

NABOKOV AND HIS FICTION  
*New Perspectives*

EDITED BY  
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## CHAPTER I

### *Setting his myriad faces in his text: Nabokov's authorial presence revisited*

Gavriel Shapiro

“Setting his myriad faces in his text” is a paraphrase of Vladimir Nabokov’s paraphrase of a passage from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* which Nabokov discusses in his Cornell lectures. In his examination of *Ulysses*, Nabokov demonstrates his fascination with authorial presence, a device known from time immemorial and customarily employed in various creative media, such as literature, fine arts, and cinema.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Nabokov draws his students’ attention to Joyce’s “Man in the Brown Macintosh,” whose identity Nabokov interprets as follows:

Do we know who he is? I think we do. The clue comes in chapter 4 of part two, the scene at the library. Stephen is discussing Shakespeare and affirms that Shakespeare himself is present in his, Shakespeare’s, works. Shakespeare, he says, tensely: “He has hidden his own name, a fair name, William, in the plays, a super here, a clown there, as a painter of old Italy set his face in a dark corner of his canvas . . .” and this is exactly what Joyce has done – *setting his face in a dark corner of this canvas* [emphasis added]. The Man in the Brown Macintosh who passes through the dream of the book is no other than the author himself. (*LL*, 319–20)<sup>2</sup>

As this passage suggests, Nabokov was fascinated with manifestations of authorial presence in the works of his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Shakespeare and Joyce. At the same time, Nabokov tended to encode his own presence as author in his texts, a habit which has long been noted by Nabokov scholars.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I revisit the issue of Nabokov’s self-representation in his work and focus on his more intricate and heretofore unnoticed modes of self-encodement. In addition, I discuss the reasons for Nabokov’s strong propensity toward this device.

## THE SURNAME

Although Nabokov believed that his family name was derived from a legendary Nabok (see *SM*, 52 [ch. 3]), he was also aware that it lent itself to another interpretation more suited to Russian language etymology: *na bok* (“on[to] the side”).<sup>4</sup> Scholars have also noticed that Nabokov often encoded his authorial presence in his works through these “asides.”<sup>5</sup>

Concomitant with the use of these rather obvious “asides” is the writer’s far more surreptitious self-encodement via references to string instruments, such as the violin and viola, which a musician holds *na boku* (“sideways”). We may recall that Nabokov characterizes *Invitation to a Beheading* as “a violin in a void.”<sup>6</sup> In *Lolita*, he includes among the class list of Lolita’s peers the name of Viola Miranda – an anagram of Vladimir N.<sup>7</sup> *Mirando* in Italian means “wonderful.” Thus, “viola miranda” can be seen, first and foremost, as a sign of Nabokov’s high artistic self-esteem. This interpretation is supported in the foreword to the novel, when John Ray, Jr. (of whose “impersonation” of himself Nabokov speaks in the opening of the postscript) calls the reader’s attention to the magic of Humbert Humbert’s “singing violin” (*AnL*, 5 [“Foreword”] and 311, 324).<sup>8</sup>

## FATIDIC DATES

Throughout his life, Nabokov attributed great significance to fatidic associations. The writer admits: “I am the subject of embarrassing qualms of superstition: a number, a dream, a coincidence can affect me obsessively” (*SO*, 177). Nabokov often encodes his authorial presence by means of fatidic dates: commonly his birth day (April 23) or birth year (1899).<sup>9</sup> In such cases, however, he at times introduces them indirectly, through works of literature or art, or historic events contemporaneous with these dates. We come across a rather intricate example of fatidic self-encodement through works of literature in *The Gift*. There, the name of Shahmatov (in Nabokov’s transliteration; the Library of Congress system transliterates the surname as Shakhmatov), a fleeting character in the novel, calls to mind Aleksei Shakhmatov, an eminent linguist, known in particular for his edition of the *Primary Chronicle*. This chronicle is contained in a number of codices, of which the Hypatian codex is among the most ancient and best known. The Hypatian codex is mentioned in

*The Gift*, in connection with Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who compiled *A Tentative Lexicon* for this literary monument.<sup>10</sup> The allusion to the *Primary Chronicle* as well as the mention of the Hypatian codex are significant: the latter is the only existing written source which dates the beginning of Igor's campaign to April 23, 1185. (Nabokov was well aware of this: in the foreword to his translation of *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, he points out that the campaign started on that date.)<sup>11</sup> In this way, Nabokov subtly alludes to his authorial presence by linking his birthday (April 23) to Russia's greatest epic, a work that signifies the dawn of Russian literature.

In addition, with the names of Sha(k)hmatov and his fellow writer Shirin, Nabokov alludes to Pushkin's juvenile epigram which begins: "Ugriumykh troika est' pevtsov / Shirinskii, Shakhovskoi, Shishkov" ("There is a gloomy triumvirate of bards / Shirinsky, Shakhovskoi, Shishkov").<sup>12</sup> The subjects of young Pushkin's ridicule here were clearly his older contemporaries: the literati Sergei Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, Alexander Shakhovskoi, and Alexander Shishkov.<sup>13</sup> Although written in 1815, the epigram was not published until 1899. Thus, Nabokov intricately encodes his presence through his birth year (1899) and at the same time once again fatidically ties himself to Pushkin.<sup>14</sup>

By means of two dates – one (April 23) associating him with *The Song of Igor's Campaign* through his birthday, and the other (1899) through his birth precisely one century apart from Pushkin's (two of the highest pinnacles of Russian literature) – Nabokov apparently viewed himself fatidically destined to become a great Russian writer. Many years later, he evidently saw himself as having been chosen by Providence to translate both *The Song of Igor's Campaign* and *Eugene Onegin* (Pushkin's *magnum opus*) into English; all the more, since he was also acutely aware that he shared his birthday with Shakespeare (see *SM*, 13–14 ["Foreword"]). For example, in Nabokov's untitled poem, which begins: "Here is what we call the moon" ("Vot eto my zovem lunoi," 1942), he mentions Shakespeare and Pushkin side by side.<sup>15</sup> In this way, Nabokov not only claims his literary ancestry, but also encodes his presence through his birth date: April 23 (identical with Shakespeare's), and 1899 (exactly a century after Pushkin's).

