical writer whom Vladimir Vladimirovich annotated with undivided respect, showing no urge to rewrite, correct, or improve.

But with which Pushkin should the comparison be drawn? Pushkin has many faces, is reader-friendly, a crowd favorite, universal, and generally familiar; he looks at us "From both sides at the same time . . . from above, from the side, from some third point of view."[39] Pushkin is here: "Arise, O Prophet, watch and hark, . . . / Go forth now over land and sea, / And with your word ignite men's hearts" ("The Prophet" [Prorok], 1826).* But he is also here: "Poet! Do not

*Uncredited translation at http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/~mdenner/Demo/texts/prophet.htm.—Trans.

prize the people's love. / The momentary noise of fervent praise will pass" ("To a Poet" [Poetu], 1830). Or he is altogether aloof: "To answer / To no one, to serve and gratify / None but your own self, . . . / To wander where you will, / Marveling at nature's divine beauties, / Joyfully atremble, in transports of emotion / Before the artifacts of art and inspiration. / That is happiness! those are liberties" ("From Pindemonte" [Iz Pindemonti], 1836).

But Nabokov was never other than inaccessible ("I pride myself on being a person with no public appeal"),[40] arrogant ("let us look for the individual genius"),[41] solitary ("I'm interested in the lone performance"),[42] and difficult ("Art is difficult. Easy art is what you see at modern exhibitions of things and doodles").[43] When the choice was between rhyme and reason, he opted for reason, preferring pedantic English to verbose Russian, rejecting poetry in favor of prose, exchanging the lightweight use of many faces for an intense use of many masks (when he accepts an image, the versatile Pushkin organically becomes that which he is describing, while Nabokov only changes one mask for another, always remaining his own cold, unimpeachable, and contemptuous self).

So, then, which Pushkin should we apply to Nabokov in this new millennium—the Prophet, the Poet, or the carefree artist? In the foreword, "Russian Writers, Censors, and Readers," to his *Lectures on Russian Literature*, Nabokov resolves that issue unambiguously, citing (and translating) "From Pindemonte" as a model of "individual genius."[44] Elsewhere he asserted that "A work of art . . . is only important to the individual, and only the individual reader is important to me."[45]

Disavowing the reader's very existence, doggedly sequestering himself behind sundry barriers (miles of ocean, the academic cocoon, tape-recorded lectures, Swiss neutrality, forewords, afterwords, and the impenetrable case-binding of books), protecting himself from any human contact, warning—Authorized Personnel Only!—that "the best reader is still the egoist who savors his discovery unbeknownst to his neighbors,"[46] Nabokov spent his life defending the image of the writer who belongs to no group: "I do not write for groups, nor approve of group therapy . . . I write for myself in multiplicate."[47]

> Occasionally, perhaps, the purest of artists is tempted to have his say, when the clamor of his century, the screams of those being slaughtered, or the

> snarling of some brute reach him. But it is a temptation to which he must not succumb, for he can be sure that if something is worth saying it will ripen and eventually yield unexpected fruit. No, the so-called social side of life and all the causes that arouse my fellow citizens decidedly have no business in the beam of my lamp, and if I do not demand an ivory tower it is because I am quite happy in my garret.[48]

But while insisting on his freedom neither to render service nor to serve as an example, while disagreeing with "The Prophet," and assuring us that "I have . . . no moral message . . . no general ideas to exploit, I just like composing riddles with elegant solutions,"[49] Nabokov sometimes gives the game away; "[A] good combination [in chess as in art] should always contain a certain element of deception."[50]

By carefully examining what is hidden behind the author's countless costume changes—thus following his injunction "In reading one should notice and fondle details"[51]—we will undoubtedly discover in Nabokov Pushkin's Prophet ("And with your word ignite men's hearts").

