IMAGE OF THE ARTIST IN TWO OF NABOKOV'S RUSSIAN NOVELS

THE IMAGE OF THE ARTIST IN TWO OF NABOKOV'S RUSSIAN NOVELS

by
Terry Patrick Anderson

A thesis submitted for the
degree of Master of Arts

An abstract

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov (1899-) has been one of the least understood and consequently most poorly acknowledged major writers of the twentieth century. Critics trained on the tenets of formalist criticism have not known what to make of works containing no didactic import. They have consequently been unsuccessful in discerning Nabokov's primary theme. This thesis attempts to refute the basis of contemporary criticism and show that Nabokov's fiction is outstanding art. Of the many themes in his work, one feels that the image of the artist is the most significant. An attempt had been made to explicate this theme in two of his Russian novels. Separate chapters deal with biographical information, Nabokov's artistic aim, and his artifice. These chapters serve to explain the author's choice of theme, as well as form a basis for a better understanding of his art and the presentation of his theme in the two chosen novels.

Department of Russian and Slavic Studies
McGill University
1971

THE IMAGE OF THE ARTIST IN TWO OF NABOKOV'S RUSSIAN NOVELS

A thesis

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

by

Terry Patrick Anderson

Department of Russian and Slavic Studies

McGill University

1971

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The writer was born on April 20, 1947 in Jersey City, New Jersey, in the United States of America. He received his elementary and secondary education in the Ithaca Public School System, Ithaca, New York, where he began his studies of Russian language and literature. In June of 1969 he received his Bachelor of Science degree from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. The major concentration was Russian language and literature with a minor in German literature.

He entered the graduate section of the Department of Russian and Slavic Studies at McGill University in September 1969, where he was both a student and a graduate Teaching Assistant from 1969-1971.

PREFACE

The system of transliteration employed in this study is the one recommended by the Slavic Review (formerly, the American Slavic and East European Review.) It must therefore be noted that the names of Russian literary publications, publishing-houses, and people appear in their more accurate transliterated form, and not according to their conventional spelling. Hence, "Dostoevsky" is rendered "Dostoevskij" and "Gogol" as "Gogol'."

A concession is made to conventional practice, however, in the rendering of Nabokov's own name as well as the names of people and characters appearing in his memoirs and novels. It has been decided to retain the spelling Nabokov used in his writing and translations. In addition, the Russian word-concept for "philistinism" is rendered as "poshlust'" and not "pošlost'." Also, the Chekhov Publishing House of New York is rendered as such in the text, and not as Čekhov Publishing House. In the references it appears as "Izd. im. Čekhova."

The transliterated names of literary publications is

followed by a translation in parentheses in both the text and the references. The names of publishing-houses, however, remain more accurately untranslated in both text and references.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Professors J.G. Nicholson and A.V. Fodor for their invaluable assistance and guidance throughout the writing of this thesis.

A special note of appreciation must be extended to Professor N.V. Pervushin for both his much-needed counsel and friendly interest and encouragement during the writing of this study.

I also wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Kevin M. Windle and Mr. Gennady J. Adrianow for their interest and encouragement, and also to Miss Patricia M. Fortin for her patience and reliability as both a friend and typist.

I must also thank the Department of Russian and Slavic Studies of McGill University for providing financial assistance in the form of a Graduate Teaching Assistantship for the years 1969-1971.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"Across the dark sky of exile, Sirin passed, ..., like a meteor, and disappeared, leaving nothing much else behind him than a vague sense of uneasiness."

(Speak, Memory, p. 288)

INTRODUCTION

The story of Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov's life as a future artist began on the twenty-third day of April (New Style) in the year 1899. He was born into an artistic and wealthy St. Petersburg family which nurtured his aesthetic sensibilities throughout his childhood and adolescence. As is the case with any writer, both personal and social circumstances play a decisive role in establishing artistic conceptions. This is especially so with Nabokov, for there is manifested in his literary art the distinct influence of his childhood environment. Therefore it is felt that any attempt to analyze Nabokov's writings necessitates at least a brief consideration of those circumstances in which he was raised.

Unlike the biography of many Russian émigré writers, this sketch of Nabokov's life will not concern itself so much with the political aspect of his life, as with the environmental and hereditary influences which later were so instrumental in cultivating and distinguishing his literary art. Admittedly, Nabokov's life has been tainted and

strongly influenced by what, many times, were malfeasant political incidents. For example, Nabokov confesses to having been forced to flee Berlin for Paris in 1938 because of the increasing terrorism of the Nazis and the resultant fear for his Jewish-Russian wife and their small child. One can also attribute his wandering throughout European Russia, Europe, and the United States to the political and social upheaval caused by the birth of the Soviet State. But these political episodes do not constitute the real or the important story of Nabokov's life. It is felt that his story is not one of political asylum, but instead a relentless quest for the lost lyrical atmosphere of his childhood, a search for that bygone poetic environment which aroused his sentience and thereby generated a feeling of security and moments of empyreal bliss.

Ever since his emigration in 1919 Nabokov has succeeded in transcending his finite consciousness and has recreated that ecstatic milieu of his childhood through his literary art. Consequently, as a result of his conviction that the only true reality is a life in art, one finds the most basic and recurring image throughout Nabokov's writings to be that of the image of the artist who embodies virtually the same ideals and pursuit in life that his creator does. He too

finds that the only manner in which to escape the sterile, void, and artless world of poshlust'[1] is to embrace some form of art and escape into the world of aesthetics.

The purpose of this study will be to discern and explicate the image of the artist as seen in two of Nabokov's most outstanding Russian novels: Zaščita Lužina (The Defense), and Priglašenie na kazn' (Invitation to a Beheading). The first two chapters of this work contain biographical information. It is felt that this approach will serve as the most explicit possible introduction to the author, as well as form a basis for understanding his writings.

FOOTNOTES

[1] According to the system of transliteration suggested by the Slavic Review, the Russian word-concept for "philistinism" would be rendered as "pošlost'." Conventional spelling usually renders it as "poshlost'," but for unknown reasons Nabokov prefers the spelling "poshlust'."

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

The years 1899 to 1919 of Nabokov's life were spent primarily at his father's large country estate near St. Petersburg and at various summer resorts. And although cultural excursions beyond the Russian border were not frequent, the occurrence of such adventures can be considered as having been almost unnecessary. The wealth of cultural and intellectual stimuli which surrounded young Vladimir in the multitude of family servants (they numbered fifty), nurses, governesses, tutors, relatives, and family "hangeroners" [sic], provided as thorough an educational environment as could be desired. As he notes so nostalgically and lyrically in his memoirs, Speak, Memory[1], Nabokov grew up in aristocratic Russian surroundings which were made to sparkle with the "comfortable products of Anglo-Saxon civilization":

> All sorts of snug, mellow things came in a steady procession from the English Shop on Nevsky Avenue: fruitcakes, smelling salts, playing cards, picture puzzles, striped blazers, talcum-white tennis balls.[2]

In fact, aside from Russian, young Vladimir learned English

in his St. Petersburg home. He recalls in his memoirs:

> I learned to read English before I could read Russian. My first English friends were four simple souls in my grammar -- Ben, Dan, Sam, and Ned.[3]

The fact that Nabokov grew up under the influence of two diverse cultures and learned to read and write two foreign languages (English and French) before he had so mastered his native language, has rather special significance in his life. First, it instilled in him a sense of poly-culturalism and therefore provided him with a basis for the ultimate cultural transition which he had to make from the high aristocratic Russian society of St. Petersburg, Russia, to the small-town milieu of a town like Ithaca, New York, in the United States. Second, and perhaps more significant, it was a decisive factor in his career as a writer. By late 1939, having spent nearly twenty years writing in exile and producing eight full-length novels in Russian, as well as numerous poems, plays, and short stories, Nabokov realized that to continue to write in Russian, whether it be about Russian émigré life, or life in Russia before or after the Revolution, would be a misuse of his literary talent. Also, he never received more than a few hundred dollars a year for any of his prose or poetry works since his audience was so

small. Nabokov consequently made the decision to write in English, using as a background for his fiction that milieu which he knew second-best, Western culture. Had Nabokov not been raised in circumstances that enabled him to learn about Western culture as well as its predominate languages, his career as a writer would in all probability have ended when he left the shores of France for America in 1940.

The effect of Nabokov's bi-cultural childhood is especially marked in his English prose in that, to the amazement of almost all of his English-language readers, he writes English prose with more style and command than most native speakers. In fact, it has been said that the only person in this century or the last to even approach Nabokov's mastery of the English language has been James Joyce.[4] Whether or not this is a reasonable evaluation is controversial. One thing is certain, however, Nabokov writes in English and he writes well.

Nabokov's bi-cultural childhood was influential in helping him establish a most successful literary career in America during his adult years, but the factors which initially aroused and influenced his creative talents were the literary tradition of his heritage and the artistic nature of his immediate family. In his memoirs Nabokov rather

facetiously lists an impressive number of eccentric social, military, legal, and literary misfits, many of whom appear as momentous footnotes on the pages of Russian history and arts. As an example, Nabokov mentions Ivan Aleksandrovich Nabokov, brother of Vladimir's great grandfather, who was:

> ... in his old age, commander of the Peter-and-Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg where (in 1848) one of his prisoners was the writer Dostoevsky, author of The Double, etc., to whom the kind general lent books. Considerably more important, however, is the fact that he was married to Ekaterina Pushchin, sister of Ivan Pushchin, Pushkin's schoolmate and close friend. Careful, printers: two "chin"'s and one "kin."[5]

Nabokov traces his literary heritage back to that initial spark of creative proclivity and finds that it was with his remotest ancestors and "the first caveman who painted a mammoth."[6] From there a Tatar prince named "Nabok Murza," whose artistic achievements are as yet unknown, carried on the tradition. After that there follows a "long line of German barons" who upheld artistic endeavours to a more recent collection of wealthy landowners and military men. Nabokov claims "gleeful kinship" with one man in particular, his mother's maternal grandfather, Nikolai Illarionovich Kozlov. Kozlov was:

> [the] first President of the Russian Academy of Medicine and was the author of such delightfully entitled papers as 'On the Development of the Idea of Disease' or 'On the Coarctation of the Jugular Foramen in the Insane'.[7]

Another notable self-styled artist was Vladimir's paternal uncle, Konstantin Nabokov. His life is described as "not particularly eventful," with the exception of two published works: The Ordeal of the Diplomat (1921), and an English version of Pushkin's Boris Godunov, and his portrayal:

> ... goatee and all (together with Count Witte, the two Japanese delegates and a benevolent Theodore Roosevelt), in a mural of the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty on the left side of the main entrance hall of the American Museum of Natural History....[8]

The two ancestors for whom Vladimir holds a special place in his memories are Karl Heinrich Graun, a relative on his father's side of the family, and Dimitri Nabokov, his paternal grandfather. Graun was an eighteenth century composer and fine operatic tenor. He impresses Nabokov because of his eccentric act of secretly composing and singing in place of the originals, various tenor parts in a Schurmann opera which in its original composition he did not find to his taste.

His grandfather, Dimitri Nabokov, was a rather fiery individual who served the tzarist government as State Minister of Justice during the years 1878 to 1885. Vladimir gleefully reminisces about him because as a liberal reformist, Dimitri Nabokov took special delight in making irreverent gestures toward the symbols of courtly ritual and tradition.

Although Nabokov jocosely reminisces about his ancestors and the seemingly remote possibility of their having influenced his writings, one suspects Nabokov is pulling our legs when he reflects:

> Neither in environment nor in heredity can I find the exact instrument that fashioned me, the anonymous roller that pressed upon my life a certain intricate watermark whose unique design becomes visible when the lamp of art is made to shine through life's foolscap.[9]

A close reading of Speak, Memory reveals that Nabokov does indeed experience both joy and pride at having such an eccentric and iconoclastic lineage. Nabokov's temperament clearly responds to the humorous titles of his ancestors' writings and the wry humor implicit in his whole family's insistence upon the breach of decorum. This family characteristic has influenced Nabokov to the extent that he has carried the iconoclastic tradition over into the structural, stylistic, and thematic aspects of his

writings. The influence has been so strong that many critics have condemned his works as being literary eccentricities.

The person who perhaps exerted the greatest single influence on Nabokov's life was his mother, Elena Ivanovna Nabokov, born Rukavishnikov. Without her insight into human nature, her love for the beauties of nature and the glorious moments of the past, as well as her understanding and encouragement of her son's sentient nature, Nabokov might not be the successful writer he is today.

Mme. Nabokov was instrumental in helping her son understand, appreciate, and develop three rather peculiar, but hardly abnormal, physiological phenomena which he experienced periodically: aural and visual hallucinations, praedormitary visions, and "colored hearing." Vladimir viewed these phenomena "with interest, with amusement, seldom with admiration or disgust."[10] He soon discovered that his mother too was "gifted" with these phenomena and consequently learned to more fully appreciate his extraordinary abilities. In Speak, Memory he joyously reflects:

> My mother did everything to encourage the general sensitiveness I had to visual stimulation. How many were the aquarelles she painted for me; what a revelation it was when she showed me the lilac tree that grows out of mixed blue and red.[11]

Perhaps his mother's greatest gift to her son was her intense love for the past and memories:

> As if feeling that in a few years the tangible parts of her life would perish, she cultivated extraordinary consciousness of the various time marks distributed throughout our country place. She cherished her own past with the same retrospective fever that I do now her image and my past. Thus, in a way, I inherited an exquisite simulacrum -- the beauty of intangible property, unreal estate -- and this proved a splendid training for the endurance of her losses.[12]

One might add that this special gift proved not only invaluable to Nabokov's mother, but also splendid training for him as a future writer and creator of imaginary worlds. One may conclude that Nabokov's mother provided an abiding influence in helping him understand, appreciate, develop, and finally coordinate sight, sound, memory, and imagination in his art. These factors eventually came to serve as the building blocks of Nabokov's writings and life in art.

The last really influential figure in Nabokov's childhood to be considered was his maternal uncle, Vasiliy Ivanovich Rukavishnikov, whom young Vladimir fondly referred to as "Uncle Ruka." In the brief description of him given in Speak, Memory, Nabokov portrays him as an eccentric, and wealthy man with an extremely poetic soul:

> He wrote music himself, of the sweet rippling sort, and French verse, curiously scanable as English or Russian iambics, and marked by a princely disregard for the comforts of the mute e's. He was extremely good at poker.[13]

Travelling widely throughout Europe during the winter, Uncle Ruka would return to his estate near St. Petersburg in the late spring, usually with a gift for young Vladimir. The most indicative reminiscence of Uncle Ruka's poetic soul found in the memoirs was an incident whereby Uncle Ruka lead Vladimir to a nearby tree with the promise of a marvelous gift. He then plucked a leaf and offered it to his nephew saying: "Pour mon neveu, la chose la plus belle au monde---une feuille verte."[14] Aside from the poetic influence of his uncle on Vladimir's literary style, Uncle Ruka was responsible for cultivating two obsessions in his nephew which have also affected his writings: an overwhelming interest in "cryptogrammatic" puzzles and a passion for the past. Nabokov's prose and poetry is a maze of lyrical reminiscences and obscure literary allusions.

On Nabokov's fifteenth nameday, Uncle Ruka called him aside and informed him that he was being made heir to his uncle's fortune: "And now you may go, l'audience est finie. Je n'ai plus rien à vous dire."[15]

In 1916 Uncle Ruka died and left Vladimir a two thousand acre estate and "what would amount nowadays to a couple of million dollars."[16] In 1917 the Bolsheviks began to take control of Russia, and in 1919 the Nabokov family was forced to flee Russia forever. Several years later the Soviet state absorbed the Nabokov inheritance and properties. And as an indication of the significance of his childhood on his life in art, Nabokov claims in his memoirs that his:

> ... old (since 1917) quarrel with Soviet dictatorship is wholly unrelated to the question of property. My contempt for the émigré who 'hates the Reds' because they 'stole' his money and land is complete. The nostalgia I have been cherishing all these years is a hypertrophied sense of lost childhood, not sorrow for lost banknotes.[17]

These were the influential people and environment in Nabokov's life during his first twenty years. More attention has been given to this segment of his life than will be found for the remaining fifty-one years; the reasons for this seem self-evident. The only obtainable information about Nabokov's life is that which is found in a few interviews, which are for the most part inane,[18] and in his memoirs. These memoirs, however, are primarily concerned with reminiscences of his early childhood. And although there are a few reflective sketches of his years in exile,

they are secondary to the sections on childhood. As specifically concerns the years from 1940 to the present, Nabokov says in Speak, Memory that someday he hopes to write:

> a 'Speak on, Memory,' covering the years 1940-60 in America: the evaporation of certain volatiles and the melting of certain metals are still going on in my coils and crucibles.[19]

The final and most important reason for concentrating on these twenty years is that it was at this time that Nabokov the Artist was born. Although he claims his college days at Cambridge were "the story of my trying to become a Russian writer...,"[20] the years which should be considered as the most crucial stage of his general literary development are those of his childhood and early adolescence. And although he published only three volumes of poetry in these twenty years (all of them privately printed), the seemingly boundless proliferation that is associated with Nabokov during the following fifty-one years might not have been possible without these formative years.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The full title is: Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966.

[2] Vladimir Nabokov, Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), p. 79.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Page Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics: The Arts of Vladimir Nabokov (New York: The Dial Press, 1966), p. 44.

[5] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 53.

[6] Ibid., p. 52.

[7] Ibid., p. 65.

[8] Ibid., p. 61.

[9] Ibid., p. 25.

[10] Ibid., p. 33.

[11] Ibid., p. 36.

[12] Ibid., p. 40.

[13] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[14] Ibid., p. 69.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 72.

[17] Ibid., p. 73.

[18] Two such examples are: "Playboy Interview: Vladimir Nabokov." Playboy, January, 1964, pp. 35-45, and "Nabokov on Nabokov and Things." The New York Times Book Review, May 12, 1968, pp. 4-5, 51-52.

[19] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 14.

[20] Ibid., p. 261.

CHAPTER II

1919-1970

> In March of 1919, the Reds broke through in northern Crimea, and from various ports a tumultuous evacuation of anti-Bolshevik groups began. Over a glassy sea in the bay of Sebastopol, under wild machine-gun fire from the shore.. my family and I set out for Constantinople and Pireaus on a small and shoddy Greek ship [Hope] carrying a cargo of dried fruit. I remember trying to concentrate, as we were zig-zagging out of the bay, on a game of chess with my father - one of the knights had lost its head, and a poker chip replaced a missing rook - [1]

Thus ended the first twenty years of life for Vladimir Nabokov and the last time he would ever see Russia. The Nabokov family ultimately landed in London where they remained together until Vladimir's father left for Berlin to co-edit a Russian émigré newspaper, Rul' (The Rudder).[2] It was decided prior to their father's departure that Vladimir and his younger brother, Dimitri, would go to Cambridge on scholarships which Nabokov himself admits were "awarded more in atonement for political tribulations than an acknowledgement of intellectual merit."[3] So, Dimitri went to Christ College and Vladimir to Trinity.

Nabokov spent the first three years of his exile

(1919-1922) in Cambridge, before he moved to Berlin in late 1922. These years at Trinity College are significant, for they were the formative years of his career as a mature writer.

In Cambridge, on narrow Trinity Lane, "a rather sad little street, with almost no traffic, but with a long, lurid past beginning in the sixteenth century when it used to be Findsilver Lane."[4] Nabokov occupied lodgings which he considered as "squalid in comparison with my remote and by now nonexistent home."[5] As noted in this last fragmentary quotation, Nabokov's college days were characterized primarily by feelings of nostalgia. Aside from the usual student sufferings of cold weather, long nights of study, the pressures of conforming to college tradition, practical jokes, girls, political discussions, and especially athletic workouts, young Nabokov spent a great deal of time reflecting on all of those things which he had missed in Russia, and which he would not have neglected to note and treasure had he suspected before that his life was to veer in such a violent way. He personifies Russia when describing his nostalgia:

> Emotionally, I was in the position of a man who, having just lost a fond kinswoman, realized - too late - that through some laziness of the routine-drugged human soul, he had neither troubled to know her as fully as she deserved, nor had shown her in full the marks of his not quite conscious then,

but now unrelieved, affection.[6]

And although Nabokov claimed at first that Cambridge and all its famed features were of no consequence in themselves, but existed merely to frame and support his rich nostalgia, he later confesses it was Cambridge "that supplied not only the casual frame, but also the very color and inner rhythms for [his] very special Russian thoughts."[7] It was because of the atmosphere of Cambridge that Nabokov finally decided to turn away from his frivolous political activities and devote himself to literature.