Another such birth-year related manifestation of the authorial presence can be found in *The Enchanter*. In this work, Nabokov makes reference to his birth year through Maria, the only character named

in the novella – an important marker indeed.<sup>16</sup> Maria, a maidservant, who is described as “shooing the chicks in”,<sup>17</sup> is reminiscent of Marina, a servant in Anton Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*, who also “walks near the house and calls the chickens.”<sup>18</sup> When asked which fowl she is after, Marina responds: “The speckled hen has walked off with her chicks . . . The crows might steal them” (*ibid.*), which, in the context of Nabokov’s novella, sends out a metaphorical warning about the protagonist. The play, we may recall, premiered at the Moscow Art Theater in 1899.

Nabokov’s authorial presence, this time through a work of art, is evident in *The Gift*, in the reference to Pan (*Gift*, 335 [ch. 5]). The mention of the Greek god of shepherds is an example of complex authorial presence which I shall discuss at the end of this article. Suffice it to say at this point that Pan paronomastically suggests Nabokov’s pen name, Sirin, by way of a syrinx, or Pan-pipe. More important for our purposes here, however, is that Nabokov’s mention of Pan apparently alludes to Mikhail Vrubel’s 1899 painting of the same name. Incidentally, Vrubel is implied earlier in the novel when Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, the author’s *alter*-ish, if not *alter, ego* recalls Yasha Chernyshevski’s “rather pathetic reference to ‘Vrublyov’s frescoes’ – an amusing cross between the two painters (Rublyov and Vrubel)” (*Gift*, 39 [ch. 1]). It is also noteworthy that Nabokov lists Vrubel among his most favorite artists of “the experimental decade that coincided with my boyhood” (*SO*, 170).

Another example of labyrinthine birth-year related self-encoding through a work of art appears in *Invitation to a Beheading*, which Nabokov composed while working on *The Gift*. Here we come across the description of a photohoroscope which M’sieur Pierre concocted for Emmie “by means of retouching and other photographic tricks” (*IB*, 170 [ch. 16]). In particular, it shows the 12-year-old Emmie “already in her bridal veil, the groom at her side was tall and slender, but had the round little face of M’sieur Pierre” (*ibid.*). This description evokes, albeit by way of parody, the self-portrait of Gertrude Käsebier: the turn-of-the-century American pioneer of photography and originator of photomontage. In this self-portrait, very much like in the photohoroscope, Käsebier attached her photographed face and hands to her ink-drawn, dress-clad figure.<sup>19</sup> Through this photohoroscope description, aside from poking fun at photomontage, Nabokov encodes his authorial presence, since Käsebier’s self-portrait dates, in all likelihood, from 1899. This assump-



tion is supported by reference to the artist, thinly disguised, in *The Gift*: Käsebier is the surname of one of the directors of the Berlin law firm Traum, Baum and Käsebier (*Gift*, 189–90 [ch. 3]). Many years later, Nabokov also describes Käsebier's "photographic masterpiece 'Mother and Child' (1897)." <sup>20</sup> Although Nabokov refers to the 1897 photograph, it is quite possible that he alludes, by association, to Käsebier's eponymous and better known work of 1899 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City).

Nabokov's authorial presence through a historical event that took place in his birth year can be found in "The Return of Chorb." In this earlier story, Nabokov points out that Keller, the protagonist's father-in-law, "closely resembl[ed] Oom Paul Kruger". <sup>21</sup> This mention undoubtedly refers to Paul Kruger (1825–1904), the South African statesman and President of Transvaal whose ultimatum provoked the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899. It is noteworthy that this surname also appears in *The Gift*, in a letter in which Fyodor's mother advises him, in preparation for writing his father's biography: "be sure to get into touch with Vasiliy Germanovich Krüger, search him out if he's still in Berlin, they once traveled together" (*Gift*, 97 [ch. 2]).

An important period in Nabokov's life was the time of his study at the Tennishev School; doubly so because the school was founded in 1899, the year of his birth. <sup>22</sup> Therefore, Nabokov occasionally encodes his authorial presence through the names of personalities who are connected to the school in one way or another. One such example appears in *The Gift*. There, we come across a character named Strannolyubski: Chernyshevsky's fictitious biographer whom Nabokov apparently endows with his own opinions and who, therefore, can be viewed as a distinctive manifestation of Nabokov's authorial presence. His actual namesake was Alexander Nikolaevich Strannoliubsky: a notable pedagogue and mathematics teacher whose most outstanding student was the renowned mathematician Sof'ia Kovalevsky. Strannoliubsky was a member of the Tennishev School's Board of Trustees. <sup>23</sup>

In addition to his personal fatidic dates, Nabokov at times encodes his presence through important familial dates, such as the birth years of his dear ones. An example of this kind of fatidic date use can be found in *Invitation to a Beheading*. In the novel's episode of the supper held before the scheduled execution, there is mention of "a white rose that distinctly adorned his [Cincinnatus's] place" (*IB*, 182

[ch. 17]). The most prominent white rose in fine arts is evident in El Greco's *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (Church of Santo Tomé, Toledo), in which it adorns the garment of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Aside from hinting at Cincinnatus's martyrdom, El Greco's masterpiece commands interest in another important respect: the boy in the left-foreground, who is pointing to the white rose, is assumed to be El Greco's son. The handkerchief protruding from his pocket bears the painter's signature followed by the date of the boy's birth.<sup>24</sup> (This is all the more remarkable since artists commonly date their paintings' completion.) Therefore, this likely allusion to El Greco's masterpiece by way of the white rose could be viewed as an intricate manifestation of a very momentous event in Nabokov's life: the birth of *his* son, Dmitri, in 1934; the year in which the writer composed *Invitation to a Beheading*.

