In VN’s novel *Lolita* (1955) Humbert Humbert mentions Lolita’s hiding places that he found in their Beardsley house:

Once I found eight one-dollar notes in one of her books (fittingly – *Treasure Island*), and once a hole in the wall behind Whistler’s ‘Mother’ yielded as much as twenty-four dollars and some change – say, twenty-four sixty – which I quietly removed, upon which, next day, she accused, to my face, honest Mrs. Holigan of being a filthy thief. Eventually, she lived up to her I.Q. by finding a safer hoarding place which I never discovered; but by that time I had brought prices down drastically by having her earn the hard and nauseous way permission to participate in the school’s theatrical program; because what I feared most was not that she might ruin me, but that she might accumulate sufficient cash to run away. I believe the poor fierce-eyed child had figured out that with a mere fifty dollars in her purse she might somehow reach Broadway or Hollywood – or the foul kitchen of a diner (Help Wanted) in a dismal ex-prairie state, with the wind blowing, and the stars blinking, and the cars, and the bars, and the barmen, and everything soiled, torn, dead. (2.7)

*Treasure Island* (1882) is a novel by R. L. Stevenson. *Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1* (also known as *Whistler’s Mother*, 1871) is a painting by the American-born artist James McNeill Whistler. In a pastiche of the Goncourt Journal in *Le temps retrouvé* (“Time Regained”), the seventh and last volume of Proust’s *À* *la recherche du temps perdu* (“In Search of Lost Time”), Whistler and Stevenson are mentioned:

*«Avant-hier tombe ici, pour m’emmener dîner chez lui, Verdurin, l’ancien critique de la Revue, l’auteur de ce livre sur Whistler où vraiment le faire, le coloriage artiste de l’original Américain est souvent rendu avec une grande délicatesse par l’amoureux de tous les raffinements, de toutes les joliesses de la chose peinte qu’est Verdurin.»*

“The day before yesterday, who should drop in here, to take me to dinner with him but Verdurin, the former critic of the Revue, author of that book on Whistler in which truly the doings, the artistic atmosphere of that highly original American are often rendered with great delicacy by that lover of all the refinements, of all the prettinesses of the thing painted which Verdurin is.”

*«Et la suggestive dissertation passa, sur un signe gracieux de la maîtresse de maison, de la salle à manger au fumoir vénitien dans lequel Cottard me dit avoir assisté à de véritables dédoublements de la personnalité, nous citant le cas d’un de ses malades, qu’il s’offre aimablement à m’amener chez moi et à qui il suffisait qu’il touchât les tempes pour l’éveiller à une seconde vie, vie pendant laquelle il ne se rappelait rien de la première, si bien que, très honnête homme dans celle-là, il y aurait été plusieurs fois arrêté pour des vols commis dans l’autre où il serait tout simplement un abominable gredin. Sur quoi Mme Verdurin remarque finement que la médecine pourrait fournir des sujets plus vrais à un théâtre où la cocasserie de l’imbroglio reposerait sur des méprises pathologiques, ce qui, de fil en aiguille, amène Mme Cottard à narrer qu’une donnée toute semblable a été mise en œuvre par un amateur qui est le favori des soirées de ses enfants, l’Écossais Stevenson, un nom qui met dans la bouche de Swann cette affirmation péremptoire : « Mais c’est tout à fait un grand écrivain, Stevenson, je vous assure, M. de Goncourt, un très grand, l’égal des plus grands.»*

“This suggestive dissertation continued, on a gracious sign from the mistress of the house, from the dining-room into the Venetian smoking-room where Cottard told me he had witnessed actual duplications of personality, giving as example the case of one of his patients whom he amiably offers to bring to see me, in whose case Cottard has merely to touch his temples to usher him into a second life, a life in which he remembers nothing of the other, so much so that, a very honest man in this one, he had actually been arrested several times for thefts committed in the other during which he had been nothing less than a disgraceful scamp. Upon which Mme Verdurin acutely remarks that medicine could furnish subjects truer than a theatre where the humour of an imbroglio is founded upon pathological mistakes, which from thread to needle brought Mme Cottard to relate that a similar notion had been made use of by an amateur who is the prime favourite at her children’s evening parties, the Scotchman Stevenson, a name which forced from Swann the peremptory affirmation: ‘But Stevenson is a great writer, I can assure you, M. de Goncourt, a very great one, equal to the greatest.’”