Although admitting to never once having visited the University Library in three years at Trinity, Nabokov still devoured literature. He claims having thought of Milton, Marvell, and Marlowe, "with more than a tourist's thrill," but it was Russian literature which Nabokov most enjoyed. It was at this time that he was becoming a Russian writer. One day while at a bookstall in the Market Place, he came across a secondhand copy of Dahl's Interpretative Dictionary of the Living Russian Language in four volumes. In hopes of raising the stylistic level of his Russian prose to that of his English writing, as well as in fear of losing or corrupting through alien influence the only thing he had salvaged from Russia, her language, Nabokov purchased his find and "resolved

to read at least ten pages per day."[8]

In 1922 Nabokov graduated from Trinity with an Honours degree in European and Slavic literature. Also in 1922, Nabokov's father was assassinated by two Russian émigré right-wing extremists named Šabelskij and Taboritskij during a political meeting in the Berlin Philharmonic Hall; he died defending the intended victim, Pavel Miljukov.[9]

After graduation, Nabokov took up residence in Berlin. In 1923 he made the acquaintance of Vera Evseevna Slonim and two years later they were married. During his years in Berlin, Nabokov earned his living primarily through private instruction in French, English and tennis; he also published a great number of poems, reviews, chess problems, and short stories in the émigré Russian newspaper which his father once had co-edited - Rul' (The Rudder). The year 1926 marked a momentous occasion - the appearance of Nabokov's first full-length novel, Mašen'ka. This work was the first of eight such full-length novels, in addition to one half-finished work and a long short-story, all written in Russian under the pseudonym Sirin in Berlin between 1922-1937.[10] For the sake of chronological convenience, these works are generally referred to as Nabokov's Russian novels. The publication history of these writings is considered below.

The first novel, entitled Mašen'ka, was originally published by Slovo[11] in Berlin in 1926. Not until January 1970 was the work translated without revisions into English as Mary by Michael Glenny.[12] Translation, of course, was done under the supervision of the author.

Nabokov's second novel was Korol', dama, valet". It was written in 1927-28 and published by Slovo of Berlin in 1928. In late May of 1968 an English translation of this work appeared under the title King, Queen, Knave.[13] The work was translated by Dmitri Nabokov (the author's son) in collaboration with the author. Nabokov had earlier considered Korol', dama, valet" as a loosely coordinated, "mediocre" novel (in his memoirs he speaks of both Mašen'ka and Korol', dama, valet" as being "to my taste mediocre.")[14] In the foreword to the English rendition, however, he refers to this "finished" novel in the following manner: "Of all my novels, this bright brute is the gayest."[15] This turnabout on Nabokov's part was the result of extensive textual revisions of the original Russian version which have resulted in a much longer and more substantial work in its final edition. The novel can be considered almost completely new and different from the Russian original, even though the story line is much the same. This is because the characters have been altered, the ending has been changed,

there have been deletions or additions or words, sentences, paragraphs, and even whole pages; and in general the novel has been transposed into a well coordinated whole.[16]

The third novel, Zaščita Lužina, was written in 1927-28, and appeared in serialized form in the Parisian Russian émigré journal, Sovremennye zapiski, volumes 40-42, in the years 1929-30. It finally came out in book form (paperback) in 1938-39 by Slovo of Berlin. In 1964 Zaščita Lužina appeared in English translation as The Defense with no great revisions. The job of translating the novel was entrusted to someone other than the author;[17] the result was a relatively literal translation.

Podvig" was the fourth novel. It was written in 1930-31, appeared serially in Sovremennye zapiski, volumes 45-48, in 1931-32, and finally was published in book form by Parabola of Berlin in 1932.[18] As of January 1971, this remains the only Russian novel of Nabokov's which has not been translated into English. There is some conjecture at this time, however, that this work has been translated in full. This suspicion is heightened by information obtained from the dust-cover on the new translation of Mašen'ka put out by McGraw-Hill in October of 1970.[19] So far, however, it has not been possible to trace this translation under its supposed translated title Podvig.

In 1932 Nabokov wrote Kamera Obskura. This short novel appeared serially in Sovremennye zapiski in 1932-33 in volumes 49-52, and also in book form in 1932 by Parabola of Berlin. In 1936 an English translation of the work appeared in London under the title Camera Obscura. It should be noted that this was the first of Nabokov's novels to be translated into English. The job of translating, which was completed without revisions, was done by W. Roy and published in London. In late 1937, however, Nabokov apparently became dissatisfied with Camera Obscura as well as with the Russian original and consequently reworked and reissued the novel in 1938 under the title Laughter in the Dark. It was published by Bobbs-Merrill in Indianapolis and New York.

The sixth Russian novel, Otčajanie, was written in 1932 and appeared serially in volumes 54-56 in Sovremennye zapiski in 1934. It was published in book form in 1936 by Petropolis of Berlin.[20] Nabokov translated the novel himself into English in 1937 and published it the same year under the title Despair in London. The translation was without revisions. This particular version appeared serially in Playboy, December 1965 - April 1966. Prior to the book's publication by G.P. Putnam's Sons, however, Nabokov chose to revise and enlarge the text.

Priglašenie na kazn' was the seventh Russian novel. Written in 1935-37, it was published serially in volumes 58-60 of Sovremennye zapiski in 1935-36, and was finally printed in book form in 1938 simultaneously by Dom Knigi[21] of Paris and Petropolis of Berlin. Dmitri Nabokov translated this novel into English in 1959 under the title Invitation to a Beheading. Its translation remained true to the original Russian version.

The last complete Russian novel written by Nabokov was entitled Dar. It was written in 1935-37, appeared serially in Sovremennye zapiski, volumes 63-67, in 1937-38, but was not published in book form until 1952 in New York (in Russian) by the Chekhov Publishing House.[22] The rationale for such a late publishing date was that the initial serialized version of Dar was expurgated by the editors of Sovremennye zapiski (somewhat of a shock to Nabokov considering the liberal views of this journal) because it seemingly contained an unsympathetic, even slanderous biography of the nineteenth century radical critic, Nikolaj Černyševskij. The first complete edition was the one published by the Chekhov Publishing House in 1952. The novel was translated into English in 1963 by Michael Scammel, Vladimir and Dmitri Nabokov. The present version appears without revisions of the original Russian text.

Nabokov began a ninth Russian novel entitled Solus Rex, but published only two small sections of it. The first segment

of it appeared in 1940 in the last issue of Sovremennye zapiski, volume 70 (pp. 5-36). A second fragment appeared as a short story, "Ultima Thule," in Nabokov's collection of stories Vesna v Fial'te i drugie rasskazy (Spring in Fialta and Other Stories), on pages 271-313. This collection was published in 1956 in New York by the Chekhov Publishing House.

One final consideration is Sogljadataj. "This little novel," as Nabokov refers to it in the English language translation, The Eye,[23] originally appeared as the title story of a collection of short stories published in 1938 by Russkija Zapiski.[24] And although the English language edition is considered a separate novel, originally in the Russian it was considered by its author as only a long short-story and should be so classified when referring specifically to the Russian novels.

In 1937 the political situation in Berlin became intolerable because of the rise of the Nazis. Just as with the rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia, Nabokov, his wife, and their small son Dmitri this time too sought political asylum from terrorist activities; they emigrated to Paris. In 1940, when the Nazis overran France, the Nabokovs fled Europe, emigrated to the

United States and applied for citizenship.

In America Nabokov began his academic career at Harvard University as a research fellow in the Museum of Comparative Zoology (1942-48). It seems that his life-long obsession with nature, and in particular, lepidopterology, had turned into something more than a hobby. While working at Harvard, Nabokov also taught Russian grammar and literature three days a week at nearby Wellsley College.

From 1948 to 1959 Nabokov taught Russian and European literature at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. His lectures were so popular with Cornellians, that when he finally resigned his position due to the success of Lolita (he describes his salary at Cornell as being not exactly "princely."),[25] as well as a desire to devote himself entirely to writing, the course enrollment numbered well over four hundred - rather a sizeable class in those days, even for a big university.

The years in America, 1940-1960, are commonly referred to by Nabokov enthusiasts as his "American period;" during this time he wrote five novels in English. They include: The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, which was actually begun in Paris in 1938, but completed in America and published by New Directions in 1941; Bend Sinister, first published by New Directions in

1941; Pnin, pieces of which appeared as early as 1953 in the New Yorker, but which was not published as a novel until 1957 by Doubleday and Company; Lolita, first issued in 1955 in Paris in an Olympic Press edition and finally published in America in 1958 by G.P. Putnam's Sons; and Pale Fire, brought out by G.P. Putnam's Sons in 1962.

In 1960 Nabokov and his wife, Vera, travelled to Montreux, Switzerland, to be nearer their son Dmitri, who was pursuing a career in opera in Italy. There he and his wife occupy a sixth-floor apartment overlooking Lake Geneva in the Palace Hotel. He remarks about his surroundings:

> This is a rosy and opulent place for our exile. It's fitting for a Russian writer to settle in this region -- Tolstoy came here as a youth, Dostoevsky and Chekhov visited, and Gogol began his Dead Souls nearby.[26]

If any contemporary Russian writer merits mention among Russia's outstanding writers of the past, it is Vladimir Nabokov. In 1966 he began his sixth English novel, Ada. May 1969 saw the completion of this work and its publication by McGraw-Hill. It is considered by many readers to be his best and most abstruse novel.

These are the full length novels of Vladimir V. Nabokov. In addition to these during his fifty-six years of writing,

beginning with the composition of his first poem in St. Petersburg in 1914, Nabokov has proved himself to be most prolific in many genres in Russian, English and even French. He has been declared as the most prolific writer of this century, or the last, for that matter. Frequent comparisons of Nabokov are made with the Polish-born author, Joseph Conrad. Such a comparison denies Nabokov his signal achievement. Conrad was thirty when he began to write in English, unlike the middle-aged Nabokov, and Conrad had written nothing in his native language, let alone eight full length novels, a novelette, and a half-finished novel. It has also been generally noted that not since Henry James has an American writer created such a formidable corpus of work. One might even consider Nabokov's position in literary history as unique. R.H.W. Dillard claims:

> [Nabokov] has no double in recorded literary history. Along with Boris Pasternak he is one of the two greatest Russian novelists of his time, and he is, along with William Faulkner, one of the two greatest American novelists of that same time. And his novels are genuinely Russian and as genuinely American.[27]

Whether one classifies Nabokov as a Russian writer or as an American writer, "there are probably not ten people who have read even eighty percent of what Nabokov has written."[28]

Even the extensive 1963 bibliography of Nabokov's writings printed privately for the author's friends by his German publisher, Rowohlt,[29] was considered until recently by Nabokov enthusiasts as "complete." In his exhaustive research, however, Andrew Field found this work to be incomplete. Field's own bibliography is complete to 1966 and contains over three hundred entries. In addition to the novels, Field includes short stories, poems, plays, articles on lepidoptera, reviews, interviews, and other miscellaneous materials. The bibliography includes the first lines of poems in the poetry collections and the individual titles in the story collections, and lists nearly all of the uncollected poetry and articles from Rul' (The Rudder) and various other émigré journals. The complete list shows: eight novels in Russian, a novelette in Russian, a half-finished novel in Russian, six novels in English, four volumes of collected poetry (Russian and English), five volumes of collected stories (Russian and English), numerous uncollected stories and poems (Russian, English and French), six verse plays, three dramas, one movie scenario, many translations from English and French into Russian, and from Russian into English, a volume of memoirs, twice revised, numerous articles and short reviews, as well as scholarly articles on literary topics, twenty scholarly articles on

lepidoptera, and a scholarly book on Gogol'. At present he is editing and preparing for publication his lectures on Russian and European literature which he gave at Cornell, while concurrently working on a critical study of James Joyce. At present he is also writing another novel, Transparent Things, as well as a history of the butterfly in Western art, a screen-play and broadway production of Lolita, a selection of his own poems, and a collection of his chess problems.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), p. 251.

[2] Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov joined Iosif Hessen in editing Rul' (The Rudder) in Berlin during the years 1919-1922. Along with I. Hessen, V.D. Nabokov was a fellow member of the People's Freedom Party. Rul' was the main organ of the moderate Constitutional Democrats of which V.D. Nabokov was a member.

[3] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 253.

[4] Ibid., p. 260.

[5] Ibid., p. 259.

[6] Ibid., p. 261.

[7] Ibid., p. 269.

[8] Ibid., p. 265.

[9] Although Vladimir V. Nabokov has remained politically aloof throughout his life, his father was active in political organizations both in Russia and in exile. He (Vladimir D. Nabokov) was a supporter of political and social causes which seemingly were opposed to everything the Nabokov family stood for and benefited from as members of the intelligentsia. He was consequently referred to as one of those young men who were the "conscience of their class". Before his exile as a member of the Constitutional Democrats (the "Kadets"), V.D. Nabokov held various high positions in the tzarist government, as well as a prominent seat in the 1917 Provisional Government. In his exile, he became the leader of the Kadet moderate faction, one of the two major ideological divisions of the party. The more liberal faction was headed by Pavel Miljukov. The two groups differed on the question of possible rapprochment with the Bolsheviks. At a political meeting at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall, it was hoped that these two men could settle their differences concerning this and other troublesome issues. Two monarchist extremists, Šabelskij and Taboritskij, attended this meeting with the intention of assassinating Miljukov because he supposedly was indirectly responsible for the murder of Nicolas II by the Bolsheviks.

[10] Vladimir chose to use the pseudonym Sirin in order to avoid confusion with his father, whose name also was Vladimir Nabokov. In 1922, with the death of his father, the use of this nom de plume became superfluous; Nabokov nevertheless chose to retain it.

[11] Slovo - a Russian émigré publishing-house in Berlin.

[12] In his article entitled "Nabokov as a Russian writer", Gleb Struve notes that the only translation of Mašen'ka until Glenny's was a rendition in German under the title Sie kommt-kommt sie? [See: Gleb Struve, "Nabokov as a Russian Writer," in Nabokov: The Man and His Art, ed. L.S. Dembo (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 47.] This information is confirmed in Andrew Field's bibliography.

[13] Andrew Field notes in his bibliography that a German translation was available in 1967 under the title König, Dame, Bube.

[14] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 12.

[15] Vladimir Nabokov, King, Queen, Knave (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. vii.

[16] Stephen Jan Parker, "Vladimir Nabokov-Sirin as Teacher: The Russian novels" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1969), pp. 45-46.

[17] It is not known who exactly the translator was; one suspects it was Nabokov's son, Dmitri.

[18] Parabola - a Russian émigré publishing-house in Berlin.

[19] Podvig", under its supposed translated title of Podvig, is included in a list of all of Nabokov's novels (except Solus Rex), both Russian and English, on the back dust-cover. One might logically assume that it too has finally been translated, especially since Andrew Field writes in his bibliography that it is "now being translated into English." Correspondence with McGraw-Hill has so far resulted in no information concerning the work's publication or possible translation.

[20] Petropolis - a Russian émigré publishing-house in Berlin.

[21] Dom Knigi - a Russian émigré publishing-house in Paris.

[22] Chekhov Publishing House - a Russian émigré publishing-house in New York.

[23] Vladimir Nabokov, The Eye (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 7.

[24] "Sogljadataj" in Sogljadataj. Pariž": Russkija Zapiski, 1938, pp. 5-87.

[25] Herbert Gold, "Vladimir Nabokov: An Interview," Paris Review, (Winter, 1967), 109.

[26] Vladimir Nabokov, Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), photo-section.

[27] R.H.W. Dillard, "Not Text But Texture: The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov," The Hollins Critic, III (June, 1966), 2.

[28] Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art, p. 6.

[29] Zimmer, Dieter E. Vladimir Nabokov Bibliographie des Gesamtwerks. Berlin: Rowohlt, 1963.

CHAPTER III

NABOKOV'S ARTISTIC AIM

Public and critical reaction to Nabokov's prose has been notably ambivalent during the past forty-five years. The sources of these diverse responses have as well been as varied as the nature of this criticism. A significant tendency has been noted, however, which shows that the great majority of Nabokov's antagonistic reviewers were unjustified on a scholarly basis in their appraisals of his work. They failed to discern and comprehend accurately Nabokov's artistic aim. They consequently misinterpreted his writings, ultimately discarding them as literary eccentricities.

During the middle sixties critics began to afford Nabokov his due acknowledgement as one of the outstanding writers of the twentieth century. This phenomenon was due primarily to the appearance of his previously untranslated Russian novels, a resurgent interest in his prose by American scholars, as well as a more objective critical approach in general to his writings as an oeuvre. Scholars began to discern that Nabokov's prose represented a deviation from the traditional formula of fiction, that his artistic aim was totally idiosyncratic, and that his novels must be treated as a neoteristic phenomenon in

literature. In defining Nabokov's artistic aim, it is interesting and essential first to note the bases for much of the adverse criticism he has received in the past.

Russian émigré critical reaction to Nabokov's writings became increasingly unsavory after the publication of Mašen'ka (Mary) in 1926.[1] Their objections were based on both the literary style and the thematic content of his prose. By the middle thirties, the general conclusion among émigré critics was that his writings were basically "un-Russian," that they were at best a rather poor imitation of either German or French Expressionism. Despite this widely held opinion, however, not one scholarly essay has been discovered which attempted to support this thesis.[2] It is therefore felt that this assertion of Nabokov's literary style being foreign had no substantial basis. Because his style deviated from the established norm of Russian literature, Russian émigrés categorically rejected his novels and refused to judge them according to their intrinsic merits.

Émigré criticism objected to the thematic content of his work on two main premises: one, that Nabokov refused to concern himself with either the problems of Russian émigré life or life inside Russia; two, that his works showed a complete absence of didactic moral, psychological or social

import. Apparently émigré litterateurs felt that one of the most basic tenets of Russian literature (whether in exile or not) was that fiction teach the reader something about himself or his complex environment. Consequently, any work which was not permeated with such ideas was doomed to failure. Unfortunately these critics did not discern Nabokov's intentional avoidance of social didacticism in his writings and his alternative of writing art purely for art's sake. As Nabokov said in a BBC interview with Peter Duval Smith: "I have no social purpose, no moral purpose; I have no general ideas to exploit."[3] For critics concerned more with the what of his writings than the how, Nabokov's novels seemed to be merely eccentric and superfluous artifices. But to suggest failure of Nabokov's writings regarding solely their thematic content is to suggest a totally inaccurate artistic limitation; half of Nabokov's artistry is its form. And today, as in the thirties and forties, Nabokov scorns those readers who attempt solely to find "messages" in his works.

Nabokov's failure to conform totally to the socially oriented tradition of Russian literature virtually resulted in his ostracism from émigré literary circles. But despite his failings, a few émigré critics did covertly revere Nabokov's talent. Official recognition finally did come in the personage of Vladislav Khodasevič.[4] But generally, as in the case of

George Adamovič,[5] himself a leading émigré critic, poet, and essayist, it took émigré reviewers many years to confess their unjustified misconceptions and finally admit the quality of Nabokov's art, as well as his significance as a writer.

Soviet acknowledgement of Nabokov has ranged from seeming total ignorance of even his existence to exalted homage (clandestine, of course). Despite his great proliferation and the appearance of most of his prose in the West, Soviets have only passingly (and reluctantly, at that) cited his name in officially-sanctioned literary publications. In 1926, in Na literaturnom postu (On Literary Guard),[6] V. Volin quoted some poetry of Sirin in an attack on émigré poetry. In the fifties Nabokov's name appeared only once in the official literary newspaper, Literaturnaja gazeta (Literary Newspaper) - and this was in connection with a misleading summary of Lolita.[7] The epitome of exemplary Soviet disregard toward Nabokov's writings occurred in connection with the publication of a standard reference work on American literature. The 1964 edition of M. Mendelson's Sovremennyj amerikanskij roman (The Contemporary American Novel) failed to contain even a single reference to Nabokov, even though all of his English novels (except Ada) were in print before this work's publication.[8]

From 1964 to 1968 Soviet literary periodicals remained

virtually silent about Nabokov despite the appearance of his newly translated Russian novels and the newly aroused and enthusiastic scholarly interest in him. Suddenly in 1968, in the Kratakaja literaturnaja ènciklopedija (The Short Literary Encyclopedia), an incomplete, but surprisingly objective biography of Nabokov appeared along with an incomplete bibliography and several references to literary criticism.[9] This remarkable turn of affairs indicated the acknowledgement Soviet officialdom most likely felt obligated to extend to Nabokov due to the apparent growth of interest in and popularity of his writings among Soviet intellectuals.

In the past, official Soviet objection to Nabokov seems to have been based on two primary phenomena: the fact that he emigrated to the West after the Bolshevik revolution, and there openly objected to Soviet doctrine [Soviets scorn these people, especially if they are influential and materially successful]; and his apparent preoccupation with perversion, which they felt was excessively displayed in Lolita [Soviets claim that an interest in sexual matters is one of the basic "unhealthy" by-products of "decadent" Western culture. This is evidenced by the Soviets' claim that they have no sexual or pornographic literature, and consequently few sexual crimes.] During the early sixties under the leadership of Khruščëv,

Soviet reaction to her expatriots, and the West in general, mellowed considerably. Coexistence was manifested as the official government policy. This enabled the Soviets to acknowledge to some degree prominent personalities in the fields of art and literature without compromising their political and social doctrine - hence the more frequent mention of Nabokov's name in literary publications.