#### SIRIN

Nabokov commonly encodes his authorial presence through various meanings attached to Sirin, the pen-name the writer used throughout his "Russian years."<sup>25</sup> Nabokov unveiled some of the meanings of his pen-name in his second interview with Alfred Appel, Jr., in August 1970:

In modern times *sirin* is one of the popular Russian names of the Snowy Owl, the terror of tundra rodents, and is also applied to the handsome Hawk Owl, but in old Russian mythology it is a multicolored bird, with a woman's face and bust, no doubt identical with the "siren," a Greek deity, transporter of souls and teaser of sailors. (*SO*, 161)

Nabokov employs for self-encodement all of the following associations of the name: Sirin as an owl; Sirin as a mythical Russian bird of Paradise; Siren as "a Greek deity." Let us consider some less apparent examples of Nabokov's authorial presence associated with each one of these three meanings of the writer's pen-name to which he relates in the interview.

First, the owl. The owl as a manifestation of authorial presence can be found at the close of the story "A Bad Day." There, it finds expression in the form of "a baby owl" (*Stories*, 276), whose image Nabokov employs as his "signet" with which he "seals" this story. Here, this helpless "baby owl," detached from its nest, seems to convey metaphorically the child-protagonist's feelings of loneliness

and desperation. Another indication of such authorial presence can be found in Nabokov's first English novel in the image of "an owl hooting."<sup>26</sup> The owl- and, therefore, Sirin-marked authorial presence is reinforced in the ensuing paragraph iconically, through Nabokov's first initial, by the mention of "a V-shaped flight of migrating cranes" (*RLSK*, 137; see iconicism discussed below).

It is commonly known that Nabokov frequently encodes his presence through the image of Sirin as a legendary bird of Paradise: a mythical land believed to have been located in the East. Therefore, the mention of "the paradisian Orient" (*Stories*, 338) in the description of medieval maps in the story "Perfection" can be seen as a subtle manifestation of the authorial presence. In another, more intricate example, the caption of one Russian *lubok* tells about Sirin appearing in India, where, to avoid temptation by the bird's singing and to scare it away, the people fire a cannon.<sup>27</sup> This explains why in *Korol', dama, valet*, Martha's dancing partner, Blavdak Vinomori – a full anagram of Vladimir Nabokov – is described as "student s indusskimi glazami" ("a student with Indian eyes"), thereby additionally implying the authorial presence, this time by the allusion to Sirin, the bird of Paradise.<sup>28</sup> (In *King, Queen, Knave*, the English rendition of the novel, this phrase is omitted.)

An intricate example of self-encodement by way of Siren, "a Greek deity," is evident in *The Gift*. There, the reference to Zina as "half-Mnemosyne" (*Gift*, 157 [ch. 3]) points to Memory not only as a crucial aspect of Nabokov's poetics, but also "genealogically" alludes to Nabokov's pen name: Mnemosyne was the mother of the Muses, and the Sirens were believed to be the daughters of Melpomene, the muse of drama, or of Terpsichore, the muse of dance and light verse.<sup>29</sup> The same intricate reference to Nabokov's *nom de plume* is contained perhaps by way of Mnemosyne, the Sirens' "grand-mother," in the appellation of Nabokov's memoirs, *Speak, Memory*, which he initially intended to entitle *Speak, Mnemosyne* (see *SM*, 11 ["Foreword"]).

Another less apparent instance of Nabokov's self-encodement via his *nom de plume*, this time through paronomastic and multilingual wordplay, can be seen through his mention of canaries – *serin* in French. (In English, "serin is a small European finch [*Serinus canarius*], related to the canary."<sup>30</sup>) An example of such typically Nabokovian authorial presence by way of multilingual punning is manifest in *The Gift*. In the episode clearly inspired by Gogol's

“Overcoat,” the shoemaker, who refuses to mend Fyodor’s worn-out shoes, thus prompting him to buy a new pair, bears the surname Kanarienvogel, which means “canary bird” in German. Furthermore, to underscore the meaning of the shoemaker’s last name, the narrator points out that in his (the shoemaker’s) window “there actually was a bird cage, although minus its yellow captive” (*Gift*, 57 [ch. 1]). And toward the end of this long paragraph, the bird is mentioned once again in the title of the painting – “Four Citizens Catching a Canary.” The two “canary” episodes are then tied together by the remark that the bird in the painting was “perhaps the one that had escaped from my shoemaker’s cage” (*Gift*, 58–59 [ch. 1]).

#### ANAGRAMMATIC ENCODING

It has become commonplace throughout Nabokov scholarship to speak of the author’s self-encodement via full or partial anagrammatization of his name.<sup>31</sup> The most oft-quoted examples are the earlier mentioned Blavdak Vinomori, as well as Mr. Vivian Badlook (*King, Queen, Knave*), Vivian Darkbloom (*Lolita*), Vivian Bloodmark (*Speak, Memory*), Baron Klim Avidov (*Ada*), Adam von Librikov (*Transparent Things*), Van Bock (*Strong Opinions*), and V. Irisin (*Look at the Harlequins!*).<sup>32</sup>

As we have already seen, Nabokov tends to manifest his authorial presence through the titles of his works, such as *Speak, Memory*, and at times does it by implanting his name in them anagrammatically. Thus, the original title of Nabokov’s novella *The Enchanter, Volshebnik*, contains Nbkovl, a partial anagram of the writer’s surname and given name. This anagrammatized self-encodement is supported by Nabokov’s self-referential allusion through the meaning of the title which undoubtedly implies the magic art of the novella’s creator and not the repulsive perversity of its pedophile-protagonist. (As we may recall, Nabokov considered enchantment the main component of a writer’s gift when he remarked that “it is the enchanter in him [a writer] that predominates and makes him a major writer” [*LL*, 5].) Similarly, the original title of the story “Cloud, Castle, Lake,” “**Oblako, ozero, bashnia**,”<sup>33</sup> contains Naboko(v), a partial anagram of the writer’s surname. Our supposition that this title implies Nabokov’s authorial presence is reinforced by the trisyllabic nature of its first two words and the disyllabic nature of its third. Despite

the difference in the stress pattern, the title nevertheless apparently alludes to Vladimir Nabokov Sirin.

