

The Mad Hatter's Hats
Unpacking the Nested Hat Boxes
inside
Vladimir Nabokov's Semi-Autobiographies
Part I

by
James H. Buckingham

With a *side ride* through Leo Tolstoy's Казаки *Kazaki* / *The Cossacks*

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, there is A Mad Tea-Party happening in front of the March Hare's house, where the Hare and the Hatter are having tea. Of course, everyone knows him as the Mad Hatter, but curiouser and curiouser, the Hatter is never officially appelled as such.

Appelled? You mean, appalled?

I am by your interruption.

Appelled is not a word. If you're thinking of naming, try an appellation.

Why *wood* I try a noun, when a passed verb *will* do?

Yes, pass one, please. And now I leave you to your copulas.

Be being been am is are was were will be has been had been have been. And don't feel guilty about any of this. No *mea copulas* necessary.

The Hatter does play with words, for words are all any of us have. However, I don't look to offer riddles with no answers, rather I prefer to solve riddles and understand an entire picture versus just a quick glimpse taken here or there. In the same vein, after having read both of Vladimir Nabokov's semi-autobiographies, *Conclusive Evidence* (CE) and *Speak, Memory* (SM), what remains missing is the middle piece, the center of an equation. For without knowing the full operand, how can one fully complete the problem at hand?

Drugie berega / Other Shores is Nabokov's missing piece; his Russian version that bridges betwixt the other two: CE and SM. One giant part otherwise goes missing in order to tie the puzzle together. With that in mind, I began with just one word, "hat." Mind you—you do if you read this—it was the Hatter who got this all going for me. One word that opened the door to this party. A party I have not been able to check out from this Hotel Hatterfornia — *ooh*, that's sounds erotic and it's not supposed to. Rather, such is this state of my complete capture that no rest is complete until the task is done, devoured and delivered. May my butter suit your works.

THE PROCESS Using *Speak, Memory* as the template, I searched for every instance of the word, “hat,” in the Kindle version of that text. From there, I began to search for the possible placements of each instance of the word “hat” in the other two versions, *Conclusive Evidence* and *Drugie berega* (Db). While this method is not 100% accurate, it did offer up 15 ‘hat’ mentions in *Speak, Memory*. From those original 15 mentions, plus one more from Db, 12 examples of ‘hat’ were found in *Drugie berega* and 10 ‘hat’ examples in *Conclusive Evidence*. Of note is that when broken down to distinctive passages for both ‘hat’ and accompanying referential passages, the numbers change significantly to: Db = 14 / CE = 11 / SM = 7. While the distinctiveness of SM now becoming last makes sense, due to SM being the last written, that does not account for Db now being first in the passages count.

Why *Drugie berega* jumps to first is that unlike *Speak, Memory*, which has a lot of repeated passages from *Conclusive Evidence*, Db is quintessentially *Other Shores* when compared to the other two versions of the semi-autobiographies. *Drugie berega* stands out as a distinctive version due to its Russian composition, not just in vocabulary but also in highlighting different emphases, culture and history. A more personal perspective is found in Db.

Next, as to the order of examination of the aforementioned passages, I chose to go back in time from the most recent (newest) to the first written (the oldest). And how was this determined? By taking Vladimir Nabokov (VN) at his word in *Speak, Memory*'s Foreword, where all the dates of composition are laid out for the various chapters that comprise the work. By going by the dates of publication, we can begin taking out each passage from inside its box. One box nested inside another. A giant Matryoshka of hatboxes. Will each box get bigger, as we delve deeper? Or are there surprises? Will a small box contain large content? Or will a large box contain but mostly air? Let us see.

Order of Publishing:

[Chapter Titles are from the Foreword of *Speak, Memory*]

Chapter	5	“Mademoiselle O” <i>The Luzhin Defense</i>	1936, January 1943 1930 – excerpt pertaining to Mlle O
	3	“Portrait of My Uncle”	1948
	4	“My English Education”	March 1948
	6	“Butterflies”	June 1948
	7	“Colette”	July 1948
	9	“My Russian Education”	September 1948
	10	“Curtain-Raiser”	January 1949
	2	“Portrait of My Mother”	April 1949
	11	“First Poem”	September 1949
	12	“Tamara”	December 1949
	8	“Lantern Slides”	February 1950
	1	“Perfect Past”	April 1950
	15	“Gardens and Parks”	June 1950
	13	“Lodgings in Trinity Lane”	January 1951
	14	“Exile”	Jan. – Feb. 1951
		<i>Conclusive Evidence</i>	1951
		<i>Drugie berega / Other Shores</i> *	1954
		<i>Speak, Memory</i>	1966
	16**	‘On <i>Conclusive Evidence</i> ’	1999

* *Drugie berega / Other Shores* omits Chapter 11 “First Poem” from *Conclusive Evidence*. Hence, Chapters 11-14 in *Drugie berega* correspond roughly to Chapters 12-15, respectively, in *Conclusive Evidence/ Speak, Memory*.