As concerns Soviet reaction to the element of perversion which they saw manifested in Nabokov's novels (especially Lolita and Pale Fire), those seriously interested in literature apparently began to realize that Nabokov was not primarily interested in portraying psychologically defunct sexual aberrants, as he was in utilizing certain human types to develop a totally unrelated theme. Just as in the West, there seems to have been considerable controversy among Soviet readers as to just what Nabokov's aim is; but by dismissing the theme of overt sexualism, they are starting on the right track to understanding him. Nevertheless, there are no doubt still many readers [usually those over forty] in the Soviet Union who read his novels and continue to regard Nabokov as a disgusting psychopath. The fact remains, however, that virtually everyone who claims a serious interest in literature has read and thoroughly enjoyed at least the

English version of his novels - Lolita, Invitation to a Beheading, and quite often The Gift.[10] For those who do not read English, the Russian translations are continually being taken into the country by tourists, diplomats, and Russian travelers. Concerning those works which have not yet been translated into Russian, devoted followers of Nabokov do it themselves as can be affirmed by the recent appearance of Blednoe plamja (Pale Fire) and the first half of Nastojaščaja žizn' Sevastiana Knajta (The Real Life of Sebastian Knight).[11] Nabokov's popularity seems to be so great that it has even been suggested that a Phaedra Press edition of Lolita [Russian translation] is currently more in demand than a Russian version of Doctor Zhivago, and in fact can be exchanged on the black market for a first edition of Belyj's St. Petersburg or Mandelštam's Tristja.[12]

Despite rigorous governmental restriction on the inflow of books from the West, there are still a few people in the Soviet Union today who have managed to read a great many Nabokov novels. This number no doubt includes both the disillusioned youth, as well as members of the politically more orthodox generation. But, as in the West, the great majority of Nabokov enthusiasts remain ignorant of all that he has written. Enthusiasm about him nevertheless continues to be intense as evidenced by their evaluation of his Dar (The Gift)

and Priglašenie na kazn' (Invitation to a Beheading) as unique works in the history of Russian literature.[13] At this time there is hope that some day his works will be read and discussed openly, just as the previously unacknowledged works of Faulkner, Camus, Kafka, etc. are today.

Until just recently, Nabokov's literary reputation in America was a minor one at best. Previously the only faithful audience he had was among those few close followers of contemporary literature who read some of his early English novels. This situation is remarkable in view of scholarly acknowledgements he has received: both in 1943 and 1952 he was awarded Guggenheim Fellowships for creative writing; he also won an award from the American Academy and the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1951, as well as having his novel, Pnin, nominated for the National Book Award in 1957. Only in 1958, with the appearance of the controversial Lolita, did Nabokov begin to receive the long-overdue praise and critical attention due a writer of his proliferation and creative ability. But "to attribute Nabokov's present literary stature solely to the novel Lolita, or more specifically to the appearance of Humbert Humbert, sexual pervert and inventor of nymphetry, is to suggest an artistic limitation that is critically inaccurate."[14] At times, one wonders whether it was the literary excellence or the peculiar subject which prompted so much more attention to

Lolita than to the earlier novels. In any case, Lolita was a best seller. Despite this success, however, a great many readers continued to question Nabokov's literary talent as regarded his other novels. Many considered him to be dull; others judged him to be a literary hoax, as well as disgusting, immoral, and even perverted because of his apparent interest in "nymphets." The great majority found him to be totally incomprehensible. The reasons for this reaction are easily discerned.

First, the fact that most of his novels failed to conform to some established school or Zeigeist resulted in a feeling of uneasiness on the part of his audience. Readers trained on the tenets of formalist criticism simply did not know what to make of works which resisted the search for ordered mythic and symbolic levels of meaning. This was a total departure from the post-Jamesean requisites for the "realistic" or "impressionistic" novel that a novel be the impersonal product of a pure aesthetic impulse, a self-contained illusion of reality rendered from a consistently held point of view and through a central intelligence from which all authorial comment has been exercised.[15]

Second, Nabokov's writings deviated from the trend which the American novel had taken since the late thirties. The social panorama, the relatively straightforward, realistic novel about normal people and inconsequential interpersonal conflict, was

almost totally replaced by anti-realistic works which concentrated primarily on intense examination of psychological aberrations.[16] Nabokov's novels exhibited total and deliberate disregard for this trend. In fact, he has on many occasions expressed his antipathy toward this psychological preoccupation in contemporary literature. He feels that serious, meritorious prose need not deal with Freudian implications of communal guilt or redemptive salvation of the neurotic self. Regardless, influential critics of the sixties tended either to ignore or to label as dull those writers who were not seriously concerned with a psychological justification of the neurotic human condition in their writings. Nabokov's novels therefore met with little success. This conclusion is substantiated by the fact that two of his most successful novels, Lolita and Pale Fire, do in fact deal with psychologically abnormal protagonists.

After the success of Lolita, Nabokov began to render into English his hitherto unknown Russian novels. As they gradually began to appear on bookstands, American readers and scholars slowly began to realize that Nabokov had been a prominent, although poorly acknowledged writer for thirty-two years prior to the appearance of Lolita. At this time, critics began to devote more time to Nabokov's writings as an oeuvre - attempting to discover some recurring theme which would lend some understanding of his artistic aim. Despite this enthusiasm, more

attention was given to the English novels; the Russian novels were regarded as unimportant and even inferior to the English works - especially Lolita and Pnin. This is certainly not to imply that either of these two novels do not deserve the attention they received, on the contrary. The point is, that the Russian novels too are important. As Nabokov has suggested, they serve as the basis for his literary art. It is essential to understand them if one is to appreciate his English novels. Consequently, any reader or critic who disregards or does not understand the Russian works, cannot hope to understand fully the remaining segments of his oeuvre. Nabokov has even suggested that to thoroughly understand all of his Russian works, readers should have access to everything he has written, as well as an understanding of the full cultural tradition in which he has lived.[17] Although Nabokov is justified to some extent here, it seems that he should be as understandable to the discerning reader as are both Joseph Conrad and Henry James, also émigré writers.

The year 1967 saw the publication of an exciting innovation in scholarly Nabokov criticism; Andrew Field presented his Nabokov: His Life in Art.[18] Whereas in the past criticism was centered primarily around the English works, Field's book was the first scholarly work to appear which called attention to all of the genres in which Nabokov had written,

and considered for the first time all of his writings as an oeuvre so that the reader could place and trace the various Nabokovian motifs which figure throughout his art. Unfortunately, although he points out several secondary recurring themes, Field seemed reluctant to call attention to any one particular motif which he considered to be the important theme in Nabokov's writings. Nevertheless, in attempting to define Nabokov's artistic aim, Field wisely refrained from drawing parallels between his author and other writers of various Russian literary traditions - especially those who followed the Gogolian tradition. Instead he chose merely to leave the question unanswered and simply acknowledged interpretations as suggested by other critics. As Field points out, many critics in the past have naively attempted to compare Nabokov and Gogol', and one even linked him up with Saltykov-Ščedrin.[19] While this approach to Nabokov is interesting and many times thought-provoking, it is for the most part erroneous. It is a false scent. Nabokov does admit the possible influence of Gogol' (among others), but as he warns critics:

> Desperate Russian critics, trying to find an Influence [sic] and to pidgeonhole my novels, have once or twice linked me up with Gogol, but when they looked again I had untied the knots and the box was open.[20]

Understandably Nabokov prefers to consider himself a singularly independent and idiosyncratic writer who has acknowledged the outstanding writers of the past, but who has by no means fallen under their stylistic or thematic influence. Woe to the reader or critic who searches for another's influence in Nabokov. Nabokov has duped him with his parodaic style and rich knowledge of Russian literature; he has flaunted the artifice. Consequently, as Andrew Field has generally suggested, the only way in which one may successfully approach Nabokov is to consider his works in isolation - study them with an open mind - view them as self-contained entities. One must discern Nabokov's unique theme(s) and analyze the novels accordingly.

Although Nabokov claims that he strives to remain aloof from didactic import in his works, that he is "the kind of writer who in starting to work on a book has no other purpose than to get rid of that book,"[21] there are nevertheless certain recurring thematic resemblances among all of his novels - thereby indicating that he is in fact being didactic, although not in a moral, social, or psychological sense as the term is generally understood. Nabokov's "didactic point" is just exactly what his critics have been complaining about - his works do not, and according to Nabokov, must not, have any general ideas to exploit. His works are works of art; and in Nabokov's

estimation, art and didacticism do not mix well. Hence, readers and critics immersed in the artless world of didactic fiction cannot possibly understand or appreciate his creations. By the creation of a piece of art which manifests itself as a self-contained reflection on life in art, Nabokov seems to be asserting that only through an involvement in pure art can one hope to escape the sham artistic sterility of the surrounding world. This conclusion seems self-evident and quite straightforward until one discerns the complex, involuted nature of his works. As works of art about life in art, one may safely conclude that the most recurring image throughout his fiction his that of the artist. And just as Nabokov was suddenly awakened into an insensitive world of <u>poshlust'</u> in his exile, so too his artist-protagonists are surrounded by an artless, sterile world which is many times hostile toward their sentient nature. And just as Nabokov's life has been characterized by a relentless desire to escape the trivial circumstance of this first consciousness and recreate an aesthetic milieu reminiscent of that which he experienced during his childhood, so too his protagonists strive to escape the cruel joke of their reality. Nabokov has found his escape from his finite consciousness in art; through literary creation he has succeeded in escaping into aesthetics through aesthetics. It consequently

should not be surprising to note that his protagonists also seek to escape the suffering they endure in their finite consciousness by embracing some form of art as their saviour.

Zaščita Lužina (The Defense) and Priglašenie na kazn' (Invitation to a Beheading) have been chosen for analysis and explication of the image of the artist in support of the above conclusions. It is felt that they best exemplify Nabokov's concern for the problems of the artistic creative process and the difficulties encountered by a sentient person immersed in an artistically callous society. It is felt that this is Nabokov's artistic aim - portrayal of the artist. It is a concern which one feels is manifested throughout his prose.

Before turning to a textual analysis, it is necessary first to investigate the form of Nabokov's writings. Vladislav Khodasevič was the first critic to point out Nabokov's almost obsessive concern with style and device. Khodasevič maintained that the perfection and skillful usage of these literary elements were as equally important as the characters and the theme of the novel. In dealing with the subject of art, Nabokov's artifice is central to the development of his theme. And as Khodasevič wrote in 1937:

> Art cannot be reduced to form, but without form it has no existence, and consequently, no meaning. Therefore the analysis of a work of art is unthinkable without an analysis of form.[22]

FOOTNOTES

[1] See Gleb Struve, Russkaja literatura v izgnanii (Russian Literature in Exile) (N'ju-Jork: Izd. im Čekhova, 1956), pp. 278-290, for a discussion and compilation of adverse commentary on Sirin's (Nabokov's) prose during the late twenties and thirties.

[2] Andrew Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 178.

[3] Peter Duval Smith, "Vladimir Nabokov on His Life and Work," The Listener, November 22, 1962, p. 857.

[4] Vladislav Khodasevič (1886-1939) was a major Russian émigré poet and literary critic. During the thirties he was one of the most outstanding champions of Sirin's (Nabokov's) prose.

[5] George Adamovič was at one time the most influential Russian émigré literary critic. During the thirties he harshly condemned Nabokov's prose and poetry as pure imitations of German (and French) Expressionism. In his 1956 book of essays, Solitude and Freedom, Adamovič reconsidered his evaluation of Nabokov and presented a firm recognition of the fact that Nabokov is a major writer.

[6] V. Volin, Na literaturnam postu (On Literary Guard), III (1926), pp. 20-23.

[7] Ellendea Proffer, "Nabokov's Russian Readers," in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 254.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid. [See Kratakaja literaturnaja ènciklopedia (Short Literary Encyclopedia) (Moskva: Sovetskaja ènciklopedia, 1968), vol. 5, pp. 60-61.]

[10] Ibid., p. 256.

[11] Ibid., p. 254. [According to Ellendea Proffer, there are many Soviet citizens who translate Western literature and distribute these samizdat publications. For example, there is an old lady in Moscow who does nothing all day but sit in her apartment and translate Agatha Christie novels into Russian. She types the translations herself and sells them to interested readers.]

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 250.

[14] Page Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov (New York: The Dial Press, 1966), p. 14.

[15] Harold Marshall, Art and the Artless (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1962), pp. 38-41.

[16] John Hill, The American Novel in Progress (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1962), pp. 74-95.

[17] Malcolm Donald, "An Interview With Vladimir Nabokov," New Yorker, (November 8, 1959), p. 197.

[18] Field, Andrew. Nabokov: His Life in Art. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1967.

[19] Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art, p. 193. [See P.M. Bicilli, "The Revival of Allegory," in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 102-119, for a comparison of Nabokov with Saltykov-Ščedrin.]

[20] Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1959), p. 155.

[21] Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 313.

[22] Vladislav Khodasevič, "On Sirin," in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 96.

CHAPTER IV

NABOKOV'S ARTIFICE

In an essay entitled "On Sirin,"[1] Vladislav Khodasevič affirmed that Nabokov was basically a writer of form and device; he was more concerned with the "how" of his writings than with the "what," which he many times referred to as the "so what."[2] Khodasevič also maintained that Nabokov did not hide his devices like other writers of form, but instead placed them in full view of his readers. Upon a close reading, the perceptive reader will note that Nabokov's writings are indeed filled with devices which "construct the world of the book and function indispensably as important characters."[3] Nabokov does not try to hide these devices because "one of his major tasks is ... to show how these devices live and work."[4] Khodasevič rightfully concluded that the "key" to Nabokov is an understanding of his devices.

Khodasevič was also the first to point out that Nabokov's primary thematic concern was the portrayal of the artist. As a writer of form and device dealing specifically with the topic of art, it is felt that Nabokov exposes his devices so as to suggest and create around them a whole vision of reality and life through art in which his protagonists strive to live. And

not only does Nabokov's artifice reflect his artistic desire to create a world of art for his characters, but it also reflects his personal endeavor to create a world of aesthetics for himself. In artistically manifesting this "other reality," Nabokov attains what he is striving to construct for his fictional artists, thereby lending an involuted quality to his writing - a weaving of his life with his art.

The concern of this chapter will be to analyze the basic components of Nabokov's artifice in order to understand better his idealistic world of aesthetics. In doing this it is hoped to cast some light on the problems of creativity and the creative process as manifested in the fictional world of Nabokov's artist-protagonists.

The most basic feature of Nabokov's novels is their complexity. The inexperienced reader's first reaction to Nabokov is usually one of total bewilderment and despair. They (the novels, and actually all of his prose and poetry) seem to be constructed around some cohesive, but totally indiscernible center of reasoning. Nabokov metaphorically described this complexity while reflecting on the composition of his chess problems in Speak, Memory:

> Deceit, to the point of diabolism, and originality, verging upon the grotesque, were my notions of strategy; and although

> in matters of construction I tried to conform, whenever possible, to classical rules, such as economy of force, unity, weeding out loose ends, I was always ready to sacrifice purity of form to the exigencies of fantastic content, causing form to bulge like a sponge-bag containing a small furious devil.[5]

Although this is primarily a description of his chess problems, we can be sure that Nabokov approaches the creation of each piece of fiction with the same degree of cunning.

This contrived complexity has led many readers and critics to conclude that Nabokov has indeed attained technical virtuosity, but that "the intricately convoluted designs of his novels make them self-enclosed, sterile, and therefore finally 'minor'."[6] Some critics have even gone so far as to describe the novels simply as manifestations of an eccentric personality. The suggestion of such interpretation indicates a superficial knowledge of the man with whom they are dealing. Nabokov is a writer of conjured obscurity. Indeed, he takes great pride in this feature of his works; in a personal television interview Nabokov once commented:

> Why did I write all of my books, after all? For the sake of pleasure, for the sake of difficulty ... I like composing riddles and I like finding eloquent solutions to those riddles that I have composed myself.[7]

But there seemingly is more justification for this artifice than just for the sake of obscurity or the creation of puzzles. To understand his motives is to understand Nabokov's art.

The most basic explanation for Nabokov's obvious delight in abstruse prose can be found in an explanation of his love for nature. He experiences exuberant pleasure in the "mimetic subtlety" of nature and the inherent artistic perfection it achieves. Nabokov says it is in nature that he discovers the "nonutilitarian delights I have sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception."[8] Hence it may be concluded that one reason for the contrived complexity of Nabokov's art is his desire to achieve artistic perfection through it, thereby initially puzzling and ultimately enchanting his readers.

Perhaps equally as important as his desire to achieve artistic perfection through conjured complexity, is Nabokov's hope of developing more perceptive readers. He maintains that the greatest battle to take place in a literary work should not be between the author and the protagonist, but instead between the author and his reader.[9] He asserts that the author should constantly challenge his reader's way of thinking thereby forcing him to open up new avenues of thought and critical interpretation. In support of this premise, it is apparent

that Nabokov's writings manifest themselves as games of infinte deception, like chess, which he hopes will benefit the intellectual powers of his readers. Nabokov consequently cautions the inexperienced readers, for whom these works were especially created, that everytime they begin to read one of his novels they are about to enter an intellectual game, a jousting of wits with a much superior opponent. Nabokov adds that the impulsive, erratic, or overly confident reader who is accustomed to the stylistic, structured or thematic tenets of formalist prose will, like the "expert chess-solver," lose the game from the very outset by "falling for an illusory pattern of play based on a fashionable avant-garde theme ... which the composer has taken great pains to plant."[10]

The reason for the existence of this motif in Nabokov's writings is directly connected with another of his literary endeavors: to expose to his readers what he considers to be their fraudulent and conventional ways of thinking and reading.[11] It seems Nabokov has concluded that only by totally bewildering his readers from the outset can he get them to re-read, and preferably "re-re-read" his novels. This in turn will hopefully result in a more comprehensive and thorough perceiving of the various interpretative levels of the novel, thus enabling the reader to escape his sterotyped way of thinking and develop his

mode of thought and intellect. The development of the reader's perceptive and critical powers is essential to Nabokov's art because it gives Nabokov the possibility of establishing a totally new reality, the world of aesthetics, and having it understood. Without his conscious attempt to develop the "proper type" of reader, Nabokov's efforts would, in all likelihood, be ill-spent.

Aside from the component of complexity, another distinct feature of Nabokov's art is the parody of various literary formulae - themes and characters.[12] The use of this element serves three purposes in Nabokov's writing. First, as with contrived complexity, he uses it to break down his reader's conventional thought patterns. When Nabokov chooses to parody traditional literary forms and characters in his works, he is again challenging his reader's intellect by tricking him into believing that he is familiar with what is going on.[13] This invariably leads to the reader identifying with what he feels are familiar themes and characters. Nabokov thus manipulates his reader's critical attention so as to give him a different perspective of the novel once he has reread it and realized that he has been deceived by his own complacency. Hopefully, upon a second reading he will begin to discern the "infinte levels" of perception and interpretation beyond stock characters and themes.

Nabokov also parodies traditional literary forms in his fiction so as to suggest the mindlessness and total lack of artistic quality inherent in the use of such traditions.[14] He chooses to demonstrate that "real art does not consist of the reiteration of habits of mind"[15] as these forms suggest themselves to be. This would in effect explain Nabokov's outspoken contempt for writers and literature written solely for the conveyance of "a message." For example, Nabokov is most vitriolic about the religiously didactive nature of Dostoevskij's writings and his use of sterotyped characters. His vehemence for Dostoevskij's seemingly obsessive concern for sensitive murderers and general sensationalism is most clearly represented in his novel, Otchajanie (Despair), where he snidely parodies Crime and Punishment by having the protagonist consider calling his own book Crime and Slime.

Nabokov's third use of parody is to control reality. He uses parody to impress his own vision of life and reality on his subjects, to suggest that man is capable of manipulating reality through art.[16] Nabokov achieves this result by first asserting that "when a writer adopts certain stock conventions, he accepts with it a stock view of reality. But 'reality' is largely subjective for Nabokov, and perceptions of experience are extremely different, so that an 'adopted method' limits the

ability to confront 'reality' in an original way, petrifies imagination, and, in a sense, is artistically immoral. Unlike the naturalist who is controlled by the reality which he attempts to factually reproduce..."[17] Nabokov controls reality by twisting this comedy of the debunking of a convention into a meaningful vision of the world and experience.