As he polished every phrase ("I have rewritten—often several times—every word I have ever published")[52] and set the ubiquitous traps of his puzzles, charades, riddles, and tricks, Nabokov was addressing himself to us, his future readers. "[O]f all the characters that a great artist creates, his readers are the best," he said, following this up with the optimistic opinion that "the Russian reader . . . seems to me to be as much a model for readers as Russian writers were models for writers in other tongues. He would start on his charmed career at a most tender age and lose his heart to Tolstoy or Chekhov when still in the nursery."[53]

And we, Nabokov's Russian readers whom Tolstoy and Chekhov have ultimately taught to love even the minutiae of his oeuvre, can now make bold to rebut his unapproachable image of indifference, absence of social agenda, and lack of empathy and warmth.

We agree with him that Russian literature is an example to all other literatures, an example of something that he himself so opposed in it—of spiritual leadership. The spirit, the soul, is our highest achievement and our underlying national defect. In the absence of goods, laws, and services, Russians comfort themselves with Dostoevsky's maxim "We may be backward but we do have a soul."

Philosophers have explained our pragmatic disinterest in the material thus: "For all that, the most important thing in the Russian person is that *there is nothing to lose.* Hence the Russian intelligentsia's lack of self-interest (were it not for their bookshelves)."[54] Therefore, those who are in possession of the word—the writers—invariably hold sway over our souls, our spirits, our minds, becoming our navigators, guideposts, and prophets. Russian readers, fully expecting their hearts to be ignited by writers' words, believe unquestioningly in the polestar that they represent, in the material force of what they have to say. Often that "igniting" has horrible consequences—"The Decembrists awakened Herzen. Herzen began the work of revolutionary agitation"[55]—or exerts a cleansing, salutary effect, as in the case of Solzhenitsyn, another famous émigré. But the fact remains that in Russia, the Poet is more than a poet.

Nabokov took issue with Dostoevsky's "Every one of us is answerable for everyone else" [Father Zosima, in *The Brothers Karamazov*—Trans.] and remarked, "I suppose that my indifference to religion is of the same nature as my dislike of group activities in the domain of political or civic commitments."[56]

He was guilty of nothing at all and he wanted to be Russian, but protagonists of a more practical bent—Lenin and Co.—decided instead to construct a bright future for all mankind, absolving it forever of all guilt, but they went too far and constructed a prison of peoples in which all were found culpable (an unsurprising historical paradox).

Then Nabokov, with all his objections to group therapy ("It is nothing but a kind of microcosmos of communism—all that psychiatry. . . . Why not leave their private sorrows to people? Is sorrow not, one asks, the only thing in the world people really possess?"), stopped wanting to be Russian.[57] He needed to survive in the new, un-Russian, uncomfortable setting of a rectilinear, rational world where the image of the suffering writer and the lonely poet were a far cry from romanticism of any kind and where the high-souled intellectual impotence so perfectly described by Chekhov was by no means considered a virtue, where everyone was answerable only to himself, and romantic ideas and revolutionary utopian philosophies (created in the West but sensibly never put into practice there) were left to yellow comfortably away in books.

Though categorizing himself as an entirely American writer who had just happened to have been born in Russia, Nabokov had nevertheless been raised in Russian cultural traditions, in which the poet is a national treasure called to awaken "kind feelings" with his lyre [a reference to Pushkin's "Exegi monumentum"—Trans.]; and despite himself, he believed passionately in the material force of the word. But it had to be a new word—purposeful, rational, and precise—in which "the passion of science" merged with "the patience of poetry."[58]