Mme Cottard has in mindStevenson’s novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). A well respected, middle aged doctor whose hobby is chemistry (carried out in a laboratory at the back of his house), Dr. Jekyll discovers a chemical combination that releases an alternative personality, his baser side: “Mr. Hyde.” Humbert Humbert’s landlord, Professor Chem, teaches chemistry at Beardsley College:

I really did not mind where to dwell provided I could lock my Lolita up somewhere; but I had, I suppose, in the course of my correspondence with vague Gaston, vaguely visualized a house of ivied brick. Actually the place bore a dejected resemblance to the Haze home (a mere 400 miles distant): it was the same sort of dull gray frame affair with a shingled roof and dull green drill awnings; and the rooms, though smaller and furnished in a more consistent plush-and-plate style, were arranged in much the same order. My study turned out to be, however, a much larger room, lined from floor to ceiling with some two thousand books on chemistry which my landlord (on sabbatical leave for the time being) taught at Beardsley College. (2.4)

Describing his quarrel with Lolita, Humbert Humbert compares himself to Mr. Hyde:

With people in movies I seem to share the services of the machina telephonica and its sudden god. This time it was an irate neighbor. The east window happened to be agape in the living room, with the blind mercifully down, however; and behind it the damp black night of a sour New England spring had been breathlessly listening to us. I had always thought that type of haddocky spinster with the obscene mind was the result of considerable literary inbreeding in modern fiction; but now I am convinced that prude and prurient Miss East – or to explode her incognito, Miss Finton Lebone – had been probably protruding three-quarter-way from her bedroom window as she strove to catch the gist of our quarrel.

“…This racket… lacks all sense of…” quacked the receiver, “we do not live in a tenement here. I must emphatically…”

I apologized for my daughter’s friends being so loud. Young people, you know - and cradled the next quack and a half.

Downstairs the screen door banged. Lo? Escaped?

Through the casement on the stairs I saw a small impetuous ghost slip through the shrubs; a silvery dot in the dark - hub of bicycle wheel - moved, shivered, and she was gone.

It so happened that the car was spending the night in a repair shop downtown. I had no other alternative than to pursue on foot the winged fugitive. Even now, after more than three years have heaved and elapsed, I cannot visualize that spring-night street, that already so leafy street, without a gasp of panic. Before their lighted porch Miss Lester was promenading Miss Fabian's dropsical dackel. Mr. Hyde almost knocked it over. Walk three steps and run three. A tepid rain started to drum on the chestnut leaves. At the next corner, pressing Lolita against an iron railing, a blurred youth held and kissed - no, not her, mistake. My talons still tingling, I flew on. (2.14)

Miss Lester and Miss Fabian are a Lesbian couple. In *À la recherche du temps perdu* Marcel (the narrator and main character) suspects Albertine of lesbianism. The penultimate, sixth, volume of Proust’s novel is entitled *Albertine disparue*. According to Humbert Humbert, one of the parts of his book might be called “*Dolorés Disparue*:”

This book is about Lolita; and now that I have reached the part which (had I not been forestalled by another internal combustion martyr) might be called “*Dolorés Disparue*,” there would be little sense in analyzing the three empty years that followed. While a few pertinent points have to be marked, the general impression I desire to convey is of a side door crashing open in life’s full flight, and a rush of roaring black time drowning with its whipping wind the cry of lone disaster. (2.25)

“The cry of lone disaster” brings to mind the L disaster in VN’s novel *Ada* (1969):

The details of the L disaster (and I do not mean Elevated) in the *beau milieu* of last century, which had the singular effect of both causing and cursing the notion of ‘Terra,’ are too well-known historically, and too obscene spiritually, to be treated at length in a book addressed to young laymen and lemans — and not to grave men or gravemen.

Of course, today, after great anti-L years of reactionary delusion have gone by (more or less!) and our sleek little machines, Faragod bless them, hum again after a fashion, as they did in the first half of the nineteenth century, the mere geographic aspect of the affair possesses its redeeming comic side, like those patterns of brass marquetry, and bric-à-Braques, and the ormolu horrors that meant ‘art’ to our humorless forefathers. (1.3)

“Our sleek little machines” and Faragod (“apparently, the god of electricity”) bring to mind “the machina telephonica and its sudden god” whose services Humbert Humbert seems to share with people in movies.