Vladislav Khodasevič was the first critic to point out Nabokov's obsessive concern for the problems of creativity and the creative process in his prose. He was the first to discern the essence of Nabokov's writings as a portrayal of the life of an artist in an artless world and the resultant problems of his struggling toward significance, self awareness and self-expression in such an environment. As has been suggested above, Nabokov himself was once faced with just this same problem. Ever since his emigration from Russia in 1919, Nabokov has found himself in a philistine world, a world of grotesque surroundings. To escape this reality, to recreate the aesthetic and lyrical milieu of his childhood, Nabokov realized that he must embrace some form of art - for him literature. By devoting himself to literature, Nabokov found he could consequently manipulate reality and develop a more complete consciousness so as to enter into the free world of timelessness, into the world of memory and imagination, into

the world of aesthetics.

Contrived complexity and the use of parody accustom his readers to understand better the altogether new reality established in his art - a reality where only art makes life tolerable. As portrayed in his writings, Nabokov's fictional artists are also in a constant state of "becoming," of realizing their complete self, of finding their immortal soul through artistic creation. As a result of this, however, many of the characters who begin to escape the mindless milieu of conventional thought which inhibits imaginative, artistic perception and find their redemption in art, suddenly begin to confuse the reality of art and the reality of life; they begin to turn living into art, and in so doing remove themselves from the reality which is art's source.[18] These figures no longer possess art, but instead become possessed by it. Nabokov affirms this to be one of the most basic problems of creativity and the creative process. Hence, we see that some of his characters are depicted in a semi-real world in which they must differentiate "reality" and the "illusion of reality." And although Nabokov says that such escape into the reality of art is allowable, or even preferable, one must not confuse this state of existence with that reality of life from which it came; otherwise the artist will be not only a failure in life, but also in art.

To better understand this problem, we must further analyse what this "other reality" of art is for Nabokov. To put it simply, what is generally referred to as reality, is for Nabokov illusion; and what we call illusion, is for Nabokov reality. Nabokov would consequently assert that the only true reality is that which is founded in the real world of our surroundings, but which is initially conceived of and developed by our imagination, and later remembered by our memories. Life in art is the only true reality. What distinguishes Nabokov from some of the misguided artists of his fiction is the fact that he obviously possesses an artistic obsession, and is not possessed by it. And although Nabokov may excessively glorify and even make a religion of form and literary skill, he never confuses life and art. His reason for pursuing this point of perception is not only to justify his own imaginative flights of fancy into aesthetics, but also to portray his fictional characters as trying to escape from their creator's prison of mirrors, the similar realities of art and real life, in a struggle toward a self awareness that only their creator has achieved in creating them. Nabokov maintains that a writer must now allow himself to be imprisoned in his world of creativity. Hence Nabokov's works appear as an involuted process which connects his art with his life, and clearly indicates that

the author himself is not in this prismatic prison - he is its creator and, above all, is, and should be, in control of the book.

Nabokov's awareness of this other reality was first awakened at the age of three. It was at that time that he became aware of the concept of time as a prison which limited consciousness and thereby artistic perceptiveness. Revelation came when he felt himself "plunged all of a sudden into a radiant and mobile medium that was non other than the pure element of time"[19] - into a nonspatial world in which all creatures were joined by this common bond. With this newly acquired sense, Nabokov then began to develop his reflective consciousness, - a quality which he feels distinguishes man from animal, and the true artist from ordinary man. Nabokov's solution to escaping this spherical dimension of time, and therefore the surrounding world of poshlust', is manifested in his fiction where he attempts to create a world that spirals out of the chronometrical limitations of the first consciousness. Nabokov's basic premise here is that once one becomes aware of time, one can begin to develop one's reflective consciousness, thereby freeing memory and imagination from time's restrictions. These properties then become the nucleus of the artist's cerebral excursions away from the dreaded reality. This creation of

a spiral world of reality which ultimately liberates creativity and establishes a secure and serene world for the artist, has become the basic structural norm for much of Nabokov's fiction.

The result of this impressionistic mode of writing, a mode which emphasizes the subjectivity of reality and establishes it (reality) entirely in the stream of sensations, thereby fixing reality primarily as the images and the imagination of the mind, leads Nabokov to create a world which is a composite of images created from the hallucinations of his mind and the physical surroundings of the world which we call reality. Accordingly, his language reflects a constant attempt to find fresh metaphors, original similes, and to generally coalesce disparate objects through his metaphorical and personified imagery. This too has become almost a Nabokovian convention since it is found almost everywhere in his fiction.[20] It must nevertheless be remembered that Nabokov is not trying to convey verisimiltude of characters and realistic action in his fiction; Nabokov never allows reality to escape into realism or total fiction. Instead he uses these impressionistic devices only to create a world of images, language, illusion, and allusion where imagination constitutes a reality supplementing that reality of the first consciousness.[21] Nabokov realizes that the suffering endured in one's infinite consciousness can only be eased by

escaping into the timeless world of aesthetics and art, the world of the complete consciousness.

With an understanding of how and why Nabokov constructs artifice to establish a new reality, it is now possible to analyze a secondary, but closely related theme in Nabokov's writings: his utter contempt for Freudianism.

In the prefaces to most of his novels originally written in English, as well as those translated from the Russian, Nabokov writes "a few words of encouragement to the Viennese delegation,"[22] little notes for "little Freudians" who he expects "will no doubt continue to identify my character with... comic book notions of my parents, sweethearts and serial shelves."[23] For example, in the preface to The Defense, Nabokov writes:

> Analysts and analyzed will enjoy, I hope, certain details of the treatment Luzhin is subjected to after his breakdown (such as the curative insinuation that a chess player see Mom in his Queen and Pop in his opponent's King).[24]

In the foreword to Invitation to a Beheading he comments:

> The disciples of the Viennese witchdoctor will snigger over it in their grotesque world of communal guilt and progressivnoe education.[25]

Nabokov has four basic reasons for his scorn of "Freudian voodooism."[26] The first is that its proponents, the "Viennese delegation", tend to direct their critical attention more to the sociological, psychological or moral "message" of his books. They are critics who hunt for symbols and revel in allegories and generally try to find Freudian implications in every story; they are critics who condemn an author for not writing his books the way they would have written them.[27] According to Nabokov, they tend to direct their critical attention away from the art in fiction by analyzing everything in terms of conventional ideas. It is apparent, then, that Nabokov's feud with Freudianism is directly related to his contempt for conventional thought. As a mordant skeptic of myths and archetypes, "nothing could be more totally alien to Nabokov's vision than psychoanalysis with its acceptance of dreams, sexual explanations for certain problems, and so on."[28] Nabokov's sarcastic invective serve to fend off "the furtive feeling that a book, to be great, must deal in great ideas."[29]

Nabokov also expresses markéd antipathy toward <u>deep</u> psychology because it has adopted a clinical, sterile, stereotyped language that has been made into a great series of clichés through popular overuse. Furthermore, he notes that mental disturbances have become a convention of the philistine as well as

the intellectual mind. Neurosis, psychosis, and the man [Freud] who made them famous are obvious targets for a man who heartily dislikes groups, movements and cooperative activities.[30]

Nabokov also fears psychopathology because he realizes that if it can freeze the source of man's mental disturbance, his imagination, so too it might generally be used to lessen man's interest in books, thereby reducing the number of great books that might be written. He writes in Speak, Memory:

> What a great mistake on the part of dictators to ignore psychoanalysis - a whole generation might so easily be corrupted that way.[31]

An additional reason for Nabokov's hatred of Freudianism is that it challenges the creation and acceptance of his "other reality." As an antirealist and believer in the complete freedom of the imagination, Nabokov feels that Freudianism, with its established pattern of normal existence, is too confining for both the artist and the reader who choose to escape the accepted norm of reality. Illusion and reality are interrelated in Nabokov's writings - thus making his whole vision of existence concerned with appearances, illusions, and impressions of the external world suggesting an infinite range of reality.[32] In contrast, illusion for Freud is at one end of the spectrum and reality is at the other. Freudians say that Nabokov's

vision of reality tends to be nothing but illusion and because of this distorts what the essence of reality is.[33] Nabokov argues that only in rare cases do artists obsessed by art ever really mount an attack on reality. Many artists consider this other reality of aesthetics as only a temporary imaginative escape from the grotesquerie of the first consciousness.

Finally, Nabokov fears Freudian psychology because of its attitude toward art; in many respects it is antithetic to Nabokov's own. Freudianism alleges that the artist is the possessed and not the possessor of his visionary fancy. For Nabokov, where structure, composition, precision of language, and image form the basis of art, absolute authorial control is of primary importance in the creative process. The neurotic is the possessed and not the possessor. The distinctions in Nabokov's fiction between the possessed character and the possessing author are very sharp.

The tendency of the "Viennese delegation" to approach critically Nabokov's work is for them not without basis; after all, his works are filled with disoriented individuals - sexual deviants, cripples, and the deformed of one kind or another. But where these critics are mistaken, consequently enraging Nabokov, is that these characters do not exist as psychological types, but "as reflections of the irony of existence, as

expressions of the finite vulgarity and the pathos that are superimposed on the beauty and the sublimity of the natural world."[34] The frequency with which these figures appear in Nabokov's writings suggests that he is somewhat puritanical and that he has virtually embraced aesthetics as a religion. But it seems that Nabokov is able to overcome the oppressiveness of this vulgar, freakish and distorted world only by repetitive creation of the causes of this oppression. Why else does Nabokov express such a fastidious revulsion against the vulgarity in the world emphasizing the distorted appearance which reality takes, unless to suggest that all of this is escapable only in what becomes for him and his artist-protagonists a spiritual substitution - aesthetics.[35]

The one word generally used to explain all that Nabokov scorns in reality and therefore gives explanation to both the structure and themes of his novels as well as his life, is the word-concept "poshlost'," or, as Nabokov would prefer to transliterate it, "poshlust'." In his study of Gogol', Nabokov devotes twelve pages to the elucidation of poshlust' and its purveyors, the pošljaki.[36] In his understanding, this word-concept cannot be concisely rendered into English. English offers such approximations as "'cheap, sham, common, smutty, ... in bad taste, sorry, trashy, scurvy, tawdry'."[37] Poshlust' is

"not only the obviously trashy, but also the falsely important, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive."[38] It is most insidious when "the values it mimics are considered, rightly or wrongly, to belong to the very highest levels of art, thought, or emotion."[39] Nabokov remarks that the flowers of poshlust' bloom in such phrases and terms as "'the moment of truth', 'charisma', 'existenstial',"[40] and others. In a lecture at Cornell, Nabokov spoke the following words on the concept of poshlust' (he uses philistinism as a suitable synonym):

> Philistinism presupposes an advanced state of civilization. It is omniscient ... the philistine uses set phrases and clichés ... has trivial ideas which are his entire existence ... The philistine likes to impress and be impressed. A world of deception, of happy, mutual cheating. The Philistine knows and cares very little about art and literature. He is trained to read magazines.[41]

Nabokov is most vitriolic when referring to poshlust' as it appears in literature and literary criticism. Poshlust' in these cases means:

> corny, trash, vulgar clichés, Philistinism in all its phrases, imitations of imitations, bogus profundities, crude, moronic, and dishonest pseudo-literature ... if we want to pin down poshlust' in contemporary writing we must look for it in Freudian symbolism, moth-eaten mythologies, social comment, humanistic messages, political allegories, overconcern with class or race, and the journalistic generalities we all know.[42]

In a 1962 interview Nabokov commented further on poshlust':

> I am bored by writers who join the social-comment bracket. I despise the corny philistine fad of flaunting four-letter words. I also refuse to find merit in a novel, just because it is by a brave black in Africa or a brave white in Russia - or by any representative of any single group in America. Frankly, a national, folklore, class, Masonic, religious, or any other communal aura involuntarily prejudices me against a novel ... I find comic the amalgamation of certain writers under a common label of, say, 'Cape Codpiece Resistance' or 'Welsh-Working-Upperclass Rehabilitation' or 'New Hairwave School.'[43]

In his personal pronouncement, Nabokov contends that poshlust' is insidiously omnipresent. It is found in every segment of society, in every human activity, in every area of expression. Poshlust' is the conspiracy against individual thought and action. As a result, we better understand Nabokov's effortless striving to escape into a world of pure art.

But composing riddles and debunking conventional thinking are only part of Nabokov's art. One must also consider the verbal felicity and wit, the original imagery, the grotesque comedy of the fictional world, and his incredible skill in manipulating word and structure to achieve this purpose; this is the triumph and perhaps the essence of Nabokov's art. The brilliance of his language, the sharpness of his observation, and the impressionistic rendering of reality through the

combining of disparate objects into new and brilliant metaphors establish Nabokov as the most consistently successful master of the English language among contemporary writers. If one were to overlook these staples of his art, one could never hope fully to understand Nabokov's ever increasing game of deception and searching through infinite levels of perception for a reality which brings pleasure, a reality which is art.

With these concepts in mind, one may turn directly to an analysis of the two chosen novels. The first to be considered will be Zaščita Lužina (The Defense).

FOOTNOTES

[1] The essay "On Sirin" was originally written in 1937. It appeared later as a chapter in a reprinted edition of Khodasevič's book Literaturnye stat'i i vospominanija (Literary Articles and Recollections) (N'ju-Jork: Izd. im. Čekhova, 1954), pp. 251-254. Information for this thesis was obtained from a translation of this essay as found in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 96-102.

[2] Alfred Appel, Jr., "An Interview With Vladimir Nabokov," in Nabokov: The Man and His Works, ed. L.S. Dembo (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 27.

[3] Khodasevič, "On Sirin," in Nabokov: Criticism, p. 97.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Vladimir Nabokov, Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), pp. 289-290.

[6] Robert Alter, "Invitation to a Beheading: Nabokov and The Art of Politics," in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 42.

[7] Peter Duval Smith, "Vladimir Nabokov on His Life and Work," [Reprinted text of television interview on BBC] The Listener, November 22, 1962, p. 857

[8] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 125. [See also Herbert Gold, "Vladimir Nabokov: An Interview," Paris Review, Winter, 1967, p. 111, for Nabokov's commentary on the relationship of his art and nature.]

[9] R.H.W. Dillard, "Not Text But Texture: The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov," The Hollins Critic, III (June, 1966), 2.

[10] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 221.

[11] Page Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov (New York: The Dial Press, 1966), p. 22.

[12] Ibid., p. 29.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 35.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 133.

[19] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 21.

[20] Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics, p. 56.

[21] Ibid., p. 59.

[22] Vladimir Nabokov, The Defense (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), p. 10. [According to Nabokov, the "Viennese delegation" is a sarcastic reference to those readers and critics who tend to interpret novels in Freudian psychological terms.]

[23] Ibid., p. 11.

[24] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[25] Vladimir Nabokov, Invitation to a Beheading (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 27.

[26] Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 316. [The term "Freudian voodooism" refers to the literary criticism of those followers of psychological interpretation of fiction.]

[27] Malcolm Donald, "An Interview With Vladimir Nabokov," New Yorker, November 8, 1959, p. 197.

[28] Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics, p. 36.

[29] Alvin Toffler, "Playboy Interview: Vladimir Nabokov," Playboy, January, 1964, p. 44.

[30] Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics, p. 36.

[31] Nabokov, Speak, Memory, p. 230.

[32] Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics, p. 42.

[33] Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," in The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 44.

[34] Stegner, Escape into Aesthetics, p. 40.

[35] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[36] Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1959), pp. 63-74.

[37] Ibid., p. 64.

[38] Ibid., p. 70.

[39] Herbert Gold, "Vladimir Nabokov: An Interview," Paris Review, (Winter, 1967), 118.

[40] Ibid.

[41] As cited by Stephen Jan Parker, "Vladimir Nabokov-Sirin as Teacher: The Russian Novels" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1969), p. 67.

[42] Gold, "Vladimir Nabokov," 118.

[43] "Nabokov on Nabokov and Things," New York Times Book Review, [Interview] May 12, 1968, p. 51.

CHAPTER V

ZAŠČITA LUŽINA (THE DEFENSE)

When in 1930 the émigré publishing house Slovo of Berlin first brought out Zaščita Lužina in book form, public and critical reaction was considerably more favorable than with Nabokov's first two novels, Mašen'ka (Mary) and Korol', dama, valet" (King, Queen, Knave). Even scholarly Soviet literary response was favorable. In his emigration, Evgenij Zamjatin described Nabokov as an "interesting and brilliant writer"[1] and praised Zaščita Lužina highly as one of the most important émigré novels that he had read. Émigré poet and critic Vladislav Khoadasevič, considered at that time to be Nabokov's best critic, held the novel in great esteem. He struck a most positive and perceptive note when he remarked:

> The Defense is the first work in which Sirin [Nabokov] rose to the full stature of his talent because here, perhaps for the first time, he found the basic themes of his novels.[2]

Khodasevič continued by saying that The Defense contained a transition to the second series of Nabokov's writings whereby, still concerned with the theme of a creative work and the creative personality, for the first time he [Nabokov] confirmed that a

blind obsession with aesthetics, a "permanent residence" in the world of art, could and would destroy an artist. Khodasevič also pointed out that Nabokov seemingly made a distinction between men of talent and men of true artistic genius; if the artist was only a man of talent, and not of genius, the system [art] would: "suck out his human blood, turning him into an automaton which is not adapted to reality and which perishes from contact with it."[3]

As Nabokov says in Speak, Memory, The Defense is about "a champion chess player who goes mad when chess problems pervade the actual pattern of his existence."[4] Later he compares the composition of chess problems with:

> [the] writing of one of the incredible novels where the author, in a fit of lucid madness, has set himself certain unique rules that he observes, certain nightmare obstacles that he surmounts with the zest of a deity building a live world from the most unlikely ingredients.[5]

For Nabokov, the world of chess is a world of art which possesses joys and terrors similar to those of writing. The Defense describes the life of a talented chess player, and therefore artist, who is sensitive to the patterns of the game, his art. But not being a true genius, he involuntarily allows his imagination to function separately from reality and thus falls out of harmony with the richer forces of life. Soon this obsession becomes so

intense and deeply rooted that the artist-protagonist, Luzhin, begins to see his true reality in the patterns and combinations of his art form rather than in that truer reality from which it originated. Nabokov therefore presents Luzhin as a man destined to be destroyed as both an unsuccessful man and artist.

It has been suggested that since life can be considered as a miniature of the theatre, or of the novel, Nabokov chose chess as the unifying metaphor of his novel because he wanted to demonstrate that life is a microcosm of the chessboard.[6] To be sure, chess as the stuff of prose and poetry is as old as the Sanskrit and Persian romances of the 700's A.D., where the fate of a kingdom or of a marriageable princess hinged on the outcome of a chess game.[7] Contemporary motion pictures also utilize chess as the predominate symbol; Ingmar Bergman's Seventh Seal masterfully employs the metaphor of chess to depict life's battle against death.[8] It is believed, however, that Nabokov's goal was not to suggest that all of life is a massive chess game. Instead, his choice of chess as the unifying metaphor for Zaščita Lužina suggests a much deeper significance. By making Luzhin a grand chessmaster, Nabokov symbolically presents him as an artist. The fact that Luzhin begins to see life as a game of chess is only secondary to the fact that he has subconsciously allowed his art to become his reality and

only salvation. The apparent reason Nabokov chose chess as the specific form of art as opposed to writing, was that "if he had represented his heroes directly as writers, [Nabokov] would have had, in depicting their creative work, to place a novel within a novel or a story within a story, which would excessively complicate the plot and necessitate on the part of the reader a certain knowledge of the writer's craft."[9] Hence Nabokov strips Luzhin of all professional artistic attributes, but still presents him working on his chess problems in the same manner in which an artist works on his creations.

Another apparent reason why Nabokov chose chess as the unifying metaphor is the inherent qualities it possesses for developing the player's (artist's) consciousness and sense of reality. A developed consciousness is an essential requirement for a successful artist; and, as so often happens, the more involved a true artist (player) of genius becomes in his work (game), the more developed his consciousness becomes and the more reality he encounters in his surroundings. Nabokov's rationale for this conclusion is related to his idea that individual consciousness transmutes experience into personal reality. Furthermore, the key to any sense of reality is the perception of pattern; "consciousness needs at least the illusion that it can control some of the data it encounters,

seeing in them orderly sequence, analogy, cause and effect, to be able to believe in their reality."[10] As consciousness integrates this data into more and more meaningful patterns, it encounters more and more reality. Consciousness, and the mind's ability to perceive or freely create patterns and consequently find a sense of security and delight in them, serve as the medium through which reality comes into being and makes man's life more meaningful and enjoyable. The art form of chess, a game founded wholly on pattern and the perception of an infinite number of these patterns, serves as the most expedient means by which an artist can perceive some order in his life and achieve a truer sense of reality. In embracing chess, Luzhin rejects the inharmonious and philistine complexities of his everyday world; chess becomes the antithesis to the rejected reality. Through this art form Luzhin perceives more pattern and harmony than he experienced in his renounced existence. He consequently develops his consciousness and in effect establishes a more convincing and aesthetically more pleasing reality for himself.