In his European emigration, while trying on Western authors for size, Nabokov refined his Russian language ("A very bothersome feature that Russian presents is the dearth, vagueness, and clumsiness of technical terms") into something in which the baroque profusion of Russian metaphor was replaced by functional images and precisely calibrated comparisons, exact as a mirror image.[59] E.T.A. Hoffman's monsters and doppelgangers in *The Eye* [Sogliadatai] (1930) and *Despair* [Otchaianie] (1931) and Shakespeare's Hamletian themes in *Mary* [Mashen′ka] (1936), *Glory* [Podvig], and *The Gift* [Dar] (1937) were still being passed through the prism of Russian literature, of Gogol and Belyi, but were already obviously part of an effort to create a new, victorious, rationally efficient Western protagonist divested of the Russian doubts, lofty words, and notions that are so familiar to us from Dostoevsky and Chekhov. That protagonist's own life (which often takes the form of mere survival) is more important to him than all the dewy-eyed, utopian, impractical, immaterial ideas of Russian literature. Ganin (in *Mary*), Martin (in *Glory*), and Godunov-Cherdyntsev (in *The Gift*) have no qualms whatsoever about preferring their personal comfort over their usefulness to society.

Rather than cultivating groves and cherry orchards that would later be senselessly felled by some post-Chekhovian revolutionary, Nabokov preferred to grow solitary, prickly cactuses.[60]

Prior to Nabokov, those "Western," "prickly," "cactoid," self-obsessed protagonists, those "individual geniuses," were not and could not have been part of Russian literature. Even Russian literature's Western types—for instance Insarov, Turgenev's Bulgarian in *On the Eve* [Nakanune]—set the social above the personal, and while Blok and Esenin's twentieth-century characters sang the praises of solitude, they suffered irredeemably from it. Marina Tsvetaeva

echoed them from emigration in Paris: “For once *a voice* is given to you, / Poet, the rest is taken away” (“There are lucky men and lucky women” [Est′ schastlivtsy i schastlivitsy], 1935).

Just as, prior to Pushkin, there was no Russian literature in its modern sense (there were odes, ballads, and epics but no stories, novels, or verse: “[H]e marked out roads for Russian letters for centuries to come. No matter where we poke our noses—Pushkin is everywhere, which can be explained not so much by the influence of his genius on other talents, as by the fact that there isn’t a motif in the word he didn’t touch upon. Pushkin simply managed to write about everything for everyone”),[61] so Nabokov, by reflecting us and our coevals in the polysemous protagonists distributed through his novels, stories, and verse, foretold our fate for a hundred years to come. Preserving the customary mask of bogus nonchalance, Nabokov composed for us a new Russia and supplied an elegantly workable solution for its problems. “We should always remember that the work of art is invariably the creation of a new world.”[62]

But language was, at that time, a hindrance to him. It stood in the way of the new Nabokovian protagonist, sending out cancerous metastases of lyrical asides, setting up fences of parentheses and commas, scattering the fluff of colons and em-dashes throughout encyclopedic volumes that span all eleven time zones. Snow drifts of suffering and elation prevented the sprightly, purposeful individual, free of dewy-eyed self-consciousness, from moving forward. The Russian intellectual’s useless, impractical abilities—“He [Pnin] was inept with his hands to a rare degree; but because he could manufacture in a twinkle a one-note mouth organ out of a pea pod, make a flat pebble skip ten times on the surface of a pond, shadowgraph with his knuckles a rabbit (complete with blinking eye), and perform a number of other tame tricks that Russians have up their sleeves, he believed himself endowed with considerable manual and mechanical skill”[63]—needed to be adapted and technologized in “efficient, alabastrine, humane America.”[64]

Like Pnin, exiled from the dewy-eyed communal paradise of Russian literature, Nabokov had to accommodate himself to other shores, to another language, to the Western hell of cozy, individual indifference.

Russian literature's most unsympathetic author, contemptuous of human weakness and sporting a mask of imperturbable self-sufficiency reinforced by the assertion that "In America I'm happier than in any other country," Nabokov nevertheless suffered unbearably from the loss of his *rodnoi* language, his *rodnoi* home, his *rodnaia* land, and so on (in fact, when *rodnoi* is translated into its English equivalents—*native, familiar, one's own*—it actually loses the *rodnoe* meaning that it has for us).[65]

In *Other Shores,* Nabokov confesses that "the yearning for home . . . has latched onto a small scrap of land and can be wrenched away only with life itself. . . . Give me, on any continent, forest, field, and air that are reminiscent of Petersburg province, and my soul will turn upside-down."