The Antiterran L disaster in the middle of the 19th century seems to correspond to the mock execution of Dostoevski and the Petrashevskians on Jan. 3, 1850 (NS), in our world. Dostoevski is the author of *Dvoynik* (“The Double,” 1846). Lolita’s lover with whom she escapes from the Elphinstone hospital, Clare Quilty is Humbert Humbert’s double.

According to Humbert Humbert, Lolita and Mary Lore (a nurse in the Elphinstone hospital) are plotting in Basque, or Zemfirian, against his hopeless love:

Poor Bluebeard. Those brutal brothers. *Est-ce que tu ne m'aimes plus, ma Carmen?* She never had. At the moment I knew my love was as hopeless as ever-and I also knew the two girls were conspirators, plotting in Basque, or Zemfirian, against my hopeless love. I shall go further and say that Lo was playing a double game since she was also fooling sentimental Mary whom she had told, I suppose, that she wanted to dwell with her fun-loving young uncle and not with cruel melancholy me. And another nurse whom I never identified, and the village idiot who carted cots and coffins into the elevator, and the idiotic green love birds in a cage in the waiting room-all were in the plot, the sordid plot. I suppose Mary thought comedy father Professor Humbertoldi was interfering with the romance between Dolores and her father-substitute, roly-poly Romeo (for you were rather lardy, you know, Rom, despite all that "snow" and "joy juice"). (2.22)

Zemfira is a character (Aleko’s wife) in Pushkin’s poem *Tsygany* (“The Gypsies,” 1824). In his *Eugene Onegin* Commentary (vol. III, p. 156) VN points out that Zemfira’s song was used by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy in their libretto of George Bizet’s opera *Carmen* (1875) based on Mérimée’s novella of that name (1847) and that Ivan Turgenev translated this nomadic song from *The Gypsies* for Edmond de Goncourt, who gives it as a “chanson du pays” to the gypsy woman Stepanida Roudak (also supplied by his Russian friend) in his mediocre *Les Frères Zemganno* (1879).

When Van visits Ada at Brownhill (Ada’s school for girls), Ada does not want him to see her in the role of a moribund Romeo:

They talked about their studies and teachers, and Van said:

‘I would like your opinion, Ada, and yours, Cordula, on the following literary problem. Our professor of French literature maintains that there is a grave philosophical, and hence artistic, flaw in the entire treatment of the Marcel and Albertine affair. It makes sense if the reader *knows* that the narrator is a pansy, and that the good fat cheeks of Albertine are the good fat buttocks of Albert. It makes none if the reader cannot be supposed, and should not be required, to know *anything* about this or any other author’s sexual habits in order to enjoy to the last drop a work of art. My teacher contends that if the reader knows nothing about Proust’s perversion, the detailed description of a heterosexual male jealously watchful of a homosexual female is preposterous because a normal man would be only amused, tickled pink in fact, by his girl’s frolics with a female partner. The professor concludes that a novel which can be appreciated only by *quelque petite blanchisseuse* who has examined the author’s dirty linen is, artistically, a failure.’

‘Ada, what on earth is he talking about? Some Italian film he has seen?’

‘Van,’ said Ada in a tired voice, ‘you do not realize that the Advanced French Group at my school has advanced no farther than to Racan and Racine.’

‘Forget it,’ said Van.

‘But *you*’ve had too much Marcel,’ muttered Ada.

The railway station had a semi-private tearoom supervised by the stationmaster’s wife under the school’s idiotic auspices. It was empty, save for a slender lady in black velvet, wearing a beautiful black velvet picture hat, who sat with her back to them at a ‘tonic bar’ and never once turned her head, but the thought brushed him that she was a cocotte from Toulouse. Our damp trio found a nice corner table and with sighs of banal relief undid their raincoats. He hoped Ada would discard her heavy-seas hat but she did not, because she had cut her hair because of dreadful migraines, because she did not want him to see her in the role of a moribund Romeo.

(On fait *son grand Joyce* after doing one’s *petit Proust.* In Ada’s lovely hand.)