Chess serves not only as the predominate symbol of the novel, but also as its basic structure. In the foreword Nabokov keeps hinting that his work is structured on a chess game:

> My story was difficult to compose, but I greatly enjoyed taking advantage of this or that image and scene to introduce a fatal pattern into Luzhin's life and to endow the description of a garden, a journey, a sequence of humdrum events, with the semblance of a game of skill, and, especially in the final chapters, with that of a regular chess attack demolishing the innermost elements of the poor fellow's sanity.[11]

A little further he says:

> But the chess effects I planted are distinguishable not only in these separate scenes; their concatenation can be found in the basic structure of this attractive novel.[12]

And indeed this is an attractive novel; during the course of reading about Luzhin's preoccupation with chess, the reader soon discovers that in fact he is challenged to replay the moves of the plot. The novel presents itself as a game of chess in which the reader must consider every move and possible offensive as proffered by Nabokov. The rationale for this involuted effect is Nabokov's apparent desire to force his readers to reread the novel so as to understand and be convinced of the validity of Luzhin's obsession and ultimate fate.

This deliberate conjuring is directly associated with Nabokov's idea concerning the use of parody. The Defense represents a parody of all of those novels which have unsuccessfully

tried to convert actual games of chess into fiction. Literary history offers several outstanding examples of this style:

> In Rabelais' Fifth Book there appears a highly dramatized chess ballet (cribbed from an Italian source) with minimum of clues for partial replaying. Middleton's Game at Chess (1624) is an allegory of English-Spanish diplomacy, with kings, queens, and courtiers representing actual pieces. But no game is involved.[13]

To my knowledge the only authors other than Rabelais, and to some extent S.S. Van Dine in The Bishop Murder Case, who have created fiction out of actual games are Paul Anderson in his story "The Immortal Game" and Lewis Carroll, who gave us a madcap chess game in Through the Looking Glass." In parodying these prototypes, Nabokov makes his readers play through the moves of the novel and Luzhin's defense and fall right into a "Fool's Mate," thereby proving that his novel is successfully structured on a chess game. Once discovering himself "in check," the reader must go back and "replay the moves of the plot."

The purpose of this chapter will be to trace the development of the artist, Luzhin, and comment on the nature of his life in

art and the reason for his ultimate failure. Considering the scope of this work and the often exceedingly complex nature of Nabokov's prose, it was necessary to call attention only to the most significant symbols which Nabokov employs to present his theme. Neither shall any special attention be paid to the development and significance of secondary characters.

The novel is tripartite in structure. The first fifty-six pages, which constitute the first part of the work, represent the most significant section of the novel as a whole. More detailed attention will therefore be given to the development of this section than to the rest of the novel.

The first part deals with Luzhin's childhood up to the point where his genius as a chess prodigy is recognized. We first encounter Luzhin as a small boy in Russia before the revolution, the only son of a philistine, nevertheless gentlemanly, writer of boy's adventure stories and a self-pitying mother. Nabokov gives birth to his protagonist in the opening sentence of the novel:

> What struck him most was the fact that from Monday on he would be Luzhin.[14]

Not only does this sentence serve as an introduction to the main

character, but it also foretells an important change in Luzhin's life. The fact that from Monday on Luzhin will be referred to by his surname instead of his first name and patronymic or a diminutive, is indicative of both the family's annual move from the country to the city and the boy's enrollment in school for the first time. Young Luzhin is alarmingly disturbed about this seemingly normal state of affairs. What frightens him so is that he does not want to enter school; instead he would prefer to remain indefinitely at his parents' country residence. Symbolically, school represents the callous, disorganized world of adulthood; the summer house and surrounding estate represent his lyrical and deeply enchanting childhood. As he reflects upon this childhood, he sees that it was full of the melodic sounds of nature; and his parents' garden:

> was saturated with sunshine and the sweet inky taste of the sticks of licorice.[15]

But as his father aptly remarks in a dictation: "Being born in this world is hardly to be borne."[16] Luzhin of course leaves blanks for the words "born" and "borne." If young Luzhin is to be properly borne into life, he must enter into the adult world. Ironically, Luzhin Sr. is correct because it is in the midst of the adult world that his son discovers chess and is finally brought forth into life.

Luzhin is terrified of the adult world as is represented by his parents, whom he sees menacingly circulating around him in ever narrowing circles. He is incessantly made the victim of his father's philistine Wunderkind phantasies and is thoroughly disgusted by his mother's slothful habits (she decided that her destiny in life was to lie in bed, with her face powdered, eating boules-de-gomme from a small silver bowl.) Luzhin Jr. fears that the security of his idyllic childhood, which is characterized by morning walks along Nevsky Prospect and drinking mild from a silver cup in the afternoon, will be lost forever by this move to the city and his entry into school:

> In exchange for all this came something new, unknown and therefore hideous, an impossible, unacceptable world where there would be five lessons from nine to three...[17]

And it was

> Only today, on the day of their annual move from country to city, on a day which in itself was never sweet, when the house was full of drafts and you envied so much the gardener who was not going anywhere, only today did he realize the full horror of the change that his father had spoken of.[18]

As he stands on the railroad station platform ready to depart, Luzhin gazes around only to notice, among other things, a little girl eating an apple. She too was not going anywhere.

For him this little girl represented the childhood which he was about to leave behind. In desperate defiance against this transition, he leaves the station and returns to his parents' summer home. There he hopes to hide and stave off this move into the adult world. While sitting in the attic, in isolation and security, he begins to rummage through an old box of his parents' possessions where he discovers "an cracked chessboard, and some other not very interesting things."[19] Thus Nabokov strikes the first note of his theme; in seeking escape from the world of his parents, Luzhin symbolically encounters the art form which in short time will provide him with the means to escape all of his surrounding reality.

The boy is retrieved from the attic and taken to St. Petersburg. There in school, Luzhin's classmates ridicule his father and scorn him. Thus he becomes sullen and morose. Before one of the recess periods, Luzhin Sr. goes to the school in hopes of having his son's teacher shower compliments on him for the boy's budding genius. The teacher simply remarks:

> The boy undoubtedly has ability, but we notice a certain listlessness.[20]

In desperate hope that he is indeed the father of a

Wunderkind, Luzhin Sr. concludes that the teacher understands his son even less than he does. He then accompanies the teacher to a recess period where they see Luzhin sitting in a corner in self-imposed isolation from his classmates. He refuses to take part in "lapta," a form of Russian baseball. Afterwhile this isolation becomes complemental; his classmates:

> stopped taking any notice of Luzhin and did not speak to him, and even the sole quiet boy in the class ... steered clear of him, afraid of sharing his despicable condition.[21]

As a result, Luzhin begins to find solitary amusement in the adventures of Phileas Fogg and Sherlock Holmes. He later admits, however, that his interest in the stories of these two men was prompted by neither an inclination for mysterious adventures nor a thirst for distant peregrinations, but rather by the exact and relentlessly unfolding patterns; in them he finds order, security, and as a result develops his consciousness.

Luzhin then becomes interested in magic for a short time. But he later admits:

> The secret for which [I] strove was simplicity, harmonious simplicity, which can amaze one far more than the most intricate magic.[22]

Mathematics, and especially geometry, also provide a passing interest:

> He experienced both bliss and horror in contemplating the way an inclined line, rotating spokelike, slid upwards along another, vertical one ... and he lingered long in those heavens where earthly lines go out of their mind.[23]

The next amusement was provided by jigsaw puzzles. And like a writer laboring over a novel:

> he would spend hours bent over a card table in the drawing room, measuring with his eyes each projection before trying if it would fit into this or that gap and attempting to determine by scarcely perceptible signs and the essence of the picture in advance.[24]

Suddenly, Luzhin reached "that inevitable day ... when the whole world suddenly went black":

> and in that darkness only one thing remained brilliantly lit, a newborn wonder, a dazzling islet on which his whole life was destined to be concentrated. The happiness onto which he fastened came to stay; that April day froze forever, while somewhere else the movements of the seasons, the city spring, the country summer, continued on a different plane - dim currents which barely affected him.[25]

Although Luzhin has not yet formally been introduced into the world of chess, these lines should serve as an indication to

the reader that he has isolated himself from the temporal and spatial bounds of this reality and is about to enter into the reality of the chess world. Young Luzhin is informally introduced to chess during a social gathering given on the anniversary of the death of the boy's maternal grandfather. Luzhin Sr. has organized an evening of musical entertainment at his home, during the course of which young Luzhin stealthly retires to his father's den to escape the trite comments, stupide questions, and generally oppressive atmosphere of the adult guests. During the evening the featured violin soloist receives a telephone call in the den, after which he opens the small box with which he had been toying during the conversation; it contained chess pieces. Luzhin, anxious to see the contents of the mysterious box, peers out from his hiding place and is discovered. The musician is enthusiastic about this "igra bogov," "the game of the gods," because of the "infinite possibilities" it possesses. He asks whether or not the boy or his father plays, but before Luzhin can answer his father enters and the conversation is cut short. Luzhin, however, does not forget those magic words: "infinite possibilities." And just as his mother's diamonds glint in the half light of the room when she comes in to tuck him into bed, so too those carved chess figures glimmer in young Luzhin's imagination as he drops off to sleep.

The next morning he woke up "with a feeling of incomprehensible excitement."[26] He later remembers that morning and lunch "with an unusual brightness, the way you remember the day preceding a long journey."[27] Luzhin has a premonition that chess is the long sought after key to his feelings of despair and isolation. Later in the day when Luzhin's mother confronts her husband with the fact that he has been carrying on an affair with the boy's aunt, Luzhin and the aunt retire to another room where she gives him his first formal lesson in chess. It is significant that it should be his father's mistress who first formally introduces Luzhin to chess; seemingly Nabokov equates these two matters. Subconsciously Luzhin concludes that both chess and his father's affair are matters not to be discussed, but to be kept secret. And so young Luzhin secretly begins to study the game of chess. He reads old magazines containing chess problems and reconstructs the games on his own chess board. As he becomes more absorbed and proficient in the game, he no longer finds the need to physically reconstruct the games, but instead replays the problems in his head. The fact that he is able to play these games mentally, suggests that Luzhin is beginning to withdraw into the chess world of patterns and designs. While sitting on the veranda one day, he views the avenue in front of the house; it was:

> paved with sunflecks, and these spots, if you slitted your eyes, took on the aspect of regular light and dark squares. An intense latticelike shadow lay beneath a garden bench. The urns that stood on stone pedestals at the four corners of the terrace threatened one another across their diagonals.[28]

Luzhin's obsession becomes more and more intense. He plays games with his father, whom he beats consistently, and later also defeats various guests whom his father invites to challenge the boy. The sixth game he plays (and wins) is with an old Jew:

> a senile chess genius who had been victorious in all of the cities of the world but now lived in idleness and poverty, with a sick heart, having lost forever his fire, his grip, his luck...[29]

Ironically this faded old grandmaster is a figure symbolic of Luzhin's future circumstance. Later in the novel, when playing his most outstanding opponent for the world championship in Berlin, Luzhin fears that he is losing the game, and subconsciously sees his luck fading just like the old Jew whom he had played in his childhood.

Near the end of chapter four, Luzhin suffers his "October chess-permeated illness;"[30] an illness which in time will become sempiternal. Life becomes more and more obscured to the

point wherein chess serves as the needed means through which Luzhin can mentally escape from his surrounding reality. Physical escape is affected when chess patterns so permeate his mind that he has a mental breakdown and is allowed to leave school. He later also leaves his father and is adopted by the embodiement of his obsession, his "chess-father," Valentinov, who chooses to manage the boy's career and "life". Luzhin's chess victories become more and more frequent to the point where the boy's genius is widely recognized.

Suddenly, during the course of a paragraph near the end of chapter four, Nabokov makes a stylistic coup whereby he transposes the time of the action to a point sixteen years later when Luzhin is thirty years old. In doing this "Nabokov islets the childhood, frames its naive brightness so that superimposed upon the grown figure [Luzhin's adult years], it operates as a kind of heart, as an abruptly doused light reddens the subsequent darkness."[31] Hence Luzhin's childhood is distinctly set apart from the rest of his life. The reason for this is that although the first 56 pages do not represent the physical center of the novel, they do constitute the thematic core. The entire validity of Luzhin's obsession with chess, his success as a player, his attempted repatterning of life resulting in the creation of an alternative reality, as well as his ultimate failure, are all

based on the convincingness of this first section. The rest of Luzhin's tale will reflect on it.

Part two marks a significant change in Luzhin's character. As a man of eccentric and unprepossessing habits, all of his faculties seem to have disappeared down the vistas of permutations and combinations of chess. He plays matches throughout Europe and is seen as an infinitely lonely figure who sees nothing except chessboards; he is almost entirely oblivious to external reality. Valentinov has deserted him for other enterprises; he is no longer a prodigy; and although still a great player, he is dogged by a baffling inability to win tournaments outright - "a ghostly barrier" prevents him from coming in first.

Luzhin becomes so obsessed with the reality which he finds in chess, that he begins to confuse it with the reality which surrounds him; he begins to prefer his chess reality. This is characterized by the special pleasure he takes in playing blind chess matches:

> He found therein deep enjoyment: One did not have to deal with visible, audible, palpable pieces whose quaint shape and wooden materiality always disturbed him and always seemed to him but the crude, mortal shell of exquisite, invisible chess forces.[32]

Thus Luzhin prefers to isolate himself in his world of chess and totally ignore his surroundings. As the tale continues, Luzhin's situation degenerates to the point where life too becomes completely passive to him:

> In general, life around him was so opaque and demanded so little effort of him that it sometimes seemed someone - a mysterious, invisible manager - continued to take him from tournament to tournament;[33]

Luzhin is consequently viewed as an engimatical man whose "very art and all the manifestations and signs of this art were mysterious."[34] Even Valentinov "was interested in Luzhin only inasmuch as he remained a freak, an odd phenomenon."[35]

> During the whole time he had lived with Luzhin he unremittingly encouraged and developed his gift, not bothering for a second about Luzhin as a person, whom, it seemed, not only Valentinov but life itself had overlooked. He showed him to wealthy people as an amusing monster, ..[36]

It is interesting to note Valentinov's relationship to Luzhin and the reasons which prompted him to treat the boy as he did. When Luzhin met Valentinov in his chess-childhood, he immediately became attached to him - "and later he regarded him the way a son might a frivolous, coldish, elusive father to whom one could never say how much one loved him."[37]

Valentinov thus serves as the embodiement of chess for Luzhin and physically keeps him aloof from his surrounding reality. In actuality, Valentinov is a fast-talking, self-important con-man who is interested in Luzhin only as a chess player:

> At times he had about him something of the trainer who hovers about an athlete establishing a definite regime with merciless severity.[38]

And thus he prohibits Luzhin from eating certain food and drinking spirits of any nature. Also:

> Finally he had a peculiar theory that the development of Luzhin's gift for chess was connected with the development of the sexual urge, that for him chess represented a special deflection of this urge, and fearing lest Luzhin should squander his precious power in releasing by natural means the beneficial inner tension; he kept him at a distance from women and rejoiced over his chaste moroseness.[39]

Hence we see Valentinov as an extremely influential factor in prompting Luzhin to accept chess as a surrogate for life. Later, as Luzhin becomes disillusioned with his chess-prowess, his entry back into life's reality as symbolized by his marriage is a kind of defensive castling. And as has been mentioned above, this results in Luzhin placing himself in a world of <u>poshlust'</u>, which he also finds repulsive.

As Valentinov sees Luzhin's chess powers wanning, he makes "a gift to Luzhin of some money, the way one does to a mistress one has tired of, and disappeared,..."[40] Luzhin is now at the pinnacle of his career and is about to face his most able rival for the chess championship of the world, the redoubtable Italian player, Turati. Luzhin has heard a great deal of this man and his victories throughout Europe. He was a player of the latest fashions in chess. And although a player with a mentality somewhat similar to Luzhin's own, Turati had gone further:

> Luzhin's game, which in his early youth had so astounded the experts with its unprecedented boldness and disregard for the basic, as it seemed, rules of chess, now appeared just a little old-fashioned compared with the glittering extremism of Turati. Luzhin's plight was that of a writer or composer who, having assimilated the latest things in art at the beginning of his career and caused a temporary sensation with the originality of his devices, all at once noticed that a change had taken place around him...[41]

Luzhin felt that his game was inferior to Turati's. In recognizing the possibility that his chess supremacy might be seriously challenged, and therefore the possibility that he might lose his significance in the chess world, thereby causing disillusionment with his reality, Luzhin proposes to prepare the best possible defense against the complex opening

of the Italian master. Luzhin becomes increasingly neurotic to the point that he actually begins to see reality as a chess game. Hence his defense against Turati becomes for Luzhin more of a defense for his life. Luzhin reaches that paraphasia familiar to many chess addicts in which the spatial relationships of everyday life (furniture, trees, telegraph poles, and flecks of moonlight) assume their place on a hallucinatory exechequer. He is no longer able to cope with reality because his only reality is that of the chess board. Even sleep provides him with no peace:

> in sleep, there was no rest at all, for sleep consisted of sixty-four squares, a gigantic board in the middle of which, trembling and stark-naked, Luzhin stood, the size of a pawn, and peered at the dim positions of huge pieces, megacephalous, with crowns or manes.[42]

After the first day of play with Turati in which the Italian master did not use his famous opening, thereby rendering Luzhin's defense utterly useless, Luzhin returns from the balcony adjoining his room:

> there on the floor lay an enormous square of moonlight, and in that light - his own shadow.[43]

Luzhin has thus become a pawn in his own game of chess; he is

almost immersed in life's chess game. This section of the novel is thoroughly permeated with chess images which validate the totality of Luzhin's obsession. They seem to stitch together the very fabric of Luzhin's being. Checkerboards of black and white dance through his consciousness as images of his past career, as literal markings on Berlin taxicabs. Even some of the characters are personified chess pieces: a couple of drunken clowns named Kurt and Karl act briefly as pawns in a gambit too large for them to comprehend. And Turati, of whom physically we are given only the briefest glimpses, "lacks only a consonant to be a man of towers and castles."[44] And with each passing session of the championship tournament Luzhin finds it increasingly difficult to crawl out of the world of chess concepts:

> The only thing he knew for sure was that from time immemorial he had been playing chess - and in the darkness of his memory, as in two mirrors reflecting a candle, there was only a vista of converging lights with Luzhin sitting at a chessboard, and then smaller still, and so on an infinite number of times.[45]

During the final match with Turati Luzhin lights a match, but being so absorbed in the game, he forgets he has done so and remembers only when he is burned. Therein:

> he had seen something unbearably awesome,

> the full horror of the abysmal depths of chess. He glanced at the chess board and his brain wilted from hitherto unprecedented weariness. But the chessmen were pitiless, they held and absorbed him. There was horror in this, but in this also was the sole harmony, for what else exists in the world besides chess?[46]

When the crucial game with Turati is adjourned, Luzhin collapses; he is suffering from exhaustion, mental fatigue, and despair at the thought of irrevocably losing the match and therefore his place in the secluded and secure reality of chess. Thus ends part two of the novel.

The period from Luzhin's collapse until the end of the novel constitute the third part of the novel. During the course of a somewhat dubious convalescence, his psychiatrist and fiancée [referred to only as "she" until marrying Luzhin] implore Luzhin to forget the pernicious habit of chess. In forgetting chess and withdrawing back into the real world, Luzhin discovers what he believes to be the only possible means for staving off defeat in his match with Turati. To signify this transition back into reality, Luzhin marries his fiancée after he is set free from the sanitorium. His marriage results in the ideal mother-son relationship. Also, Stephen Jan Parker has been so astute to point out that Mrs. Luzhin performs a special function in the novel; she acts as a modification of

the perry" (short for periscope):

> The "perry's" task, by virtue of its superior vision, is to visit places and precipitate situations according to the author's interests. The "perry" thus introduces characters and catalyzes events. Mrs. Luzhin introduces her husband to her friends, to a psychiatrist, to family friends, to acquaintances at a dance, to the pleasures of a movie, to current events, and to novel surroundings. Her acceptance of the rightness of what she is doing is implicit in her unquestioning identification with it. It is the omniscient narrator who is responsible for the derogatory nature of the presentation. For what Mrs. Luzhin actually offers her husband is a banal existence consisting of trite conversation, proper dress and deportment, a job in a "commercial enterprise", and an interest in émigré affairs.[47]

Mrs. Luzhin is a descendant of the long line of 19th century literary heroines who are characterized by their warm and philanthropic nature, an active and positive approach to life, as well as a domineering guiding position over their men. To characterize Mrs. Luzhin's role, before their marriage Nabokov parodies the traditional male-female relationship by having Luzhin play the passive role. One day she drops a handkerchief and Luzhin picks it up. Instead of pursuing the matter and winning her, he instead waits for another handkerchief to be dropped, thus expressing his desire to make her the active partner. Luzhin makes one concession to his

position when he proposes to her:

> '... I have to inform you that you will be my wife, I implore you to agree to this, it was absolutely impossible to go away, now everything will be different and wonderful.[48]

Ironically he begins to cry and she must soothe him. As Mrs. Luzhin, she must be both nurse and mother to her husband. Throughout the third section of the novel, Luzhin engages in innumerable childish activities and follows his wife around like a son does his mother. Because of her nature, Mrs. Luzhin provides her husband with a marvellous opportunity to return to his truncated childhood. Therein Luzhin finds total oblivion to the world and a defense against the "offenses" he sees mounting against him in his chess reality.