"He didn't love her [Tamara, in *Speak, Memory*—Trans.] in order to lose her, any more than he loved his country because he had lost it. But he loved them both more deeply in their loss, and his love is most alive in the imagining of those miraculous and bewildered letters, and of the Russia he will never see again. He loved the chance of loss, he loved what he *could* lose, which is perhaps what we really love in anyone or anything,"[66] Michael Wood explains in *The Magician's Doubts,* perhaps one of the best books ever written about Nabokov—and "the loss is irredeemable, that most goes on and on."[67]

Like pain, like life, like death.

Had Nabokov been not a Russian but an exclusively Western individual, he would have perceived life on those "other shores" not as a harsh necessity but as an incontrovertible given, and he would never have felt that yearning for a paradisiacal past, for his own land, for his home. But it was that unforgettable, unhealable wound of his loss, the source of eternal pain, that defined the immortality of the writer and his books.

What can be said of a paradise that is not lost? Only when paradise is lost does it become paradise. When Russia was no longer his, Nabokov loved it even more than before, and learned to overcome the pain through never-ending dreams and memories, which he transferred from novel to novel, of Zoorland, Zembla, Kaluga, Ladoga, and Raduga, confirming Michael Wood's observation that

Nabokov was, so to speak, lovelorn: "I think it is all a matter of love: the more you love a memory, the stronger and stranger it is. I think it's natural that I have a more passionate affection for my old memories, the memories of my childhood."[68]

According to Nabokov, a loss—the death of expectations and hopes—may be overcome only through a purposeful, precisely calibrated, spiral repetition of familiar themes, images, situations, but improved, corrected, made happier: "[T]hat pattern is a redemption of loss, and perhaps the only redemption of loss there is."[69]

"The spiral is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free,"[70] This is the main theme not only of *Other Shores* [and of *Speak, Memory*—Trans.] but of Nabokov's whole life.

Nabokov transformed the heroic deed of death (the Russian end) into the heroic deed of life (the Western beginning). In rewriting Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy by his own lights, he opened up the circle of unhappiness and death outlined by the Russian cultural tradition.

Nabokov undertook the formidable task of logically resolving, like a chess problem or an intricate brainteaser, the puzzle posed by the circular composition of Russian suffering, to find protection from the repetitious thematic pattern of Russian literature and Russian life whose canvas is based upon prolonged pain, rumbling revolution, and heroic death. What Nabokov needed to do was to make over, to repair the innards of a clock that had been repeatedly ruined by overwinding, with its broken cogs and worn-down wheels—that being the Russian theme of life for the sake of death whose paradigm could never have room in it for practical, concrete happiness.

After banishing his Russian heroes from their all-forgiving culture, tolerant of pain and, indeed, raised on pain, that throve and flourished in suffering, after depriving them of the comfortably heroic exit that redeemed all, Nabokov made them start a new life that was far more terrible than that from which Russian literature, in its great benevolence, had so openhandedly delivered them. It was a harsh Western life after a forgiving Russian death.

In this new, contemporary turn of the spiral, Nabokov's characters were, like the author himself, forced to adapt to the new and in many

respects more difficult conditions of open space, of freedom of choice, of personal responsibility, and of the need to make their own decisions, no longer able to rely on the convenience of their native language, on the coziness of Russia, with its parentheses, colons, em-dashes, and commas behind which, as behind a gate, one may hide, lying concealed behind their palisade, sheltered from the winds of life, buried under snow as fluffy as a down coverlet—and there wait it out, sit out the winter, live to see better times.

A phrase that was begun somewhere, sometime—in another time and another space—twists and whirls and winds around itself, in the typical concentric layout of a Russian village, in the circular composition of *Dead Souls*, and the beginning cannot be seen from the end and, as the familiar, chiming sleigh-bell lapses into silence, we find ourselves in a different dimension, far, far away, yet still in the same place. In our eagerness to proceed from the wheel to Gogol's "troika, swift as a bird," we double back on ourselves and return again to the beginning, to the wheel.