No less common, however, are cases in which Nabokov employs anagrammatized self-encodement in the text itself, rather than in the title, without resorting to his characters' names. Thus, his poem "In Memory of Gumilev" ("Pamiati Gumileva," 1923): "**G**ordo i **i**asno ty **u**mer, kak **M**uza **u**chila. / **N**yne, **v** tish'i **E**liseiskoi, s **t**oboi govorit o **l**etiashchem / **m**ednom **P**etre **i** o dikikh **v**etrakh **a**frikanskikh – **P**ushkin" (*Stikhi*, 95) ("Proudly and serenely you died, as the Muse had taught [you]. / Now, in the Elysian quiet, Pushkin speaks with you of the flying / bronze Peter and of the wild African winds"), contains the dedication: Pamiati Nikolaia Stepanovicha Gumileva Vladimir Sirin (In memory of Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilev – Vladimir Sirin).<sup>34</sup> Another good example is Nabokov's poem "Ut pictura poesis," which bears an inscription to his former drawing master, the celebrated Mstislav Dobuzhinsky (see *Stikhi*, 181–82). Each of the poem's three stanzas contains the anagrammatized dedication: Mstislavu Dobuzhinskomu Vladimir Nabokov Sirin (To Mstislav Dobuzhinsky – Vladimir Nabokov Sirin).

In these two examples, the title of the first short poem and the inscription in the second poem allude to a possibility of self-encodement coupled with dedication. The authorial presence is less apparent, however, in a "plain" text without such signposts, in which case both contextual and metatextual inklings, no matter how subtle, could assist in its discovery. For example, the final quatrain of the previously mentioned poem "The Skater," "**O**stavil ia **o**din **u**zor **s**lovesnyi, / **m**gnovenno **r**askruzhi<sup>35</sup>shisia **t**svetok. / **I** zavtra **s**neg **b**esshumnyi i **o**tvesnyi / **z**aporoshit **i**sch<sup>36</sup>erchennyi **k**atok" (*Stikhi* 162) ("I left a verbal design / an instantly uncircled flower. / And tomorrow the noiseless and vertical snow / will powder the rink, crossed with lines"), anagrammatically indicates that this "uzor slovesnyi" ("verbal design"), which the skater left on the ice, contains the dedication: Vere Evseevne Slonim Vladimir Nabokov Sirin (To Vera Evseevna Slonim – Vladimir Nabokov Sirin). The poem was written on February 5, 1925, that is a little over two months before Vladimir and Vera were married (April 15).<sup>35</sup> Thus, the date of the poem's composition assists in establishing that Vera Slonim was the addressee of this piece which Nabokov intended as a gift to his bride.

Earlier, I suggested that in *Korol', dama, valet* the phrase describing Martha's dance partner Blavdak Vinomori – an oft-quoted full

anagram of Vladimir Nabokov – as “a student with Indian eyes,” alludes to Sirin by way of the *lubok* caption. This context helps to determine that the whole sentence, which includes this phrase: “Eia **kavaler**, student s **indusskimi** glazami, otryvisto i tikho ei ob’iasnialsia v liubvi” (*Kdv*, 237) (“Her partner, a student with Indian eyes, was abruptly and quietly declaring his love to her”), contains the anagram: Vladimir Nabokov Sirin. Furthermore, in the English rendition of the novel, the corresponding sentence: “Her **partner** in full **erection** against her leg was **declaring his love** in **panting** sentences **from** some lewd **book**”<sup>36</sup> contains the anagram: Vladimir Naboko(v) Sirin.

In addition to self-encodement by way of anagrams in both the titles and bodies of his works, Nabokov, as I previously mentioned, employs his authorial presence as a “sealing” device at their close. To this effect, it should be added, the writer frequently uses anagrams of his name. Thus, the last sentence in *King, Queen, Knave*, both in the Russian original and the English translation, contains, respectively: Vladimir Nabokov Sirin and Vladimir Nabokov Siren. We find the same technique in *Invitation to a Beheading*: the last clause of the novel in both Russian and English contains, again respectively: Vladimir Nabokov Sirin and Vladimir Sirin. And the concluding sentence of *Lolita*’s Russian version, “**I** eto – edinstvennoe bessmertie, **kotoroe** my mozhem s **toboi razdelit**, **moia Lolita**”<sup>37</sup> (“And this is the only immortality which we can share, my Lolita”), incorporates the anagram that indicates the authorial presence: Vladimir Naboko(v) Sirin. This sentence, of course, contains a double entendre: contextually it appears that it is Humbert Humbert who is addressing Lolita, the object of his obsession, but metatextually, it is the author who is bidding farewell to his book and its title-heroine.

#### CHROMESTHESIA

Nabokov also customarily encodes his authorial presence chromesthetically, drawing on his ability to see letters and their representative sounds in colors.<sup>38</sup> Thus, in *King, Queen, Knave* we come across the sentence, “Three rackets, each in a differently colored cloth case – maroon, blue, and mulberry – protruded from under his arm” (*KQK*, 32 [ch. 2]). Interpreted in Nabokov’s “alphabetic rainbow,” the colors of the cloth cases of the tennis rackets – maroon, blue, and mulberry (the berry originally appears as waxen yellowish-white) –

respectively point, by way of the color groups red, blue, and white, to “V,” “S,” and “N” – the initials of the writer’s first name, pen-name, and surname: Vladimir Sirin Nabokov. The sentence does not exist in the Russian original, but the corresponding sentence reads: “On byl **v** prostornom **pal’to**, **na** shee, **spered**i, **puchilos’** **beloe** **kashne**, **iz** **podmyshki** **torchala** **raketa** **v** chekhle, kak muzyka’nyi **instrument**, **v** ruke on nes chemodan**chik**” (*Kdv*, 34) (“He was in an ample overcoat, on his neck a white scarf was bulging out the front, a racket in a cloth case was protruding from his armpit, he was carrying a valise in his hand”), suggesting the author’s same presence, even though anagrammatic – Vladimir Vladimiro(vi)ch Nabokov Sirin.