(But read on; it is pure V.V. Note that lady! In Van’s bed-buvard scrawl.) (1.27)

Zembla + Organon + tail/lait = Zemganno + rab/bar + Lolita

Zembla – in VN’s novel *Pale Fire* (1962) a distant northern land

Organon – a collection of works on logic by Aristotle; cf. *Novum Organum* (1620), a philosophical work by Francis Bacon; in Gorky’s play *Na dne* (“At the Bottom,” 1902) Satin mentions *organony* (pl. of *organon*); Gorky is the author of *Mat’* (“Mother,” 1906)

lait – Fr., milk

rab – slave

A connection seems to exist between Lolita’s hiding places and the Zemblan crown jewels in *Pale* *Fire*. According to my hypothesis, the crown jewels mentioned by Kinbote in his Commentary and Index to Shade’s poem correspond to *luchshie almazy v chelovecheskoy korone* (the best diamonds in human crown) mentioned by Alexander Blok in his Foreword to *Vozmezdie* (“Retribution,” 1910-21), a long poem:

Тема заключается в том, как развиваются звенья единой цепи рода. Отдельные отпрыски всякого рода развиваются до положенного им предела и затем вновь поглощаются окружающей мировой средой; но в каждом отпрыске зреет и отлагается нечто новое и нечто более острое, ценою бесконечных потерь, личных трагедий, жизненных неудач, падений и т.д.; ценою, наконец,

потери тех бесконечно высоких свойств, которые в своё время сияли, как лучшие алмазы в человеческой короне (как, например, свойства гуманные, добродетели, безупречная честность, высокая нравственность и проч.)

In the last stanza of his poem *Neznakomka* (“Incognita,” 1906) Blok mentions a treasure that lies in his soul:

В моей душе лежит сокровище,

И ключ поручен только мне!

Ты право, пьяное чудовище!

Я знаю: истина в вине.

A treasure lies in my soul,

And the key belongs to me alone!

You are right, the drunken beast!

I know: in wine is truth.

In his poem Blok mentions *p’yanitsy s glazami krolikov* (the drunks with the eyes of rabbits) who cry out “*In vino veritas!*” The characters of *Ada* include Dr Krolik, the local entomologist, Ada’s beloved teacher of natural history. In “Ardis the Second” Van refuses to visit the late Krolik’s grave:

Tiffs between them had been very rare, very brief, but there had been enough of them to make up the enduring mosaic. There was the time she stood with her back against a tree trunk, facing a traitor’s doom; the time he had refused to show her some silly Chose snapshots of punt girls and had torn them up in fury and she had looked away knitting her brows and slitting her eyes at an invisible view in the window. Or that time she had hesitated, blinking, shaping a soundless word, suspecting him of a sudden revolt against her odd prudishness of speech, when he challenged her brusquely to find a rhyme to ‘patio’ and she was not quite sure if he had in mind a certain foul word and if so what was its correct pronunciation. And perhaps, worst of all, that time when she stood fiddling with a bunch of wild flowers, a gentle half-smile hanging back quite neutrally in her eyes, her lips pursed, her head making imprecise little movements as if punctuating with self-directed nods secret decisions and silent clauses in some sort of contract with herself, with him, with unknown parties hereinafter called Comfortless, Inutile, Unjust — while he indulged in a brutal outburst triggered by her suggesting — quite sweetly and casually (as she might suggest walking a little way on the edge of a bog to see if a certain orchid was out) — that they visit the late Krolik’s grave in a churchyard by which they were passing — and he had suddenly started to shout (‘You know I abhor churchyards, I despise, I denounce death, dead bodies are burlesque, I refuse to stare at a stone under which a roly-poly old Pole is rotting, let him feed his maggots in peace, the entomologies of death leave me cold, I detest, I despise —’); he went on ranting that way for a couple of minutes and then literally fell at her feet, kissing her feet, imploring her pardon, and for a little while longer she kept gazing at him pensively. (1.41)

“A roly-poly old Pole” hints at Polonius, Ophelia’s father in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The characters of *Ada* include the Ghost of Hamlet’s father. In *Lolita* John Ray, Jr. (the author of the Foreword to Humbert Humbert’s manuscript) mentions the caretakers of various cemeteries who report that no ghosts walk. As he speaks to Lolita, Humbert Humbert swears by Polonius:

“Look, I’ve a learned book here about young girls. Look, darling, what it says. I quote: the normal girl –normal, mark you – the normal girl is usually extremely anxious to please her father. She feels in him the forerunner of the desired elusive male (‘elusive’ is good, by Polonius!).” (2.1)

 Alexey Sklyarenko