Then, wearying of evolution's measured progress, we hasten to break the circle of rumbling revolution, sweeping everything from our path. After that, taking a break from all the upheavals, again we wait through the centuries until out there, outside the window, beyond the pale, in another rectilinear world, the blizzard dies down and spring arrives.

There stands a naked man on the naked earth,* who does not rhyme *volia* [freedom] with *dolia* [fate], does not surrender to nature and swaddles himself from top to toe, expecting no mercy from her.[71] He turns into the wind, making decisions and acting on those decisions without regard for the inclement weather and the poor harvest. A Western man, economically and anglophonically rectilinear—he who has nowhere to hide on this nakedly rational earth—has no alternative but to launch a commonsensical, egotistical campaign to defeat and conquer that earth. He gathers up his Western fate into his willful hands, proving thereby that all happy families are *not* alike.[72] All you Russians know how to do is suffer!

*Perhaps a reference to Anatoly Lunacharsky's essay on Pushkin, translated by Y. Ganuskin at www.marxists.org/archive/lunachar/works/puskin2.htm.—Trans.

For a Russian protagonist, death is more than salvation; it is a validation of his petty, vulgar, joyless, needless, tormented life, in which pain is a reward and suffering is a holiday. Bashmachkin, the Karamazovs, Ivan Il′ich—watch them take their leave, die, run mad, with all the supercharged emotions of tragic characters: "I'll just die, and then . . . They didn't understand, didn't appreciate." Suffering is not noble, not virtuous, but a sign of shameful weakness in the West, where the misery of others is to be avoided like the plague.

While empathizing with the protagonists of the Russian classics, Nabokov did not forgive them their weakness and the lack of fight in them. "Do you think you have known the horror of suffering, known real pain?" he seems to be saying to them. "I'll show you what real pain means, when even death promises no reward!"

"But how I don't want to die! My soul has burrowed under the pillow. Oh, I don't want to! It will be cold getting out of my warm body. I don't want to . . . wait a while . . . let me doze some more,"[73] Cincinnatus wails. Yet, overcoming his fear of the cold unknown of death, he courageously "made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him."[74] After all his trials, "comfortably Krug returns unto the bosom of his maker."[75] Pnin—the protagonist Nabokov respected most and who dared to be smarter, kinder, and braver than the author himself (so unusual was he that his entire novel was included in the *Portable Nabokov* anthology)—does not succumb to humiliation but instead proudly sets off in search of a better life.

The Western individual is practical. He is not seeking deliverance from banality and boredom in madness, revolution, death, suicide, or an escape into empty space. He does not elevate pain and suffering and make of them the meaning and underpinning of life. Death for him is not a way out; revolution is not a spectacular act of deliverance. He lives from day to day, from yesterday to today, from today to tomorrow, and so on to the end, forced gradually to perceive the vulgarity of life as an evolutionary given of the human condition.

The followers of Nabokov and the heirs of Poprishchin [the protagonist of Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*—Trans.] (Kinbote in *Pale Fire* [1962]), of Karenina and Levin (Ada and Van Veen in *Ada*),

of Myshkin (Cincinnatus C.) enter into the solitude of unhappiness, of madness, of death as if these were the givens that defined their existence. Their life began at the intersection of death and eternity where the heroes of classical Russian literature ended theirs, at the moment when Poprishchin and Myshkin have finally shaken free of life. Death for them is not only an end but also the beginning of an arduous solitude.