** Nabokov’s fictional self-review, posthumously added to *Speak, Memory*.

Taking the same list from the previous page and now eliminating those chapters that do not contain the word "hat":

Chapter	5	"Mademoiselle O" <i>The Luzhin Defense</i>	1936, January 1943 1930 – excerpt pertaining to Mlle O
	3	"Portrait of My Uncle"	1948
	4	"My English Education"	March 1948
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	15	"Gardens and Parks"	June 1950
	13	"Lodgings in Trinity Lane"	January 1951
	14	"Exile"	Jan. Feb. 1951
		<i>Conclusive Evidence</i>	1951
		<i>Drugie berega / Other Shores</i>	1954
		<i>Speak, Memory</i>	1966
	16	'On Conclusive Evidence'	1999

NOTE: There may be some errors in this approach, due to the method cited on page 2.

Also, I have not translated all of *Drugie berega* and so some passages may be missed.

CITED SOURCES:

- AA Carroll, Lewis. *The Annotated Alice. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. Intro and Notes by Martin Gardner. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.
- CE Nabokov, Vladimir. *Conclusive Evidence*. New York: Harper, 1951.
- Db Nabokov, Vladimir. Другие берега *Drugie berega / Other Shores*. St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2013.
[Citations are from the above Paperback source.
Not from the Azbuka, 2017 Hardcover version, which was used as a reference.]
- K Tolstoy, Leo. Казаки *Kazaki / The Cossacks*. Moscow: Sovereign Classic, 2014. Digital.
- LD Nabokov, Vladimir. *The Luzhin Defense*. Translated by Michael Scammell in collaboration with the Author. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- MlleO Nabokov, Vladimir. *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*. New York: Vintage, 2008.
[Quotes from the short story, "Mademoiselle O."]
- SM Nabokov, Vladimir. *Speak, Memory An Autobiography Revisited*. New York: Knopf, 1999.
- ZL Nabokov, Vladimir. Защита Лужина *Zashchita Luzhina / The Luzhin Defense*. St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2014.

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More than high time to start and see what's in the first box. There's 16 boxes to open!

Chapter 8 "Lantern Slides"

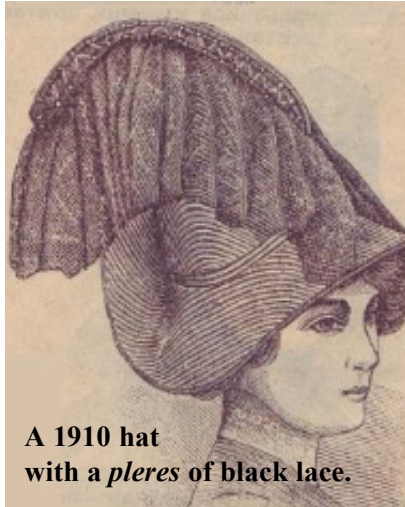
1. Lensky, the tutor, in Berlin buying a hat for a whore.

CE 8.2 (113): "Noticing one a day a bedraggled hag who was gloating over a crimson-plumed **hat** on display at a milliner's, he bought it for her—and had quite a time getting rid of the woman."

Db 8.2 (162): "Заметив на Фридрихштрассе какую-то потаскуху, пожирающую глазами **шляпу** с пунцовым плерезом в окне модного магазина, он эту **шляпу** тут же ей купил — и долго не мог отделаться от потрясенной немки."

"Noticing some kind of slut on the Friedrichstraße devouring with her eyes, a **hat** with crimson ostrich feathers, in the window of a fashionable shop, Lensky bought her this **hat** right away — and for a long while he could not get rid of the shocked German woman."

SM 8.2 (123) [Same as CE]



A 1910 hat
with a plures of black lace.

1. Analysis: Lensky, the tutor, in Berlin buying a hat for a whore.

Here Lensky buys a hat for a “bedraggled hag” in CE, who becomes a “slut,” a prostitute, in Db. Additional details are offered in the Russian text as to specifically where the two are in Berlin, being on Friedrichstraße/Friedrichstrasse, a major shopping street. The plumed hat turns into one with ostrich feathers. And the woman is German, whereas before her nationality was not noted.

Lensky is a pseudonym for VN’s tutor. Another aspect to consider is that Lensky is the name of the romantic foil to the main character in Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, which Nabokov laboriously translated into English. This first *hat* mention shows the gritty downside, the realism aftershock, to romanticism.