Nabokov resorts to the analogous technique of self-encodement in *Invitation to a Beheading*. In speaking about Cincinnatus’s world, Nabokov refers to it as “blue” (*IB*, 93 [ch. 8]) (or, in Russian, “sinii mir”),<sup>39</sup> thereby alluding to Sirin through the initial “s,” which belongs to the blue group in Nabokov’s chromesthetic system. This seems all the more plausible if we consider that the phrase “**sinii mir**” contains Sirin, an anagram of Nabokov’s pen name. (Nabokov’s choice of pen name, with its sky-blue initial denoting creativity and poetic inspiration, can be viewed as a self-affirming gesture on the part of the young aspiring writer.)<sup>40</sup>

Nabokov employs a similar device in the episode in which Cincinnatus, presuming that he has escaped from captivity, observes the landscape: “In the rosy depths of the sky, stood a chain of translucent and fiery cloudlets, and there stretched a long violet bank with burning rents along its lower edge” (*IB*, 164 [ch. 15]). Since in the writer’s chromesthetic system “V” belongs to the red group and “S” to the blue, “the rosy depth of the sky” and “fiery cloudlets,” together with the “violet bank,” chromesthetically suggest “V” and “S” (the initials of Nabokov’s first name and pen-name) and should be perceived as a “heavenly sign” that foreshadows Cincinnatus’s salvation by the God-like author. Our assumption is strengthened by the fact that in Russian this passage, “no nad nevidimymi **sadami**, **v** rozovoi **glubine** neba, stoiali tsep’iu prozrachno ogennye **oblachka**, i tianulas’ odna dlinnaia lilovaia tucha s goriashchimi **prorezami** po **nizhnemu** kraiu” (*Pnk*, 164), set within dashes to draw the reader’s special attention, once more anagrammatically contains the writer’s full name: Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov Sirin. An example of a related chromesthetic

device appears in *The Gift*: “Fyodor sat between the novelists Shahmatov and Vladimirov, by a wide window behind which the night gleamed wetly black, with two-toned (the Berlin imagination did not stretch to any more) illuminated signs – ozone-blue and oporto-red” (*Gift*, 320 [ch. 5]), the latter two hues, despite the attention-distracting ironic “Berlin” disclaimer, suggest the authorial presence through the color groups of Nabokov’s initials, “S” and “V.”

Nabokov employs a similar technique, albeit in a more intricate manner, when he encodes his authorial presence by means of red-and-blue objects, such as balloons, balls, and pencils. As we may recall, aside from being anagrammatic (the combination “red-and-blue,” or “**krasno-sinii**” in Russian, contains the word *Sirin*), the phrase chromesthetically points to the initials of Nabokov’s first-name and pen-name: Vladimir *Sirin*. We come across the red and blue balloons in the *kursaal* episode of the penultimate chapter of *Korol', dama, valet*, which marks the earliest *persona* appearance of the author, together with his wife, for his “visits of inspection” as he put in the foreword to the English version of the novel (*KQK*, viii [“Foreword”]). Nabokov’s authorial omnipresence is underscored through Martha’s perspective, when she observes that “v kazhdom byla vsia zala, i liustra, i stoliki, i ona sama” (“each [balloon] contained the entire ballroom, and the chandeliers, and the tables, and herself”) (*Kdv*, 237; *KQK*, 252 [ch. 12]). (In the English rendition of the novel this perception is somewhat blurred by the addition of green balloons.)

A red-and-blue ball is rolling through the pages of *Invitation to a Beheading*. If we take into account the narrator’s emotional involvement in the fate of the protagonist, whom he calls “my poor little Cincinnatus” and whom he occasionally admonishes against oncoming danger by imploring him to “be careful” (*IB*, 65 [ch. 5] and 155 [ch. 14]), we shall realize that this authorial presence, in the context of the novel, suggests once again that the hero will be rescued in the *deus ex machina* fashion by his omnipotent creator.<sup>41</sup>

The authorial presence is also manifest in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, in the narrator’s remark that “[t]he child came up to me and silently showed me a new red-and-blue pencil” (*RLSK*, 140 [ch. 15]). This authorial presence signals the importance of this whole episode: the artistic propensity of the child and his uncle, and specifically, the latter’s ability to write his name upside down, of which the narrator



learns at the time, returns later in the novel and assists him in revealing Madame Lecerf's true identity (cf. *RLSK*, 142 [ch. 15] and 169 [ch. 17]).

#### ICONICISM

Nabokov, who possessed an exceptional visual acuity, displays great fascination with alphabetic iconicism and occasionally thus encodes his authorial presence.<sup>42</sup> We come across a curious example of this in *Invitation to a Beheading*, where the narrator remarks that “Okruzhaiushchie ponimali drug druga s poluslova, – ibo ne bylo u nikh takikh slov, kotorye by konchalis’ kak-nibud’ neozhidanno, na izhitsu, chto-li, obrashchaia’s’ v prashchu ili ptitsu, s udivitel’nymi posledstviiami” (“Those around him understood each other at the first word, since they had no words that would end in an unexpected way, perhaps in some archaic letter, an upsilamba, becoming a bird or a catapult with wondrous consequences”) (*Pnk*, 38; *IB*, 26 [ch. 2]). As D. Barton Johnson has perceptively observed, in the Russian original, “The Church Slavonic *izhitsa*, in its turn derived from the Greek upsilon (υ), has the form and, as Nabokov suggests, physically resembles a slingshot (‘catapult’ in British English) or the head-on view of a bird in flight.”<sup>43</sup> One important component should be added to this observation, however: namely, that the Roman letter “V,” Nabokov’s first initial, iconically resembles the Church Slavonic *izhitsa*. As the novel’s context suggests, the world surrounding Cincinnatus is predictable and *izhitsa*-less, whereas the secret world of the protagonist includes this seldom-occurring letter, the paragon of unexpectedness and, thus, the quintessence of creativity. Its visual resemblance to the author’s Roman initial not only alludes to Nabokov’s authorial presence but also suggests that Cincinnatus’s inner-world is akin to that of his creator. In the English translation, Nabokov substitutes “an upsilamba” for “*izhitsa*,” which not only creates “a blend of the letter upsilon (υ) which indeed visually mimics a flying bird, and lambda which in its lower case form (λ) resembles the inverted ‘Y’-fork of a slingshot”,<sup>44</sup> but also twice points to the authorial presence through the resemblance of these two Greek letters to the writer’s Roman initial.