As could be expected, their marriage is characterized by the absence of physical love. Instead Mrs. Luzhin chooses to substitute "the joys of compassion":

> ... and she would think that there were probably greater joys than joys of compassion, but that these were no concern of hers.[49]

Mrs. Luzhin devotes herself then to the mission of Luzhin's renovation which in general is to consist of new people, new

sights, new books, new interests, and new surroundings. Her aim is to transform her husband and offer him the way back into what she considers to be a normal life. And obediently Luzhin practices his drawing (he is best at cubes and cones) and plays "jolly geography" with her (though he still finds the irregular coastlines puzzling, if not charming). Unfortunately however, as loving and courageous as she is, his wife is just another sordid sentimentalist forcing Luzhin into her own novelettish version of life. His inlaws' flat which so engrosses Luzhin's wife with all its "Russian" qualities, is utterly bogus to Luzhin. In hoping he might take an interest in émigré politics, his wife reads émigré newspapers aloud to him. Luzhin does his best to look attentive; but he is right, émigré politics are "pure twaddle," she even feels it herself. The "life" in which she strives so tenderly to interest him is not just childish (for that would indeed have been appropriate) but more inane than anything else. Luzhin despises this wretched existence of <u>poshlust'</u> because it is so reminiscent of the life his parents lead which prompted him to seek escape in chess. Luzhin nevertheless accepts "this external life as something inevitable."[50] And suddenly, despite all his wife's caution, some accident - a chess game in a film or an overheard reference to his aunt - reminds him of chess. Luzhin soon senses

that it is no accident and consequently suspects that the pattern of his life is about to repeat itself. His idyllic life since the breakdown begins to reveal a sinister pattern:

> Just as some combination, known from chess problems, can be distinctly repeated on the board in actual play - so now the consecutive repetition of familiar pattern was becoming noticeable in his present life. And as soon as his initial delight had passed, as soon as he began to go carefully over his discovery, Luzhin shuddered. With vague admiration and vague horror he observed how awesomely, how elegantly, how flexibly, move by move, the images of his childhood had been repeated... but he still did not quite understand why this combinational repetition inspired his soul with such dread... But now he resolved to be more circumspect, to keep an eye on the further development of these moves.[51]

Luzhin begins to look upon his wife, family, and society as hostile forces, as "opponents," trying through some perfidious combination to checkmate him. As Luzhin follows the repetition of his life, therein finding his security, he establishes a defense to combat these social forces just as in a game of chess. He abjures "jolly geography" and drawing, and allows the tangible world to slip away, once again abandoning himself to the beautiful and terrible harmonies of chess. When his "chess-father," Valentinov, reenters Luzhin's life, he

[Luzhin] realizes that a decisive move has been made against him. Valentinov reappears on the pretext of using Luzhin in a film. Luzhin, however, understands the significance of this move:

> he understood one thing: there was no movie, the movie was just a pretext ... a trap, a trap ... he would be inveigled into playing chess and then the next move was clear. But this move would not be made.[52]

Luzhin suspects all too well that life is a chess game which, through a repetition of patterns, is forcing him to be absorbed once again in chess. He foresees that this will lead inevitably to the conclusion of the match with Turati, a match which he realizes will generate his final defeat. Reflecting upon the significance of his situation, Luzhin sees the pattern in the game:

> The key was found. The aim of the attack was plain. By an implacable repetition of moves it was leading once more to that same passion which would destroy the dream of life. Devastation, horror, madness.[53]

Luzhin contemplates the alternatives for his ultimate defense. He paces back and forth through the three adjoining rooms of his flat as his wife watches in complete bewilderment and inexplicable terror. Ironically she tells him to sit down, that he

will die if he walks so much. She even says that they will go to the cemetery the following day, to look after his father's grave.

> And suddenly Luzhin stopped. It was as if the whole world had stopped.[54]

Luzhin had conceived of his defense. A demented man, he runs out of the room saying:

> The only way out, I have to drop out of the game.[55]

He then returns, kisses his wife as if bidding her farewell, and runs into the bathroom where he locks the door behind him. He smashes the window and climbs through:

> Now both legs were hanging outside and he had only to let go of what he was hanging on to - and he was saved. Before letting go he looked down. Some kind of hasty preparations were under way there: the window reflections gathered together and leveled themselves out, the whole chasm was seen to divide into dark and pale squares, and at that instant when Luzhin unclenched his hand, at that instant when icy air gushed into his mouth, he saw exactly what kind of eternity was obligingly and inexorably spread out before him.[56]

Luzhin's ultimate defense to checkmate life and its offensive was to destroy himself. But even in death, as in life, Luzhin

is doomed to the abysmal horrors of chess. Once he even admitted that his love for chess was fatal, and in death Luzhin concedes the ultimate victory to chess.

Expected guests at his wife's dinner party break into the bathroom only to find that Luzhin has jumped. The final sentence of the novel reads: "But there was no Aleksandr Ivanovich."[57] As this sentence appears in the English version of the novel, the reader assuredly concludes that Luzhin has committed suicide. Consideration of the original Russian text, however, leads one to consider a different interpretation of the final scene. The Russian edition reads:

No nikakogo Aleksandra Ivanoviča ne bylo.[58]

This is a negative impersonal construction in Russian which in its meaning emphasizes Luzhin's absence. The key word in the line is "nikakogo," which means "no such."[59] Taking this into consideration, the sentence might more meaningfully have been rendered: "But there had not been any such Aleksandr Ivanovich." This translation would lead one to believe that Luzhin had never really existed to begin with. As Nabokov says in the book's foreword, the name Luzhin "rhymes with 'illusion' if pronounced thickly enough to deepen the 'u' to 'oo'."[60]

If one accepts the interpretation of Luzhin never having

existed, then Nabokov seems primarily to be asserting the fictional independence of the novel as a form of art; characters appear, serve their purposes, and disappear as though they never existed. Luzhin's transient existence would in effect seem only to further serve Nabokov's goal of achieving technical virtuosity in his writings. This interpretation is plausible in view of Nabokov's assertion that the battle between banality and "normal life" is of no real import. This type of issue is only of concern to those readers who search for messages in Nabokov's writings, readers who:

> move their lips when reading and cannot be expected to tackle a dialogueless novel...[61]

In presenting a paradoxical last sentence, Nabokov seems to be forcing his readers to re-read the novel, not so much to understand Luzhin's plight, as to become more familiar with the particulars of his fictionally fashioned world: the semblances, the patterns, the imagery, the illusion and allusions. After all, these are the tenets of Nabokov's art and they should be the concern of any of his serious readers. As Andrew Field says:

> We are able to understand him [Nabokov] only to the degree that we are able to approach him culturally and intellectually. Not many do.[62]

Another possible interpretation of this last scene is that Luzhin did not really commit suicide, but that his death was allegorical. Considering the Russian text, if Nabokov had wanted to express the fact that Luzhin had been in the room, but that he had jumped out the window and consequently was not there when the door was broken in, he could simply have written: "No Aleksandra Ivanoviča (tam) ne bylo." This would translate as: "But there was no Aleksandr Ivanovich." In using the word "nikakogo," however, Nabokov suggests that Luzhin had in fact never existed. But since Nabokov has allegorically presented Luzhin's life as a game of chess, it would be reasonable to assume that his death too was allegorical, that in fact he did not commit suicide but instead withdrew completely into chess and became totally insane.

This interpretation is substantiated by two circumstances in the text. Throughout the novel Luzhin is portrayed as a being not quite complete. He seems to be lacking that one essential characteristic basic to human nature - the ability to share one's life experience with others; he could not communicate with beings around him. This is not to imply that Luzhin was not human; he did fall in love and marry. But his marriage also lacked communication; he and Mrs. Luzhin never shared physical love. In fact, Mrs. Luzhin comes the closest

of all the characters in sharing her husband's life. But he refuses to cooperate and rejects her world as utterly bogus. Luzhin's incompleteness is emphasized throughout the novel by the impersonal references to him as only Luzhin. Never once until the final scene is he referred to by his given names. When in the final scene the door is broken through and the crowd calls for Aleksandr Ivanovich, Nabokov writes: "No nikakogo Aleksandra Ivanoviča ne bylo," ("But there had not been any Aleksandr Ivanovich"/or, "But there was no Aleksandr Ivanovich.") This might imply that Luzhin was still in the bathroom, but that he was "not there," that he had gone insane; as a complete person, Aleksandr Ivanovich Luzhin, he did not exist.

This reading is further supported by the fact that the final sentence of the novel begins a new paragraph:

> The door was burst in. "Aleksandr Ivanovich, Aleksandr Ivanovich," roared several voices.
>
> But there was no Aleksandr Ivanovich.[63]

One would naturally assume that if Luzhin had committed suicide, this narration would immediately follow the word "voices." But by having the final sentence begin a new paragraph, there is an implication that a new thought is begun; that in fact the story of Luzhin's life has not just ended in suicide, but that a whole

new chapter of his life has just begun - his life of "total chess-insanity."

In conclusion, the Russian text leaves Luzhin's fate somewhat in doubt. As for Nabokov's reason, one may only make conjectures. One possible answer is that Nabokov wanted to make Luzhin's fate ambiguous, thereby forcing readers to re-read the novel. As John Updike wrote:

> Suicide, being one experience no writer or reader has undergone, requires extra credentials to pass into belief.[64]

But the possibility of suicide in Nabokov's fiction is totally within credibility; Nabokov does have the special credentials. According to the English version, Luzhin commits suicide. Two details support this idea in the narrative: one, he actually "unclenched his hand;" and two, when he did, "icy air gushed into his mouth..." There seems to be no question that Luzhin's ultimate fate was "sui-mate."[65]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Andrew Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 178.

[2] Vladislav Khodasevič, "On Sirin," in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 99.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Vladimir Nabokov, Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), p. 15.

[5] Ibid., pp. 290-291.

[6] Robert J Clements, "Life Was Like A Chessboard," review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov, in the Saturday Review, September 26, 1964, p. 45.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 46.

[9] Khodasevič, "On Sirin," p. 100.

[10] Robert Alter, "Invitation to a Beheading: Nabokov on the Art of Politics," in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 45.

[11] Vladimir Nabokov, The Defense (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), p. 8.

[12] Ibid., p. 12.

[13] Clements, "Life Was Like A Chessboard," p. 46.

[14] Nabokov, The Defense, p. 15.

[15] Ibid., p. 16.

[16] Ibid., p. 17. [It is interesting to note that the original Russian text did have a play on words, but that it was not translated literally into English, nor did it carry any apparent symbolic meaning as the English pun does. The Russian text reads: "Èto lož', čto v" teatre net" lož"." This translates as: "It is a lie that there are no loges (boxes) in the theatre." The word play in Russian was between "lož'" (lie) and "lož" " (box-loge).]

[17] Ibid., p. 22.

[18] Ibid., p. 21.

[19] Ibid., p. 23.

[20] Ibid., p. 27.

[21] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[22] Ibid., p. 36.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 38.

[25] Ibid., p. 39.

[26] Ibid., p. 43.

[27] Ibid., p. 44.

[28] Ibid., p. 59.

[29] Ibid., p. 69.

[30] Ibid., p. 71.

[31] John Updike, Assorted Prose (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 322-323.

[32] Nabokov, The Defense, p. 91.

[33] Ibid., p. 95.

[34] Ibid., p. 90.

[35] Ibid., p. 92.

[36] Ibid., pp. 92-92.

[37] Ibid., p. 93.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., p. 94.

[40] Ibid., p. 93.

[41] Ibid., p. 97.

[42] Ibid., p. 236.

[43] Ibid., p. 117.

[44] P.N. Furbank, "Chess and Jigsaw," review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov, in the Encounter, January, 1965, p. 84.

[45] Nabokov, The Defense, p. 135.

[46] Ibid., p. 139.

[47] Stephen Jan Parker, "Vladimir Nabokov-Sirin as Teacher: The Russian Novels" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1969), pp. 62-63.

[48] Nabokov, The Defense, p. 103.

[49] Ibid., p. 190.

[50] Ibid., p. 191.

[51] Ibid., pp. 213-214.

[52] Ibid., p. 249.

[53] Ibid., p. 246.

[54] Ibid., p. 251.

[55] Ibid., p. 252.

[56] Ibid., pp. 255-256.

[57] Ibid., p. 256.

[58] V. Sirin" [Vladimir Nabokov], Zaščita Lužina ("The Defense.") (Berlin": Slovo, 1930), p. 234.

[59] Parker, "Vladimir Nabokov-Sirin," p. 70.

[60] Nabokov, The Defense, p. 7.

[61] Ibid., p. 8.

[62] Andrew Field, "View From Above," review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov, in the New Leader, October 26, 1964, p. 22.

[63] Nabokov, The Defense, p. 256.

[64] Updike, Assorted Prose, pp. 326-327.

[65] Nabokov, The Defense, p. 8. [The author coins this word in the novel's foreword to describe Luzhin's fate. It is interesting to note that the neologism "sui-mate" is a combination of "suicide" and "checkmate". The roots of the word are: "sui" (Lat.) meaning "self" and "mate" (Sp.) meaning "to kill", thus confirming Luzhin's fate as suicide.]

CHAPTER VI

PRIGLAŠENIE NA KAZN' (INVITATION TO A BEHEADING)

Nabokov once described his political outlook as being:

> as bleak and changeless as an old grey rock. It is classical to the point of triteness. Freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of art.[1]

Judging from this statement we may conclude that Nabokov is more concerned with the moral structure of politics than with the ideological aspects. This political aloofness, however, has not always been the case with Nabokov; it is only the product of many years of reflection on the relative effectiveness of émigré writers. He has come to realize that the political upheavals of 1917 were unpreventable and that for all practical purposes it cannot be altered today by external forces, least of all by émigré lamentations. His only publically expressed objection today about the Soviet regime is that it does not allow the most basic human rights: freedom of expression and thought. Nabokov thus claims to have made his last political speech during his university years at Cambridge where he pursued an ardent interest in émigré politics. At that time he debated unsuccessfully con Bolshevism against an apologist for the Soviet regime from the Manchester Guardian.[2]

Since then Nabokov has found it utterly superfluous to argue about contemporary politics of any nature and has moreover remained totally oblivious to such matters. He has instead redirected his interests toward literature.

As concerns the expression of political ideas in artistic fiction, on many occasions Nabokov has expressed lofty and resounding disdain for those writers who strive to permeate their writings with a political "message." Along with social, psychological, moral, and spiritual notions, Nabokov feels political opinions have no place in literature. Regardless of these expressed sentiments, however, many readers and critics have misconstrued much of what Nabokov has written as being a personal expression of deep political convictions.[3] One outstanding example was an article entitled "An Anniversary," which appeared in Rul' (The Rudder), November 18, 1927. The occasion for this was the tenth anniversary of the 1917 November Revolution.[4] As Andrew Field points out, it "is an eloquent and stirring émigré profession de foi"[5] in which Nabokov calls upon fellow émigrés to celebrate:

> Ten years of contempt, ten years of fidelity,
> ten years of freedom - isn't this worth at
> least one anniversary speech?[6]

Nabokov then proceeds to criticize communism; it is important to

note, however, that his excoriation of the Soviet system is primarily on the grounds of its moral structure and not political ideology:

> I hold in contempt not a person, not Sidirov the worker, an honorable member of some Kompom-pom, but that ugly and stupid little nostrum which turns Russian simpletons into Communist ninnies, which makes ants out of people, a new species called Formica marxi var, lenini. And I find unbearable the sham aura smacking of middle-class Philistinism that is in every Bolshevik. Philistine boredom wafts from the grey pages of Pravda, the political harangue of the Bolshevik has the sound of Philistine fury, his poor little head has grown swollen with Philistine nonsense.[7]

Critics are gravely mistaken when classifying this article under émigré political literature. Instead, as Andrew Field suggests, "'An Anniversary' is an important document in the history of Russian émigré culture, and, I think, it will at some unforeseeable future date have a place in the intellectual history of Russia in the twentieth century."[8]

Aside from this article, there is a period of about twelve years, 1935-46(47), in which many of the pieces which Nabokov wrote also seemingly expressed political sentiments. Most often, however, one feels that he has used what appear to be "political" themes only in a playful and humorous vein as a medium through which he could explore and demonstrate artistic problems.

Perhaps the most outstanding example is his Invitation to a Beheading (Priglašenie na kazn').

Invitation to a Beheading was Nabokov's seventh Russian novel. It was written in 1935-37, appeared serially in Sovremennye zapiski (Contemporary Annals), and was published in book-form in 1938.[9] Because of the seeming political nature of the novel, it evoked the most controversy and commentary of any of his Russian novels.[10]

The tale is disturbingly abstruse and cannot be reduced simply to any one point. The work's general obscurity has lead to a wide range of critical interpretations. Nabokov accurately predicted his critics' and readers' reactions when he wrote:

> The wording will deem it a trick. Old men will hurriedly turn from it to regional romances and the lives of public figures. No club-women will thrill. The evil-minded will perceive in little Emmie a sister of little Lolita, and the disciples of the Viennese witch-doctor will snigger over it in their grotesque world of communal guilt and progressivnoe education.[11]

As could have been expected, the great majority of critics tended to interpret Invitation to a Beheading as an allegorical condemnation of a totalitarian state. The émigré reviewer V. Varšavskij placed the time of the novel's action in a distant future socialist state:

> The action of the novel takes place in some vague future after the total socialization of all life has brought the fall of culture and the degeneration of mankind.[12]

As Varšavskij interprets the novel, it is a condemnation of all totalitarian states, and in particular the Soviet Union. With the exception of the main protagonist, Cincinnatus C., all of the other characters in the novel are seen as allegorical masks which represent the various social functions of the state. Cincinnatus, on the other hand, is the only man to break away from his society's rituals. In refusing to conform, he asserts his individualism, his "I," and in doing so finds only repudiation and the penalty of death.

North American and West European critics have also had a tendency to read a great deal of politics into the novel. In a review from The Christian Century, Dean Peerman refers to Invitation to a Beheading as "a Nabokovian 1984" in which the main theme is the dehumanization that inevitably accompanies totalitarianism."[13] In his review of Andrew Field's book, Alfred Appel, Jr. suggests that the novel is unquestionably related to Orwell's 1984 and Huxley's Brave New World.[14] In another article entitled "Nabokov's Beheading", John Wain interprets Nabokov's "blazing emotion" as his "hatred for tyranny."[15]

The listing of such critical opinions could go on almost ad infinitum (or as Nabokov might say, ad absurdum), but these critics are missing the point. Of course the most superficial reading for plot does indeed lend itself to interpretations of this nature: the protagonist, Cincinnatus, appears to be an individual of a totalitarian state who has been incarcerated and condemned to die by beheading for what appears to be his refusal to conform to the habits and customs of the society in which he lives. The totalitarian state, by way of its very nature, cannot allow for individualism and accordingly sees its only panacea for such a disease as the destruction of those who cannot, or will not, adapt themselves to society's rigid rules. However, as Nabokov warns in the novel's foreword:

> I composed the Russian original exactly a quarter of a century ago in Berlin, some fifteen years after escaping from the Bolshevist regime, and just before the Nazi regime reached its full volume of welcome. The question whether or not my seeing both in terms of one dull beastly farce had any effect on this book, should concern the good reader as little as it does me.[16]

Any critic who disregards these words of warning and interprets Invitation to a Beheading as a condemnation of totalitarianism is deluding himself into thinking his analysis valid and supportable. As Nabokov's most ostentatious artifice, Invitation

to a Beheading lends itself to a much deeper level of interpretation. Maurice Richardson wrote:

> My impression is that the content of the dream [the narration of the novel] is largely personal and metaphysical and that it is a waste of time to start looking for political meaning.[17]

What Richardson seemed to mean by the term "metaphysical" is abstruse and bewildering philosophical speculation. About what he thought Nabokov was philosophizing is never made explicit. Nabokov gave perhaps the most significant hint about the novel's meaning when he said in an interview:

> I am aware of a certain central core of spirit in me that flashes and jeers at the brutal farce of totalitarian states, such as Russia, and her embarrassing tumors, such as China. A feature of my inner prospect is the absolute abyss yawning between the barb-wire tangle of police states and the spacious freedom of thought we enjoy in America and Western Europe.[18]

These words may be interpreted to mean that Nabokov does not object to totalitarian states so much on the grounds of ideological differences, as on the grounds of its moral structure. He is more distressed by the fact that such societies do not allow basic human freedoms. As John Wain puts it, Nabokov "hates the thought of a world in which the individual is denied

the right to live and develop in his own way."[19] Seemingly Cincinnatus lives in just such a society which does not allow these natural freedoms; consequently Nabokov seems to be philosophizing about the relative status of art in such an environment. But whether or not Cincinnatus lives under a political dictatorship is a matter totally irrelevant to Nabokov and should be so for any reader. As Andrew Field remarks, even taken as a political tale, Invitation to a Beheading is "equally applicable to (and thus equally independent of) [italics mine, T.P.A.] fascism, communism, or any other form of oppression, including democratic tyranny."[20] Nabokov's primary thematic concern in this novel is with the existence and significance of art in an artistically callous society which unconsciously contrives to extirpate individualism, to suppress, or better yet, obliterate, consciousness, and consequently stifle and paralyze art.