"You know, what's so awful about dying is that you are completely on your own," the eternally young Lolita observes solemnly.[76] In the same lonely loop of life's deathly emptiness, the happiness of Ada and Van Veen is no less macabre than Anna Karenina's tragic fate. The title *Ada* speaks for itself [being the genitive form of *ad,* the Russian word for "hell"—Trans.]. Their happiness is actually *more* terrible: it is *un*happiness, insanity. The relationship between willful cousins tangled in the branches of a complex family tree was comprehensible only to themselves, as an incestuous love that was cruel in its absoluteness and fearsome in its purposeful egoism and its determination to be happy at any cost. Because this is how it works: "In other, more deeply moral worlds than this pellet of muck, there might exist restraints, principles, transcendental consolations, and even a certain pride in making happy someone one does not really love; but on *this* planet Lucettes are doomed."[77]

Such an obvious hell can be called happiness (the joys of passion) only in an age that embraces "the mug of modernism."[78] In such an age, furthermore, the capacity to adapt to that hell can even be a source of pride, because in a cold world of banal rationality, happiness is what a person invents for himself, whatever joys he uses to reward himself, what he calls his life.

Having spent his whole life rewriting the heroes of Russian literature, in hopes of rewarding them in this new age for the courage of their ordinary lives by making it end well for them, Nabokov finally found for us all an ideal way out in the form of the paradisiacal *Ada* with its absolute formula of individual happiness—"all happy families are more or less dissimilar"—at any cost: "[I]f there was no future, then one had the right of making up a future, and in that case one's very own future did not exist, insofar as one existed oneself."[79]

"A sower of freedom in the desert, / I issued forth betimes, before the star" [Svobody seiatel′ pustinnyi] is something that Nabokov, following Pushkin, could have said of himself; and we, the readers of Russian literature, will say it for him. Because, entering fully into the spirit of Nabokovian infinity—the protraction of a theme, an image, a situation—we are all no more than a loop in an eternal spiral. By repeating the writer's experience, his protagonists anticipated their own post-Soviet fate: Cincinnatus, just like you and I, had to crawl out of Russian literature's indolent mindset, to emerge from Ilya Ilyich Oblomov, whose job it was to get up at last, take off his robe, make a decision, become Stoltz.

The fact that—unlike Nabokov, who considered his pre-emigration life idyllic—we wanted a hard-headed Western order in our own land and aspired to replace the kindhearted Oblomov with the enterprising Stoltz does nothing to facilitate our lead-footed adaptation to the harsh, measured, somewhat vacant, unforgiving rules of capitalism but, rather, underscores that reality is subordinated to eternity (and to art). Immortal as they are, Martin, Luzhin, Cincinnatus C., Pnin, Kinbote, Van Veen, and Ada are still artistic fabrications and have reached the end of their sufferings, while we must live on in this transition from socialism to capitalism, from totalitarianism to democracy, from spiritual values to material values, from the encyclopedic to the rational, from the twentieth century to the twenty-first.

How we are to survive in a "normal, civilized country" with no possibility of jumping out of our own skins, of taking refuge in spirituality and dreams to escape the need to live "like everyone else," from day to day, in a measured and mundane manner, with no thought of the bright, utopian future that will be constructed for us by someone else and having no better option than "commonsense egoism" (not the senseless revolutionism of Chernyshevsky that is ridiculed in *The Gift* but a self-protective coolness, self-sufficiency, and aloofness) is something that we are taught by the most unkind and contemptuous, most sympathetic and emotionally engaged on our behalf, most modern writer in Russia today.

At one point, Nabokov joked, "I believe that one day a reappraiser will come and declare that, far from having been a frivolous firebird,

I was a rigid moralist kicking sin, cuffing stupidity, ridiculing the vulgar and cruel—and assigning sovereign power to tenderness, talent, and pride."[80] That is his acknowledgment that within him was Pushkin's Prophet.