Another example of Nabokov’s authorial presence encoded through the shape of his first initial can be found in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. It originally appears rather inconspicuously in the

description of the plot-line of Sebastian's novel *Success*, where "[t]he two lines which have finally tapered to the point of meeting are really not the straight lines of a triangle which diverge steadily towards an unknown base, but wavy lines, now running wide apart, now almost touching" (*RLSK*, 95 [ch. 10]). While on the surface this butterfly-wing fluttering description speaks of Sebastian's novel's plot-line (although, on the other hand, lepidoptery is another very telling device of Nabokov's self-encodement), contextually it iconically alludes to the presence of the narrator V., but more importantly, to the presence of the author, his "initialsake."<sup>45</sup> Later in the novel, Nabokov's authorial presence is manifest iconically once again, more overtly, through the image of the writer's first initial in the form of "a V-shaped flight of migrating cranes; their tender moan melting in a turquoise-blue sky" (*RLSK*, 137 [ch. 14]). In addition to indicating the authorial presence, this sentence also expressively conveys the sorrowful atmosphere which surrounds the love-lorn Sebastian of his "Russian years." This sorrowfulness is achieved by means of auditory imagery – the cranes' moan, preceded by "an owl hooting" (*RLSK*, 137 [ch. 14]; cf. our discussion above) – that is coupled with visual imagery – "an abyss of darkness" and the "trunk of a felled tree" [*ibid.*]. It is noteworthy that this whole flashback episode portends the name of Sebastian's last unrequited love: "A **Camberwell** Beauty **skims** past and **settles** on the **kerf**, **fanning** her velvety wings" – Mme Lecerf, flighty like a butterfly, with her first name (Nina) and the time span implied in the last clause by *anni* (Latin "years"). Her previous full married name: Nina Rechnoy (under which she was known to Sebastian), is suggested in the subsequent sentence: "**Back** to town to-morrow, **school beginning on Monday**" (*RLSK*, 137 [ch. 14]). These two examples of anagrammatization underlie the narrator's supposition that "There seems to have been a law of some strange harmony in the placing of a meeting relating to Sebastian's adolescent romance in such close proximity to the echoes of his dark love" (*RLSK*, 137 [ch. 14]).

Several years later, this crane imagery reappears in Nabokov's poem "An Evening of Russian Poetry": "On mellow hills the Greek, as you remember, / fashioned his alphabet from cranes in flight."<sup>46</sup> In this programmatic poem, however, Nabokov imbued the imagery of "cranes in flight" with a new and very telling meaning – *nomen est omen*. This fatidic imagery seems to intimate that Nabokov was destined to become a writer, as his first initial, "V," that resembles

“cranes in flight” from whom “the Greek” “fashioned his alphabet,” lies at the base of verbal creation.

#### COMPLEX ENCODING

I have already pointed out Nabokov's use of complex self-encoding in which he combines various modes of authorial presence. Now, I would like to focus on one of the most striking examples of this kind. It appears in *Pnin*, in the episode of the protagonist's house-warming party. In this scene, we come across a description of Jan van Eyck's *Madonna of Canon van der Paele* (Groeninge Museum, Bruges), seemingly because Laurence Clements, Pnin's university colleague and former landlord, bears a “striking resemblance” to the “ample-jowled, fluff-haloed Canon” (*Pnin*, 154 [ch. 6]). Elsewhere I suggested that Nabokov's mention of Jan van Eyck's masterpiece intricately alludes to Nabokov's authorial presence in the novel. We may recall that the painting contains the image of, as Nabokov put it, “a super, rigged up as St. George” (*ibid.*), in whose armor a reflection of the artist can be seen.<sup>47</sup> In this context, van Eyck's self-portrait as a reflection in the armor of St. George also implies the authorial presence by way of birthday, since Nabokov celebrated his birthday on St. George's Day (April 23).<sup>48</sup> In addition, van Eyck's self-representation could also draw Nabokov's attention as it appears on the side (*na boku*) of St. George's armor. Further, by mentioning van Eyck's painting, Nabokov implies his own authorial presence both chromesthetically and anagrammatically: van Eyck's vermilion hat and hose and a dark blue mantle in the image that is reflected in St. George's armor, could also attract Nabokov, since “V” and “S,” the initials of his first name, Vladimir, and of his pen-name, Sirin, belong, in the writer's chromesthetic system, as I have already mentioned above, to the red and blue groups, while the Russian rendition of the color combination, red-and-blue, *krasno-sinii*, anagrammatically suggests Sirin.

The authorial presence is reinforced in this same episode when Joan Clements, Laurence's wife, ostensibly speaks of some unidentified writer who is clearly Nabokov himself. And Joan's “fetching way” “of interrupting her speech, to punctuate a clause or gather new momentum, by deep hawing pants” is designed to underscore the importance of the pronouncement and to draw the reader's attention to it. As Gennady Barabtarlo has aptly commented, the

sentence itself sums up “the principal feature of *Pnin*’s composition and of Nabokov’s novelistic art in general.”<sup>49</sup> The sentence in its English original, “**But don’t you think** – haw – that what he **is** trying to **do** – haw – **practically in all his novels** – haw – is – haw – to **express** the fantastic recurrence of certain situations?” (*Pnin* 159) contains the anagram of Nabokov’s abbreviated first name, surname, and pen name: Vlad. Naboko(v) Sirin. Rendered into Russian as: “A **vy** ne **dumaete**,<sup>50</sup> **chto** to, **chto** on pytaetsia **sdelat’** **prakticheski** **vo vsekh svoikh romanakh**, eto peredat’ **nebyvaloe povtorenie opredelennykh situatsii**,” the sentence, once again, anagrammatically, but this time in the Russian translation, contains the writer’s first, patronymic, last, and pen names: Vladimir Vladimirov(i)ch Nabokov Sirin.