The many critics who have seen Invitation to a Beheading as a novel of political ideas have been correct in one observation; they saw Cincinnatus as an individual striving to retain a sense of individuality within his society. One feels, however, that these critics have been mistaken in their

analyses of the novel as an allegorical condemnation of a totalitarian state. Assuredly the novel is a condemnation of some type of society, but although the circumstances described are reminiscent of totalitarian states, there are no concrete hints in the text to confirm that it is one. In light of Nabokov's personal convictions about art, a more justifiable explanation would be that the novel is a direct allegory of life in general with Cincinnatus representing an "everyday" man who possesses a sentient nature. The "everyday" society in which he lives, a society characterized by poshlust' and bad art, is insensitive, unresponsive, and many times, hostile toward men of his disposition. The prison in which Cincinnatus finds himself incarcerated is an allegory of both the actual world from which he seeks to escape, both literally and in dream, and also the hallucination of a hypersensitive mind that cannot live in such an antagonistic society. The underlying tension of the novel is Cincinnatus' continual fear that he will be influenced by the society around him and accept its notions of life and art. He sees all of society, as represented by the various inhabitants of the prison and his family, as staging a theatrical production by which they hope to influence his way of thinking. The beheading which Cincinnatus so fears is symbolic of his possible conformity and acceptance of

his

his society's ideals, thereby drowning forever his individualism in the sea of poshlust'. As a man of true artistic consciousness, a man embodying a sense of artistic consciousness which is common to all human beings, Cincinnatus aspires to become a writer; he envisages a life in art as the fullest, most human response to his condition in such a society. That Cincinnatus rises from the beheading-block and walks away in the novel's final scene is symbolic of the fact that he, at the point where he is about to conform to his philistine society, finally decides to assert his individuality, become a writer, and live a life in literary aesthetics.

In justification of this interpretation, it is necessary to draw attention to the most important recurring symbols and images in the text. The very first consideration to be made is with the nature of Cincinnatus' crime. The novel opens in medias res with Cincinnatus having just been sentenced to death. From this point the narrator gradually reconstructs Cincinnatus' history, revealing at first only fragmentary information concerning the protagonist's circumstance. Finally at one point in the narrative, we are informed of the nature of Cincinnatus' crime; he [Cincinnatus] has stopped to reflect on the reasons for his imprisonment and the fact that he would have to "don the red top-hat."[21] He evoked "the full extent of his life,

and endeavored to comprehend his situation with the utmost exactitude":

> Accused of the most terrible crimes, gnostical turpitude, so rare and so unutterable that it was necessary to use circumlocutions like 'impenetrability', 'opacity', 'occlusion'; sentenced for that crime to death by beheading; emprisoned in the fortress in expectation of the unknown but near and inexorable date ...[22]

The reader is left uninformed as to the exact nature of this crime until the narrator manifests it in this way:

> From his earliest years Cincinnatus, by some strange and happy chance comprehending his danger, carefully managed to conceal a certain peculiarity. He was impervious to the rays of others, and therefore produced when off his guard a bizarre impression, as of a dark obstacle in this world of souls transparent to one another; he learned however to feign transcence, employing a complex system of optical illusions, as it were--but he had only to forget himself, to allow a momentary lapse in self control, in the manipulation of cunningly illuminated facets and angles at which he turned his soul, and immediately there was alarm ... Cincinnatus was opaque.[23]

Cincinnatus is an "opaque" individual in a "translucent" society. Because of this characteristic he is ostracized, or at least feared as being dangerously different, throughout his entire life. As a result Cincinnatus has existed as an infinitely pathetic figure, fearful of his surrounding

society, and longing for someone with whom he could commiserate about his situation and share his hideous difference. He senses that all living beings, and even the physical environment, are in hostile collusion against him:

> I am surrounded by some sort of wretched specters, not by people. They torment me as can torment only senseless visions, bad dreams, dregs of delirium, the drivel of nightmares and everything that passes down here for real life. In theory one would wish to wake up. But wake up I cannot without outside help, and yet I fear this help terribly, and my very soul has grown lazy and accustomed to its snug swaddling clothes.[24]

In desperation, at the age of fifteen, he marries a young girl named Martha whom he had met at the doll factory where he worked. In this marriage Cincinnatus had hoped to find a kindred soul and a sense of security and belonging. Unfortunately, however, this connubial tie becomes only a source of constant torment for Cincinnatus; Martha openly takes lovers and continually taunts her husband with explicit details of her illicit sex relations. He soon realizes that she too is as "translucent" as the society in which she lives. Even their children, which are not Cincinnatus' own, are a pair of grotesques - one "lame and evil-tempered," the other "dull, obese, and nearly blind"; they are symbolic of life's ultimate irony and hostility toward Cincinnatus.

His world is understandably painted in the bizarre and horrifying color of black.

Read as an allegory of life, the novel depicts a world of artistically insensitive human beings with Cincinnatus representing an aesthetic solipsist. He feels his world to be hostile toward, or at least oblivious to, men of his sentient nature - men who possess a true sense of reality and the pleasurable nuances of life's chemistry. Predictably enough, Cincinnatus' most ubiquitous torture is bad art as symbolized by photography; this is the art _par excellence_ of this world of _poshlust'_. The culmination of this mechanical art is the "photohoroscope" as devised by Cincinnatus' executioner, M'sieur Pierre. This gadget utilizes a series of someone's retouched snapshots, placing the face in montage with the photographs of older people, so as to effect a chronological record of a person's life from birth to death. The result is predictably unconvincing and this art-form is to be regarded as the ultimate achievement of bad art.

The epitome of literary art in Cincinnatus' world is a novel entitled _Quercus_. A three thousand page work devoted to the life of an oak tree, it was considered to be the "acme of modern thought":

> Employing the gradual development of the tree (growing lone and mighty at the edge

> of a canyon at whose bottom the waters never ceased to din), the author enfolded all the historic events - or shadows of events - of which the oak could have been a witness; now it was a dialogue between two warriors dismounted from their steads - one dappled, the other dun - so as to rest under the cool ceiling of its noble foliage; now highwaymen stopping by and the song of a wild-haired fugitive damsel; now beneath the storm's blue zigzag, the hasty passage of a lord escaping from royal wrath; now, upon a spread corpse, still quivering with the throb of the leafy shadows; now a brief drama in the life of some villagers. There was a paragraph a page and a half long in which all the letters began with "p".[25]

This is Nabokov's reductio ad absurdum of the naturalistic novel and the principle of exhaustive documentary realism. It subverts everything that art should be and is "mindless, formless, pointless, infinitely tedious, devoid of humanity. It denies imagination, spontaneity, the shaping power of human consciousness."[26]

The embodiement of all that is characteristically perverse and banal in Cincinnatus' world is his executioner, M'sieur Pierre; he introduces himself to Cincinnatus thus:

> I don't want to boast, but in me my dear colleague, you will find a rare combination of outward sociability and inward delicacy, the art of causerie and the ability to keep silent, playfullness and seriousness ... Who will console a sobbing infant, and glue

> his broken toy back together? M'sieur Pierre. Who will intercede for a poor widow? M'sieur Pierre. Who will provide sober advice, who will recommend a medicine, who will bring glad tidings? Who? M'sieur Pierre. All will be done by M'sieur Pierre.[27]

In talking with Cincinnatus on various subjects such as sex, art, and gastronomic delights, Pierre expresses the distorted communal values of the society which he represents and thereby exposes it as a world of mediocrity. He talks to Cincinnatus about his favorite topic, sex:

> Recently I had sexual intercourse with an extraordinarily healthy and splendid individual. What pleasure when a large brunette ... Yes, a red rose between her teeth, black net stockings up to here, and not a stitch besides... There nothing more pleasant, for example, than to surround oneself with mirrors and watch the good work going on... when it comes to caresses I love what we French wrestlers call 'macarons': You give her a nice slap on the neck, and the firmer the meat... [28]

Some critics have tenously suggested that M'sieur Pierre is Cincinnatus' physical double.[29] This writer has not found much support in that hypothesis. Instead, it is felt that Cincinnatus has his own double within himself. There are continual references to "an additional Cincinnatus," the "real" Cincinnatus as opposed to "another," and "one Cincinnatus" or "the other." This "other Cincinnatus" is interpreted as Cincinnatus' alter

ego. One Cincinnatus being cowardly and ready to succumb to the desires of his society, the other being the assertive force, the writer, the Cincinnatus which overcomes and walks away from the beheading. In doing this Cincinnatus has rejected bad art as symbolized by the beheading [the perpetrators of this act of murder look upon it as a form of art and M'sieur Pierre as an artist.] A man of Cincinnatus' character cannot help but view this world as one of horror, as symbolized by the spider in his cell, and doom, as reflected by the frequent use of the colors red and blue in descriptions. Understandably Cincinnatus regards this society as a grotesque and incomprehensibly improbable farce in which the inhabitants are seen not as real people, but instead as parodies of humans, as specters. To him the world seems flat, two dimensional; better yet, it takes on the appearance of a huge and disturbingly bizarre stage production in which the actors (society) are incessantly trying to convince him of some point about life. This would certainly explain Nabokov's extended use of the theatre-metaphor throughout the novel. People assume various roles (some playing two roles as with the case of Cincinnatus' jailer and the prison director) and seemingly enter and exit on cue. Cincinnatus himself says:

> 'I ask three minutes - go away for that time or at least be quiet - yes, a three-

> minute intermission - after that, so be it, I'll act to the end my role in your idiotic production.'[30]

He views all of the action of his imprisonment as a series of carefully directed scenarios. He even sees the natural environment as hastily painted scenes, and

> A summer thunderstorm, simply yet tastefully staged, was performed outside.[31]

In the novel's foreword, Nabokov describes his work as "a violin in a void."[32] This description is in fact more appropriate for Cincinnatus. He finds himself to be the only "alive" person in his world - a world totally devoid of true artistic inspiration. Cincinnatus places his only hope of escape from this world (the prison) in Emmie, the prison director's daughter. In talking with her in his cell, Cincinnatus says:

> 'If only you were grown up, if your soul had a slight touch of my patina, you would, as in poetic antiquity, feed a potion to the turnkey, on a night that is murky.[33]

However, after seeing her image in M'sieur Pierre's photohoroscope, Cincinnatus realizes that it will be only a matter of time before she too will lose her innocence and her purity. Salvation becomes hopeless through Emmie. In fact, time has

always been Cincinnatus' enemy; primarily it symbolizes the incessant perpetuation of the grotesque reality in which he finds himself.

The underlying tension of the novel is Cincinnatus' fear that he too in time will succumb to the influence of his surrounding reality and accept its false logic, its stifled outlook on life, and its banal notions of art. The beheading which he fears is symbolic of his possible final acceptance of and collusion with this alien world of bad art.

Developing concurrently with the exposition of Cincinnatus' relation to his reality, is the theme of Cincinnatus' individuality. Awaiting his execution, Cincinnatus sits in his cell and reflects on the nature of his being and the relevance of his role in society. He comes to the conclusion that he is the only "alive" being in his world:

> For thirty years I have lived among specters that appear solid to the touch, concealing from them the fact that I am alive and real -- [34]

In thinking this way Cincinnatus becomes aware of his "oneness", his "selfhood," and concludes that the only logical escape from this world of sham is through the assertion of his individuality. He consequently rejects his surrounding reality as a neatly contrived two dimensional scene:

> Everything has fallen into place... that is, everything has duped me -- all of this theatrical, pathetic stuff -- the promises of a volatile maiden, a mother's moist gaze, the knocking on the wall, a neighbor's friendliness, and finally the hills which broke out in a deadly rash.[35]

In rejecting this reality, Cincinnatus replaces it with another reality which he has seen since childhood only in his dreams. He describes this other world as a place in which people become "captivatingly majestic, free and ethereal":

> There, tam, là-bas, the gaze of men flows with inimitable understanding; there the freaks that are tortured here walk unmolested ... there, there are the originals of those gardens where we used to roam and hide in this world; there everything strikes one by its bewitching evidence, by the simplicity of perfect good; there everything pleases one's soul, everything is filled with the kind of fun children know; there shines the mirror that now and then sends a chance reflection here.[36]

Cincinnatus has come to believe in the existence and reality of this other world:

> I have long since grown accustomed to the thought that what we call reality is semi-reality, the promise of reality, a foreglimpse and a whiff of it; that is they contain, in a very vague, diluted state, more genuine reality than our vaunted waking life which, in its turn, is semi-sleep, an evil drowsiness into which penetrate in grotesque disguise the sounds and

> the sights of the real world,
> flowing beyond the periphery
> of the mind.[37]

As Cincinnatus mentions, however, his flesh ties him to this first, grotesque reality. He is only partially in that dream-world:

> ... the greater part of him was in
> a quite different place, while only
> an insignificant portion of it was
> wandering, perplexed, here -- a poor,
> vague Cincinnatus, a comparatively
> stupid Cincinnatus, trusting, feeble,
> and foolish as people are in their
> sleep. But even during this sleep...
> his real life showed through too much.[38]

Cincinnatus puts a great deal of faith in his dreams because it is through his dreams that he becomes more convinced of his individuality and the definite existence of his other reality:

> It exists, my dream world, it must
> exist, since, surely there must be
> an original of the clumsy copy.[39]

Convinced of his individuality and of another reality, Cincinnatus next faces the problem of determining through what means he can assert his "selfness" and communicate the knowledge and beauty of this other world. Cincinnatus concludes that he must escape into aesthetics and become a writer - a task

which he greatly fears:

> I know something. I know something. But expression of it comes so hard ... I have no desires, save the desire to express myself -- in defiance of all the world's muteness. How frightened I am.[40]

Despite his desires, Cincinnatus feels inadequate as a writer:

> Not knowing how to write, but sensing with my criminal intuition how words are combined, what one must do for a commonplace word to come alive and to share its neighbor's sheen, heat, shadow, while reflecting itself in its neighbor and renewing the neighboring word in the process, so that the whole line is live iridescence; while I sense the nature of this kind of word propinquity, I am nevertheless unable to achieve it.[41]

What Cincinnatus is searching for is new words and new combinations and relationships of these words. He claims that if he were to have the time, "my soul would have surrounded itself with a structure of words."[42] Cincinnatus is striving to find another language for another reader. He feels the words used by men whom he had known to be inadequate:

> I would give up if I were laboring for a reader existing today, but as 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; I must think only of myself, of that force which urges me to express myself.[43]

He later expresses the desire to become a poet, to have at his command all of the necessary words to express himself:

> 'My words all mill about in one spot. Envious of poets. How wonderful it must be to speed along a page and, right from the page, where only a shadow continues to run, to take off into the blue.'[44]

Cincinnatus' lack of words makes his isolation from the surrounding reality complete. From here the novel progressively moves towards Cincinnatus' point of view and the reality which encompasses him becomes more and more intangible. The final scene of the supposed beheading is one in which Cincinnatus symbolically asserts his individuality and decides to become a writer. He rises from the chopping block, thereby throwing off the oppressive yoke of society's influence. He leaves behind him only the rubble and fallen props of a theatrical set:

> Little was left of the square. The platform had long since collapsed in a cloud of reddish dust ... The fallen trees lay flat and reliefless, while those that were still standing, also two-dimensional, with a lateral shading of the trunk to suggest roundness, barely held on with their branches to the ripping mesh of the sky. Everything

> was falling. A spinning wind was picking up and whirling: dust, rags, chips of painted wood, bits of gilded plaster, pasteboard bricks, posters; an arid gloom fleeted; and amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery, Cincinnatus made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him.[45]

Robert Alter has written a most interesting analysis of the novel entitled: "Invitation to a Beheading: Nabokov on the Art of Politics."[46] What is so fascinating about this interpretation is the fact that Alter has seemingly been succesful at analyzing the novel as both a direct allegory of life and an allegory of a totalitarian state. This interpretation will be dealt with here in some detail since some of the ideas expressed are similar to those which formulate the basis of the analysis presented in this study. In dealing with this work, however, it seems necessary to point out briefly some of the incongruencies Alter has seemingly overlooked in his analysis.

Alter begins his article by saying that critics have generally come to the conclusion that although Nabokov's novels exhibit a masterful technical virtuosity, they are in fact outstanding only as ostentatious artifices and therefore are to be considered minor. As he points out, in "whirling all social,

political, and psychological materials into a circumscribed inner concern with art and the artist,"[47] Nabokov has enraged his critics to unjustly condemn him as an ineffectual novelist, a writer who has failed to engage in the larger realm of human experience. This is generally the case with regard to Nabokov's apparent reluctance to teach us something about the social, political, and spherical milieu in which we reside, or comment on the moral character of man's complex psychological make-up. In particular, critics object to Nabokov's seemingly frivolous artistic indulgence of utilizing a totalitarian state as a convenient dramatic background for his recurrent theme of "the nature of the creative imagination and the solitary, freak-like role into which a man gifted with such an imagination is inevitably cast in any society."[48] They feel that Nabokov is avoiding his responsibilities as a writer by converting totalitarianism, the most ugly and disturbing of modern-day political actualities, into the stuff of a fable about art and artifice.

Alter is convinced that there is indeed an inner connection between the special emphasis Nabokov puts on artifice and the totalitarian worlds which he seemingly uses as the background for his novels. Using Invitation to a Beheading as his working example, he choses to reveal this connection and show that Nabokov, primarily, through his concern for art and the fate of

the artist, is able to illuminate a central aspect of the supposedly human condition in an era of police states and totalitarian terrors.

Working from the assumption that Nabokov sees consciousness, and its perception of patterns, as the medium through which reality comes into being, Alter maintains that if consciousness is obliterated, reality is expunged. He then concludes that execution, the mechanical means by which human agents destroy human consciousness, represents the supreme principle of irreality. The world in which Cincinnatus lives, a world which apparently contrives to numb, cloud, cripple and finally extirpate individual consciousness, seemingly has execution as its central rite. Thus he sees Cincinnatus' society as one consciously dedicated to the assertion of irreality. Moreover, any being possessing a truely human consciousness who lives in such a society, as Cincinnatus does, must consequently view this world of collusion to the surrender of human consciousness as a grotesque and improbable farce. Alter points out, however, that the totalitarian state in which Cincinnatus resides is by no means a disguised description of some real regime, but rather a fictional fantasy revealing only the ultimate implications of the totalitarian principle and its conceivable possibilities. Cincinnatus is then analyzed as a sentient being, an "opaque"[49]

figure, who lives in a grotesque world of specters and parodies of human beings. He lives in a world which is insensitive to the aesthetic qualities of life, a world which is characterized by cheap, false, meretricious, mechanical art, a world where the primary concern is the obliteration of human consciousness and the affirmation of the principle of irreality, a world which abounds with poshlust'. Alter also points out in defense of his arguement that Nabokov sees the totalitarian state as the ideal model of a philistine society. Nabokov remarked in his discussion of poshlust' apropos of Dead Souls in Nikolai Gogol that it [poshlust'] is a quality which "yawns universally at times of revolution or war."[50] He then concludes that "Nabokov notes the prevalence of poshlust' under condition of political absolutism not merely because it is an observable and offensive aspect of revolutionary and militant regimes - ... but because he recognizes in it an indespensable principle of such regimes, a necessary expression of their inner nature."[51]

Alter analyzes characters and scenes which he feels assert the principles of irreality and poshlust' and accordingly contrasts Cincinnatus' feelings and ideas with this world. He ultimately concludes that Cincinnatus symbolically embodies the artistic endeavors which are potentially within every

individual in a totalitarian society. But, Alter claims that Cincinnatus becomes a writer, not because there is a streak of the aesthete within him, but because finding himself a creature with an artistic consciousness in an existence which offers nothing to explain or tolerate this incredible fact, he engages art as the most human response to his own human condition.