## Notes

1. V. Erofeev, "Russkaia proza Vladimira Nabokova," in V.V. Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 4 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), vol. 1, p. 5.
2. Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 89.
3. Ibid., pp. 280–83.
4. Ibid., p. 7.
5. Ibid., p. 282.
6. Ibid., p. 283.
7. Ibid., p. 97.
8. Ibid., p. 3.
9. Ibid., p. 34.
10. Ibid., p. 206.
11. See Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 423.
12. Here and below Mandelstam's works are quoted from O. Mandel′shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 2 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990).
13. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 149.
14. [Unless noted otherwise,] all quotations from Nabokov's works are taken from V.V. Nabokov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii,* 4 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1990).
15. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, p. 171.
16. Vladimir Nabokov, "On Conclusive Evidence," in Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Knopf, 1999), p. 249.
17. Abram Tertz [Andrei Sinyavsky], *Strolls with Pushkin,* trans. Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy and Slava I. Yastremski (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 72.
18. Abram Tertz, *A Voice from the Chorus,* trans. Kyril Fitzlyon and Max Hayward (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1976), p.174.
19. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 113.
20. Ibid., p. 139.
21. Ibid., p. 85.
22. Tertz, *A Voice from the Chorus,* p. 248.
23. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 152.
24. Ibid., p. 157.
25. Ibid., p. 76.
26. Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading,* trans. Dmitri Nabokov with the author (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 91.
27. Ibid., p. 92.
28. Ibid., p. 194.
29. Ibid., p. 95.

30. Ibid., p. 205.
31. Ibid., p. 53.
32. Ibid., p. 209.
33. Ibid., p. 206.
34. S.S. Averintsev, “Sud′ba i vest′ Osipa Mandel′shtama,” in Mandel′shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii,* vol. 1, p. 42.
35. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 282.
36. Vladimir Nabokov, *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 36
37. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 58.
38. Ibid., p. 63.
39. Tertz, *Strolls with Pushkin,* p. 79.
40. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 3.
41. Vladimir Nabokov, “Russian Writers, Censors, and Readers,” in his *Lectures on Russian Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p. 11.
42. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 117.
43. Ibid., p. 115.
44. Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, p. 12.
45. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 33.
46. Vladimir Nabokov, *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 35, no. 5 (March 31, 1988).
47. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 114.
48. Nabokov, *New York Review of Books*, vol. 35, no. 5.
49. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 16.
50. Ibid., p. 12.
51. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 1.
52. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 4.
53. Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature,* p. 11.
54. Abram Tertz, “Mysli vrasplokh,” in his *Sobranie sochinenii,* 2 vols. (Moscow: SP Start, 1992), p. 321.
55. V.I. Lenin, “In Memory of Herzen” [Pamiati Gertsena] (1912). [Stepan Apresyan’s translation is at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1912/may/08c.htm.—Trans.]
56. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 48.
57. Nabokov, *Pnin,* in *Novels 1955–1962* (New York: Library of America, 1996), p. 332.
58. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 7.
59. Ibid., p. 35.
60. This image of the writer growing cactuses on the windowsill of an individual art I have gratefully borrowed from Grigorii Chkhartishvili (*Pokhvala ravnodushiiu* [Moscow: Znamia—Plius, 1997–98]).
61. Tertz, *Strolls with Pushkin,* p. 76.
62. Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, p.1.
63. Nabokov, *Pnin,* p. 304.
64. Nabokov, *Pnin,* p. 324.
65. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p.10.

66. Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 96.
67. Ibid., p. 94.
68. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 12.
69. Wood, *The Magician's Doubts,* p. 94.
70. Quoted here from *Speak, Memory,* in *Novels and Memoirs 1941–1951* (New York: Library of America, 1996), p. 594.
71. Tertz, *Strolls with Pushkin,* p. 72.
72. The line "All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike"—a paraphrase of the first line of *Anna Karenina:* "All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"—ushers the reader into the conceptual space of *Ada* (1969) [Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle,* in *Novels 1969–1974* (New York: Library of America, 1996), p. 7].
73. *Invitation to a Beheading,* p. 26.
74. Ibid., p. 223.
75. Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister,* in *Novels and Memoirs 1941–1951,* p. 169.
76. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita,* in *Novels 1955–1962*, p. 267.
77. Nabokov, *Ada,* p. 398.
78. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), p. 134.
79. Nabokov, *Ada,* p. 465.
80. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 193.

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