How to explain, then, Nabokov’s strong predilection for the diverse and deeply-embedded art of self-encodement? First, in his manifestations of authorial presence, Nabokov followed a cultural tradition, well established in various media, such as literature, fine arts, and cinema. Further, Nabokov, who viewed himself as “an anthropomorphic deity”<sup>51</sup> in his fictional universe, would display this notion by leaving “divine signs” that pointed to his authorial appearance. Occasionally, he would reveal his empyrean presence at the close of his works by sealing them with one of its manifestations – a “signet,” as it were. When employing complex self-encodement techniques, Nabokov would resort to the strategy concomitant with that of composing charades and chess problems whose solution commonly necessitates a number of “moves.” *Homo ludens* to the extreme, Nabokov encoded his authorial presence in a great number of ways as a fun game which he enjoyed playing with his “good readers” (*LL*, 1–6), but first and foremost, with “the person he sees in his shaving mirror every morning” (*SO*, 18).<sup>52</sup> Finally, the exploration of Nabokov’s self-encodement yields unique access to the creative laboratory of this incomparable verbal magician whose authorial presence is so multifariously embossed throughout his oeuvre.

#### NOTES

- 1 Thus Cicero reports in his *Tusculanae disputationes* (1.xv.34) that “Phidias inserted his likeness on the shield of Minerva, though not allowed to inscribe his name on it.” See Cicero, *Tusculan disputations*, trans. J. E. King (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 41.

On authorial presence in literature, see Bruce E. Chaddock, "Authorial Presence and the Novel" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1974); and more recently, G. R. Thompson, *The Art of Authorial Presence: Hawthorne's Provincial Tales* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993). On various aspects of the artist's self-representation in fine arts, see Matthias Winner (ed.), *Der Künstler über sich in seinem Werk* (Weinheim: VCH, Acta Humaniora, 1992).

Nabokov, a movie aficionado, was undoubtedly familiar with manifestations of the authorial presence in the works of his coeval, the film director Alfred Hitchcock. Thus, while in the foreword to the *Lolita* screenplay Nabokov humorously refers to his persona as having "the placid profile of a stand-in for Hitchcock" (*Lolita: A Screenplay* [1974; New York: Vintage International, 1997], xii ["Foreword"]) [hereafter *LoScreen*], he briefly enters the scene under his own name in the screenplay itself, subsequently envisioning this episode acted out in the movie (see *ibid.* 127–28 [Act 2]). Such self-representation is very much in keeping with Hitchcock's "walk-on" technique. See Alfred Appel, Jr., *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), esp. 249–52; and Pekka Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics: A Narratological Analysis* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1985), 315–17.

- 2 See also Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics*, 317.
- 3 For the most extensive discussion, including the bibliography on the subject, see Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics*, esp. 314–59. For more recent references to Nabokov's self-encodement, specifically in *Despair*, see Julian W. Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction: Patterns of Self and Other* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 157–60 and Alexander Dolinin, "The Caning of Modernist Profaners: Parody in *Despair*," *Zembla*, online available at <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/iasweb/nabokov/dolin.htm>, 6 n.7.
- 4 Vladimir Nabokov, *Drugie berega* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978), 43. (Hereafter *DB*.) For the meaning of Nabok, see Alexander Lehrman, "An Etymological Footnote to Chapter Three of *Speak, Memory*," *The Nabokovian* 24 (1990): 32–33.
- 5 See Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics*, 327; Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction*, 157; Dolinin, "The Caning of Modernist Profaners," 6, n. 7. Nabokov was also undoubtedly aware that the meaning of his surname corresponds to his position as an émigré writer: an outsider who looks at things *sboku* ("from the [out]side").
- 6 *Invitation to a Beheading*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author (1959; New York: Vintage International, 1989), 7 ("Foreword"). (Hereafter *IB*.)
- 7 *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. and introd. Alfred Appel, Jr. (1970; rev. edn. New York: Vintage International, 1991), 52 (pt. 1, ch. 11). (Hereafter *AnL*.)
- 8 Also see Gavriel Shapiro, "Lolita Class List," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 37 (1996): 327.

- 9 For Nabokov's use of fatidic dates, see Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics*, 327–29, and Priscilla Meyer, *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden: Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 88. On the significance of birthdays in the works of Nabokov's contemporaries, specifically in the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva and Velimir Khlebnikov, see Barbara Lönnqvist, "K znacheniiu dnia rozhdeniia u avangardnykh poetov" in *Readings in Russian Modernism. To Honor Vladimir Fedorovich Markov*, ed. Ronald Vroon and John E. Malmstad (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), 206–11.
- 10 *The Gift*, trans. Michael Scammell in collaboration with the author (1963; New York: Vintage International, 1991), 288 (ch. 4). (Hereafter *Gift*.)
- 11 *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, trans. Vladimir Nabokov (1960; New York: Vintage International, 1989), 1 ("Foreword"). (Hereafter *Song*.)
- 12 Here and henceforth, all unattributed translations are mine.
- 13 Cf. Annelore Engel-Braunschmidt's commentary in Vladimir Nabokov, *Die Gabe* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), 785.
- 14 For more on the subject, see Gavriel Shapiro, "Nabokov's Allusions: Dividedness and Polysemy," *Russian Literature* 43 (1998): 329–38.
- 15 See Vladimir Nabokov, *Stikhi* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), 269. (Hereafter *Stikhi*.)
- 16 Cf. Gennady Barabtarlo, "Those Who Favor Fire (On *The Enchanter*)," *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 24 (1991): 91.
- 17 *The Enchanter*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov (1986; New York: Vintage International, 1991), 61. (Hereafter *En*.)
- 18 Anton Chekhov, *Plays*, trans. Eugene K. Bristow (New York: Norton, 1977), 61.
- 19 See Barbara L. Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier. The Photographer and Her Photographs* (New York: Abrams, 1992), 65, ill. 40.
- 20 *Pnin* (1957; New York: Vintage International, 1989), 95 (ch. 4). (Hereafter *Pnin*.)
- 21 *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (1995; New York: Vintage International, 1997), 147. (Hereafter *Stories*.)
- 22 See Osip Mandel'shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3 vols. (New York: Mezhdunarodnoe Literaturnoe Sodruzhestvo, 1967–71), II:576.
- 23 See L. S. Zhuravleva, *Kniaginia Mariia Tenisheva* (Smolensk: Poligramma, 1994), 17–18.
- 24 See Francisco Calvo Serraller, *El Greco: The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 19.
- 25 For a detailed discussion of Nabokov's pen name and its multilayered connotations, see B. Ostanin, "Ravenstvo, zigzag, trilistnik, ili o trekh rodakh poezii" and "Sirin: 22 + 2," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 23 (1997): 300–02 and 305; A. Fomin, "Sirin: dvadtsat' dva plus odin," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 23 (1997): 302–04; and Gavriel Shapiro, *Delicate Markers: Subtexts in Vladimir Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 9–29.