Alter, then, sees Invitation to a Beheading as essentially illuminating the entire question of the inexorable antagonism between totalitarianism and authentic art. As previously mentioned however, it is strongly felt that Nabokov did not intend to comment on a totalitarian state in this novel, whether it be on ideological or moral grounds. Granted, Nabokov has used political themes in his writings ostensibly as a background for a discussion of the inherent problems of the creative process in such a society.[52] But it is felt that such an interpretation does not lend itself to this particular novel. And although such facts as execution being the central rite of both Cincinnatus' world and that of a totalitarian state do exist, one feels that there are no substantial inferences of politics in Cincinnatus' world. One may argue that Nabokov would not be so forthright as to make clear any political scheme in his writings; but the fact is, he has done so on occasion as can be seen in his novel,

Bend Sinister. And in consideration of the protagonist's fate [for Alter it is death], Alter's interpretation could only lead one to see Invitation to a Beheading as a condemnation of totalitarianism. It is felt that although Nabokov's senses strongly the antagonism between art and police states and describes this problem in his writings, he never would be so bold as to condemn openly this situation. For the most part, Alter has correctly interpreted Cincinnatus' personal problem of living in an insensitive society; one would nevertheless prefer to interpret this world as everyday society in light of Nabokov's pronounced commitments about art and didacticism. In defense of the presented explication, it is interesting to note two incongruencies seemingly overlooked by Alter in his article. He concludes that since Nabokov finds poshlust' to be the most prevalent characteristic of political absolutism, he writes that since Nabokov presents Cincinnatus' world as permeated with poshlust' it must necessarily be a totalitarian society. The invalidity of this conclusion can be easily exposed by simply drawing attention to any one of a number of Nabokov's prose writings which portrays a philistine society, but which is not in the least reminiscent of a dictatorship or have as its background a political milieu. Also, it seems that if Nabokov had intended to portray a dictatorship of any nature, this situation

would necessarily presuppose that a significant portion of the population living under this system would feel a great deal of resentment; but in Invitation to a Beheading Cincinnatus' crime of the assertion of his individualism is described as "rare and unutterable."[53] In any event, one thing is sure - Cincinnatus seeks a life in art as the only possible escape from whatever type of society he is fleeing. As Hermann, the protagonist in Nabokov's Despair, once said:

> The invention of art contains for more intrinsical truths than life's reality.[54]

FOOTNOTES

[1] As cited by Andrew Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 181.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Two examples are: Robert Phelps in "The Unique Vision of Vladimir Nabokov," review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov in The Herald Tribune Book Review, November 22, 1959, p. 16; and Dean Peerman in "Invitation to a Beheading," review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov, in The Christian Century, February 3, 1960, p. 141.

[4] Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art, p. 182.

[5] Ibid.

[6] As cited by Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art, p. 182.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 84.

[9] Published by the Russian émigré publishing-house Dom Knigi of Paris.

[10] See Gleb Struve, Russkaja literatura v izgnanii (Russian Literature in Exile) (N'ju-Jork: Izd. im. Čekhova, 1956), pp. 278-290.

[11] Vladimir Nabokov, Invitation to a Beheading (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), pp. 7-8.

[12] V. Varšavskij, "O Poplavskom i Nabokove" ("About Poplavskij and Nabokov"), in Opyty (Experiences) (no. IV, 1955), p. 70.

[13] Dean Peerman, "Invitation to a Beheading," in a review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov, in The Christian Century, February 3, 1960, p. 141.

[14] Alfred Appel, Jr. in a review Nabokov: His Life in Art, by Andrew Field, in Contemporary Literature, vol. IX, 1968, p. 244.

[15] John Wain, "Nabokov's Beheading," in a review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov, in The New Republic, December 21, 1959, p. 19.

[16] Nabokov, Invitation, p. 5.

[17] Maurice Richardson, "New Novels: Invitation to a Beheading," review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov, in New Statesman, June 4, 1960, p. 833.

[18] "Nabokov on Nabokov and Things," New York Times Book Review. May 12, 1968, p. 51.

[19] Wain, "Nabokov's Beheading," p. 18.

[20] Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art, p. 182.

[21] Ibid., p. 21. [The expression means: "to be beheaded" or literally "to get the axe."]

[22] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[23] Ibid., p. 24.

[24] Ibid., p. 36.

[25] Ibid., pp. 122-123.

[26] Alter, Nabokov: Criticism, pp. 54-55.

[27] Nabokov, Invitation, p. 85.

[28] Ibid., p. 144.

[29] Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art, p. 188.

[30] Nabokov, Invitation, p. 209.

[31] Ibid., p. 129.

[32] Ibid., p. 7.

[33] Ibid., p. 47.

[34] Ibid., p. 70.

[35] Ibid., pp. 204-205.

[36] Ibid., p. 94.

[37] Ibid., p. 92.

[38] Ibid., p. 120.

[39] Ibid., p. 93.

[40] Ibid., p. 91.

[41] Ibid., p. 93.

[42] Ibid., p. 204.

[43] Ibid., p. 95.

[44] Ibid., p. 194.

[45] Ibid., p. 223.

[46] Robert Alter, "Invitation to a Beheading: Nabokov and The Art of Politics," in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, eds. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 41-60.

[47] Ibid., p. 42.

[48] Simon Karlinsky, "Illusion, Reality and Parody in Nabokov's Plays," in Nabokov: The Man and His Work, ed. L.S. Dembo (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 183.

[49] Cincinnatus is accused of being "opaque" in a "translucent" society.

[50] Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1959), p. 65.

[51] Alter, Nabokov: Criticism, p. 55.

[52] The most notable example is Bend Sinister.

[53] Nabokov, Invitation, p. 72.

[54] Vladimir Nabokov, Despair (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), p. 132.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this study to show that Nabokov's prose cannot be analyzed in terms of contemporary formalist criticism; it defies such an approach. Instead, one must analyze his writings as a totally idiosyncratic phenomenon in modern literature. Moreover, one must critically approach his works with the utmost respect, for "to approach Nabokov's novels with anything less than complete humility is not only an act of arrogance but foolishness."[1]

In the past, critics have tended to condemn Nabokov's novels as superfluous artifices because they failed to teach the reader anything about himself or his society. And as has been shown, Nabokov refuses to permeate his fiction with didacticisms of any social nature. He consequently scorns both those readers and critics who search for any kind of message in his novels, as well as those writers who compose with some didactic moral, social, psychological, or religious purpose in mind. This would explain his outspoken contempt for such writers as Tolstoj and especially Dostoevskij, as well as "the Freudian approach" to literary criticism and interpretation.

In their haste either to find some message in his novels

or pidgeon-hole his style as the influence of some other writer, critics haveccompletely overlooked Nabokov's own themes; they have refused to judge his art according to its own intrinsic values. Furthermore, when critics have attempted to evaluate Nabokov's art in isolation, they generally have been unable to discern clearly his themes and then have wrongly interpreted the works. This was due not to any fault of theirs, but instead to the overwhelming complexity of Nabokov's literary style. As a result, this work has attempted to distinguish the image of the artist as the most significant recurring theme in Nabokov's novels. In addition, an attempt has been made to deal at least generally with the problems of his artifice to show that the allusions and illusions, games and deceptions, parodies and distortions, all form an integral part of his complex art, and in effect suggest a whole vision of life and reality in art. In support of the conclusions reached, an attempt has been made to explicate the predominating image of the artist in two of Nabokov's Russian novels. This choice of the Russian novels is significant in that one can show that they form the basis of Nabokov's art. If one is to understand fully the English prose, one must first comprehend the Russian novels. The specific choice of The Defense and Invitation to a Beheading is significant in that they best present the image

of the artist and the inherent problems of the creative process in an artistically insensitive society. As has been suggested in the foregoing chapters, Nabokov condones an escape into aesthetics away from the oppressive trivialities of today's life; he himself has effected such an escape through his literary art. His works thus reflect artists striving to achieve what he has already accomplished in their creation. But, as Nabokov warns, this retreat from reality must be only temporary; the artist must not lose control of his ability to return to that reality from which art originated. Art can be man's saviour, but if one reaches that paraphasia where one can no longer clearly discern life's reality, one is destined to failure both as an artist and a human being.

Luzhin in The Defense and Cincinnatus in Invitation to a Beheading represent the extremes of the artist-spectrum in Nabokov's fictional world of art. At one end, Luzhin finds security and happiness in the aesthetics of his art. But because he is unable to control his reveries and passion, Luzhin irreparably disassociates himself from life and thus destines himself to be a failure in both life and art. His art so permeates his reality at the novel's conclusion that the only escape Luzhin sees from his maddening consciousness is the absence of consciousness -- his ultimate fate is self-destruction.

At the other end of the spectrum, Cincinnatus is an individual victimized by a distorted view of life and art's role in life. Living in a world of poshlust' which is characterized by meretricious art, Cincinnatus is metaphorically condemned to die because he does not accept his society's notions. On the day of his "execution," Cincinnatus asserts his individualism and finally decides to become a writer; he chooses a life in aesthetics as his escape from the wretched world of his first consciousness. Cincinnatus thus survives his ordeal and dissociates himself from his past, his condemned self, and his "death." Purged of his despair, sure of his own destiny, and in harmony with the realities of both life and art, Cincinnatus views the world of his imprisonment and despair as truly a bad stage set. He thus moves out of it and enters into a life beyond illusion. He masters his imagination, and by that feat fulfills himself and finds both his destiny and the direction of reality; Cincinnatus exits the final scene a true artist-hero.

In conclusion, one may say that although critics have been insensitive to the soul of Nabokov's prose, and in fact on occasion have compared his writings to the spiral maze of Nabokov's own eccentric personality, a glimmer of cognizance

has been detected in scholarly criticism. Increasing numbers of littérateurs also are beginning to distinguish Nabokov's theme as the problem of the creative process in today's world and the resultant image of the artist in his fiction. Assuming this trend continues, one foresees full recognition and the understanding of Nabokov and his prose in the not-too-distant future.

FOOTNOTES

[1] R.H.W. Dillard, "Not Text But Texture: The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov," The Hollins Critic, III (June, 1966), 1.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: A near complete bibliography of Nabokov's writings through 1966 may be found in Andrew Field's Nabokov: His Life in Art (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1967), pp. 352-380.

Primary Sources

A. Works in English:

Nabokov, Vladimir. Ada. New York: Fawcett World Library, 1970. [1st. edition New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969.]

_____. Bend Sinister. Norfolk, Connecticut: Henry Holt & Co., 1947. [1st. edition Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1941.]

_____. Conclusive Evidence. New York and London: Harper & Bros., 1951. [Prior to the book's appearance the separate chapters appeared in slightly different form in The Atlantic Monthly (January, 1943); The New Yorker (January 3, 1948; March 27, 1948; June 12, 1948; July 31, 1948; September 18, 1948; January 1, 1949; April 9, 1949; December 10, 1949; February 11, 1950; April 15, 1950); Partisan Review, 1951; Harper's Magazine (January, 1951).]

_____. Nabokov's Congeries. Selected, with a critical introduction by Page Stegner. New York: The Viking Press, 1968.

_____. The Defense. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964.

_____. Despair. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966. [1st. edition London: John Long, 1937. The 1937 version appeared serially in Playboy magazine, December, 1965--April, 1966. The novel was altered and slightly enlarged in its 1966 English translation for Putnam.]

_____. The Eye. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.

_____. The Gift. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963.

_____. Invitation to a Beheading. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.

_____. King, Queen, Knave. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968. [The English translation contains many revisions of the original Russian version. A German edition of the original is currently in print as König, Dame, Bube by Rowohlt of Berlin, 1959.]

_____. Laughter in the Dark. New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1969. [1st. English translation was published in London by John Long (1936) under the title Camera Obscura. The American translation of the novel was substantially altered and retitled Laughter in the Dark and published by New Directions in 1938.]

_____. Lolita. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958. [1st. edition Paris: Olympia Press, 1955.]

_____. Mary. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

_____. Nikolai Gogol. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1959. [1st. edition Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1944.]

_____. Pale Fire. New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1969. [1st. edition New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1962.]

_____. Pnin. New York: Atheneum, 1965. [1st. edition, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1953. Chapter III first appeared in the New Yorker, April 1953, pp. 115-118.]

_____. The Real Life of Sebastien Knight. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1959. [1st. edition Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1941.]

_____. Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1966. [Definitive version of memoirs originally published as Conclusive Evidence (1951), including revisions and additions as found in Drugie berega*, as well as some wholly new

* See Primary Sources, Works in Russian.

material, such as a brief biography of Nabokov's father.]

B. Works in Russian:

Nabokov, Vladimir. (V. Sirin). Dar. ("The Gift.") N'ju-Jork: Izd. im. Čekhova, 1952. [The novel first appeared serially in the Parisian Russian émigré journal Sovremennye zapiski (vols. 63-67) in 1935-37, but without the fourth chapter, which was deleted by the editors. The first complete Russian edition appeared only in 1952.]

_____. Drugie berega. ("Other Shores.") N'ju-Jork: Izd. im. Čekhova, 1954. [This is a Russian version of Conclusive Evidence, rewritten and slightly expanded rather than directly translated in Russian.]

Sirin", V. [Vladimir Nabokov.] Kamera obskura. ("Camera Obscura.") Berlin": Sovremennyja Zapiski, Parabola, 1931. [The novel first appeared serially in Parisian Russian émigré journal Sovremennye zapiski (vols. 49-52) in 1932-33.]

_____. Korol', dama, valet". ("King, Queen, Knave.") Berlin": Slovo, 1928.

_____. Mašen'ka. ("Mary.") Berlin": Slovo, 1926.

_____. Otčajanie. ("Despair.") Berlin": Petropolis, 1936. [The novel first appeared serially in Sovremennye zapiski (vols. 54-56) in 1934.]

_____. Podvig". [translation in progress] Pariž": Sovremennyja Zapiski, 1932.

_____. Priglašenie na kazn'. ("Invitation to a Beheading.") Pariž": Dom Knigi, 1938. [The novel was first published serially in Sovremennye zapiski (vols. 58-60) in 1935-36.]

_____. Soglјadataj. ("The Eye.") Pariž": Russkija Zapiski, 1938. [Title story of a collection of short stories.]

_____. Zaščita Lužina. ("The Defense.") Berlin": Slovo, 1930.

Secondary Sources

A. Books and Theses:

Appel, Alfred, Jr. and Newman, Charles, eds. Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

Dembo, L.S., ed. Nabokov: The Man and His Work. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967.

Field, Andrew. Nabokov: His Life in Art. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1967.

Fromberg, Susan. "Folding the Patterned Carpet: Form and Theme in the Novels of Vladimir Nabokov." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1966.

Hill, John. The American Novel in Progress. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1962.

Marshall, Harold. Art and the Artless. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1962.

Parker, Stephen Jan. "Vladimir Nabokov-Sirin as Teacher: The Russian Novels." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1969.

Stegner, Page. Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov. New York: The Dial Press, 1966.

Struve, Gleb. Russkaja literatura v izgnanii. ("Russian literature in Exile.") N'ju-Jork: Izd. im. Čekhova, 1956.

Trilling, Lionell. The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society. New York: The Viking Press, 1950.

Updike, John. Assorted Prose. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.

B. Articles in Books:

Field, Andrew. "The Defenseless Luzhin." On Contemporary Literature. Edited by Richard Kostelanetz. New York: Avon Books, 1964.

Green, Martin. "American Rococo: Salinger and Nabokov." Reappraisals: Some Commonsense Readings in American Literature. New York: Avon Books, 1964.

C. Articles in Journals:

Dillard, R.H.W. "Not Text But Texture: The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov." The Hollins Critic, Vol. III, no. 3 (June, 1966), 1-12.

Gold, Herbert. "Vladimir Nabokov: An Interview." Paris Review, (Winter, 1967), 92-111.

Grosshans, Henry. "Vladimir Nabokov and The Dream of Old Russia." Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VII (Winter, 1966), 401-409.

Handley, Jack. "To Die in English." The Northwest Review, (Spring, 1963), 23-39.

Ivask, George. "The World of Vladimir Nabokov." Russian Review, (April, 1963), 134-142.

Lee, L.L. "Vladimir Nabokov's Great Spiral Being." Western Humanities Review, XVIII (Summer, 1964), 225-236.

Struve, Gleb. "Current Russian Literature: II. Vladimir Sirin." East European and Slavic Review, (January, 1934), 436-443.

_____. "The Double Life of Russian Literature." Books Abroad, (Autumn, 1954), 389-406.

Varšavskij, V. "O Poplavskom i Nabokove." (About Poplavskij and Nabokov.) Opyty, (Experiences) no. IV (1955), 65-72.

D. Articles in Magazines:

Brenner, Conrad. "Nabokov: The Art of the Perverse." The New Republic, June 23, 1958, pp. 18-21.

Coleman, John. "Nabokov." The Spectator, November 6, 1959, p. 619.

Donald, Malcolm. "An Interview With Vladimir Nabokov." New Yorker, November 8, 1959, pp. 195-203.

Dupee, F.W. "Nabokov: The Prose and Poetry Of It All." The New York Review of Books, December, 1963, pp. 10-12.

Hagman, John G. "A Conversation with Vladimir Nabokov - With Digressions." Twentieth Century, December, 1959, pp. 444-450.

"Nabokov on Nabokov and Things." The New York Times Book Review, May 12, 1968, pp. 4-5, 51-52.

Pryce-Jones, Alan. "The Art of Nabokov." Harper's Magazine, April, 1963, pp. 97-101.

Toffler, Alvin. "Playboy Interview: Vladimir Nabokov." Playboy, January, 1964, pp. 35-45.

Smith, Peter Duval. "Vladimir Nabokov on His Life and Work." The Listener, November 22, 1962, pp. 856-858.

E. Reviews:

Adams, Robert M. "Nabokov's Game." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New York Review, January 14, 1965, pp. 18-19.

Anderson, Quentin. "Nabokov in Time." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New Republic, June 4, 1966, pp. 23-25.

Appel, Alfred, Jr. "Nabokov: His Life in Art." Review of Nabokov: His Life in Art, by Andrew Field. Contemporary Literature. Vol. IX, 1968, pp. 244-246.

Appel, Alfred, Jr. "Nabokov's Puppet Show - I." Review of Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New Republic, January 14, 1967, pp. 27-32.

_____. "Nabokov's Puppet Show - II." Review of Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New Republic, January 21, 1967, pp. 25-30.

Bicilli, P. "Priglašenie na kazn'." Review of Priglašenie na kazn' ("Invitation to a Beheading"), by Vladimir Sirin (Vladimir Nabokov). Sovremennye zapiski, LXVIII, 1939, pp. 474-477.

Bradbury, Malcolm. "Grandmaster." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov, The Spectator, November 13, 1964, pp. 643-644.

Bryden, Ronald. "I, Cincinnatus." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Spectator, June 3, 1960, p. 810.

Burns, Singer. "Utopia and Reality." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. Encounter, January, 1961, pp. 77-79.

"Checkmate." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Atlantic Monthly, November, 1964, pp. 197-199.

Clements, Robert J. "Life Was Like a Chessboard." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Saturday Review, September 26, 1964, pp. 45-46.

Davenport, Guy. "Turn the Other Face." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The National Review, November 3, 1964, pp. 978-979.

Dennis, Nigel. "Sacrifices of a Grandmaster." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New York Times Book Review, September 27, 1964, p. 4.

"The Devil's Tongue." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. Newsweek, September 28, 1964, pp. 98-99A.

"The Dream of Cincinnatus C." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. Time, October 26, 1959, pp. 109-110.

Field, Andrew. "The View from Above." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New Leader, October 26, 1964, pp. 22-23.

Furbank, P.N. "Chess and Jigsaw." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. Encounter, January, 1965, pp. 83-86.

Hampshire, Stuart. "Among the Barbarians." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New Statesman, November 6, 1964, pp. 702-703.

Hicks, Granville. "A Man of Many Words." Review of Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Saturday Review, January 28, 1967, pp. 31-32.

Hindus, Maurice. "Gentle Russian Yesterdays." Review of Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Saturday Review, April 14, 1951, pp. 29, 64.

Novik, Al. "Zaščita Lužina." Review of Zaščita Lužina ("The Defense"), by Vladimir-Sirin (Vladimir Nabokov). Sovremennye zapiski, XLV, 1931, pp. 514-517.

Peerman, Dean. "Invitation to a Beheading." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Christian Century, February 3, 1960, p. 141.

Peterson, Virgilia. "In Front of Reason He Waves a Red Cape." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Saturday Review, October 24, 1959, pp. 35-36.

Phelps, Robert. "The Unique Vision of Vladimir Nabokov." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Herald Tribune Book Review, November 22, 1959, p. 10.

Richardson, Maurice. "New Novels: Invitation to a Beheading." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. New Statesman, June 4, 1960, p. 833.

Rolo, Charles J. "Duped by a Nightmare." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New York Times Book Review, October 25, 1959, pp. 4, 69.

"Ruffling Their Hair." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Times Literary Supplement, June 10, 1960, p. 1041.

"Strange Mating." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Times Literary Supplement, November 19, 1964, p. 1033.

Wain, John. "Nabokov's Beheading." Review of Invitation to a Beheading, by Vladimir Nabokov. The New Republic, December 21, 1959, pp. 17-19.

Wall, Stephen. "New Novels." Review of The Defense, by Vladimir Nabokov. The Listener, November 19, 1964, p. 806.