- 26 *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941; New York: Vintage International, 1992), 137 (ch. 14). (Hereafter *RLSK*.)
  - 27 See Iurii Ovsiannikov, *The Lubok: Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Russian Broad-sides* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1968), ill. 81.
  - 28 Vladimir Nabokov, *Korol', dama, valet* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 237. (Hereafter *Kdu*.)
  - 29 See Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 293 and 421. Nabokov paid tribute to both Muses: he wrote several plays and was not above composing light verse. For the latter, see, for example, *Selected Letters, 1940–1977*, ed. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich / Bruccoli Clark Layman, 1991), 246, 324, and 383. (Hereafter *SL*.) Nabokov mentions Terpsichore in his poem “The Skater” (“Kon’ko-bezhets,” 1925); see *Stikhi*, 162.
  - 30 *Webster’s New Dictionary*, 2nd edn. (Springfield, MA), s.v. “serin”.
  - 31 For the sake of conciseness I will use the term “anagram” to include partial or incomplete anagrams as well as exact anagrams.
  - 32 For the most recent discussion of anagrams of Nabokov’s name, see Laurence Guy, “Les anagrammes cosmopolites de l’auteur dans son oeuvre, ou l’identité renversée de Vladimir Nabokov,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 37 (1996): 337–48.
- On the use of anagrammatic encodement and alphabetic iconicism in Nabokov’s native Russian literature, and specifically in the works of Nabokov’s literary ancestors Pushkin and Gogol, cf., respectively, A. A. Kandinskii-Rybnikov, *Uchenie o schast’e i avtobiografichnost’ v “Povestiakh pokoinogo Ivana Petrovicha Belkina, izdannykh A. P.”* (Moscow: Feniks, 1993); Lauren G. Leighton, *The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); and Gavriel Shapiro, “Nikolai Gogol’ i gordyi gogol’: pisatel’ i ego imia,” *Russian Language Journal* 43, no. 144 (1989): 145–59.
- 33 In several of these passages there is an excess of letters that could be chosen to make up the target name or phrase. I have chosen a representative selection of these letters.
  - 34 “Serenely” as well as “quiet,” synonymous with “serenity,” are perhaps additional, paronomastic, allusions to the authorial presence by way of Sirin/Siren. “The flying bronze Peter” suggests, of course, the Falconet monument of Peter I in St. Petersburg and Pushkin’s poem *The Bronze Horseman*. “African” refers to Pushkin’s ancestry and Gumilev’s journeys to the continent.
  - 35 For the date of the poem’s composition, see D. Barton Johnson with Wayne C. Wilson, “Alphabetic and Chronological Lists of Nabokov’s Poetry,” *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 24 (1991): 365; for the date of the Nabokovs’ wedding, see Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 239–40.
  - 36 *King, Queen, Knave*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the

- author (1968: New York: Vintage International, 1989), 252 (ch. 12). (Hereafter *KQK*.)
- 37 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Phaedra, 1967), 287. (Hereafter *LoR*.)
- 38 See D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels by Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985), 7–46.
- 39 Vladimir Nabokov, *Priglasenie na kazn'* (Ardis: Ann Arbor, 1979), 99. (Hereafter *Pnk*.)
- 40 Cf. Nabokov's own admission: "I saw Sirin with an 's' being a very brilliant blue, a light blue . . . I thought it was a glamorous, colorful word." Cited in Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Part* (New York: Viking, 1977), 149.
- 41 For a detailed discussion of the red-and-blue ball as a manifestation of Nabokov's authorial presence in the novel, see Shapiro, *Delicate Markers*, 67–70.
- 42 On Nabokov's employment of alphabetic iconicism, specifically in *Invitation to a Beheading*, see Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, 28–46 and Shapiro, *Delicate Markers*, 32–55.
- 43 Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, 35. Both images, a bird in flight and *prashcha* ("slingshot" or "catapult") are very telling: the former, of course, connotes freedom, and the latter alludes to King David's victory over Goliath; they foretell, respectively, Cincinnatus's liberation and his triumph over the world around him.
- 44 Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, 35.
- 45 Cf. Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, "The V-Shaped Paradigm: Nabokov and Pynchon," *Cycnos* 12.2 (1995): 173–80.
- 46 *Poems and Problems* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 158. (Hereafter *PP*.)
- 47 For the most recent discussion of Jan van Eyck's self-representation in the painting, see John L. Ward, "Disguised Symbolism as Enactive Symbolism in Van Eyck's Paintings," *Artibus et historiae* 29 (1994): 43–44.
- It is noteworthy that earlier in the novel Nabokov refers to such practice of self-representation, common among Early Netherlandish painters: "In the chrome plating, in the glass of a sun-rimmed headlamp, he [Victor] would see a view of the street and himself comparable to the microcosmic version of a room (with a dorsal view of diminutive people) in that very special and very magical small convex mirror that, half a millennium ago, Van Eyck and Petrus Christus and Memling used to paint into their detailed interiors, behind the sour merchant or the domestic Madonna" (*Pnin* 97–98 [ch. 4]).
- 48 See Gavriel Shapiro, "Two Notes on *Pnin*," *The Nabokovian* 29 (1992): 36–37.
- 49 Gennady Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact: A Guide to Nabokov's Pnin* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1989), 246.
- 50 Cf. the reverse translation of this phrase in, respectively, *Dar* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1975), 327 and *Gift*, 293 (ch. 4).



- 51 *Bend Sinister* (1947; New York: Vintage International, 1990), xviii (“Introduction”). (Hereafter *BS*.)
- 52 On Nabokov as *homo ludens*, see A. M. Liuksemburg and G. F. Rakhimkulova, *Magistr igry Vivian Van Bok (Igra slov v proze Vladimira Nabokova v svete teorii kalambura)* (Rostov-on-Don: Rostovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1996).