Chapter 12 “Tamara”

2. VN recalling the Spring of 1916.

CE 12.2 (174): “That spring of 1916 is the one I see as the very type of a St. Petersburg spring, when I recall such specific images as Tamara, wearing an unfamiliar white **hat**, among the spectators of a hard-fought interscholastic soccer game, in which, that Sunday, the most sparkling luck helped me to make save after save in goal; and a Camberwell Beauty, exactly as old as our romance, sunning its bruised black wings, their borders now bleached by hibernation, on the back of a bench in Alexandrovski Garden; and the booming of cathedral bells in the keen air, above the corrugated dark blue of the Neva, voluptuously free of ice; . . .”

Db 11.2 (220): “Из всех моих петербургских весен та весна 16-го года представляется мне самой яркой, когда вспоминаю такие образы, как: золотисто-розовое лицо, моей милой Тамары в незнакомой мне большой белой **шляпе** среди зрителей Футбольного состязания, во время которого редкая удача сопровождала мое голкиперство; вкрадчивый

ветер и первую пчелу на первом одуванчике в двух шагах от сетки гола; гудение колоколов и темносинюю рябь свободной Невы; . . .”

“Out of all my St. Petersburg springs, that spring of the 16th year represents to me the brightest, when I recall such images as: the golden-pink face of my sweet Tamara in a big white **hat**, unfamiliar to me, amongst the spectators of a soccer match, during which rare good luck accompanied my goalkeeping; the smooth-tongued wheedling wind and the first bee on the first dandelion, a stone's throw away from the net of the goal; the buzzing of the bells and the navy-blue ripples of the free Neva River; . . .”

SM 12.2 (186): [Same as CE, except missing a period after “St” Petersburg.]

2. Analysis: VN recalling the Spring of 1916.

While Tamara wears the same white hat unfamiliar to VN in both versions, Tamara's face is now golden-pink and she is ‘sweet’ Tamara in Db. The CE version has a bit more detail about the soccer game and then goes into much detail about the butterfly, Camberwell Beauty. Why would a noted lepidopterist such as Nabokov delete a butterfly reference? Sounds unlikely. All in all, a bee is not a butterfly.

Besides the ‘sweet’ of Tamara now connecting to the honey ‘bee’ on the dandelion and the ‘buzzing’ of the bells, is there another reason for so changing this *autobiographical* narrative? *Emphasis noted here.* Why? Because these are actually semi-autobiographies, since the narrative must conform to the story, first and foremost. Fiction overrides fact.

What VN, the Russian, knows as a knowledgeable lepidopterist is that the name, Camberwell Beauty, is the British name for this butterfly. The species name is *Nymphalis antiopa* and the common name will vary. For England, there's Camberwell Beauty. For the U.S. it's Mourning cloak. For Russia, it's Траурная бабочка, the Mourning butterfly. Yes, when this

butterfly emerges from hibernation, it is a sign of Spring. But the Russian name, much less the American one, does not fit the narrative of this scene, which is positive, not negative.

So what to do? Change the scene. Which one is real? Did they both happen? Does it matter, if the story and the writing still shine through?

And that butterfly's common name about the mourning bit? When one dresses for mourning, you dress in dark colors and if the wings fit, as they say.



Chapter 2 “Portrait of My Mother”

3. Newsreels of WWI.

CE 2 [Passage is not present.]

Db 2.4 (42): “В Первую мировую войну (Пуанкаре в крагах, слякоть, здравия желаем, бедняжка-наследник в черкеске, крупные, ужасно одетые его сестры в больших застенчивых **шляпах**, с тысячей своих с тысячей своих частных шуточек) . . .”

“In the First World War (Poincaré in riding boots, the mud the mire, We wish you good health, the poor little heir in a Circassian fashion, his prominent sisters terribly dressed in big, bashful **hats**, with a thousand of their private little jokes) . . .”

SM 2.4 (31-32): [Passage is referenced. No mention of hats.]

“The newsreels showed photogenic explosions, the spasm of a cannon, Poincaré in his leathern leggings, bleak puddles, the poor little Tsarevich in Circassian uniform with dagger and cartridges, his tall sisters so dowdily dressed, long railway trains crammed with troops.”

3. Analysis: Newsreels of WWI.

Raymond Poincaré (1860-1934) was the President of France from 1913 to 1920. To show his solidarity with the French troops in the trenches (the mud, the mire), Poincaré put on his own



Raymond Poincaré at the Front

special garb for the purpose of the visit and for the publicity as well. Poincaré chose not to wear a uniform (even though he was entitled to the same as a Reserve Officer), instead he would dress in an odd outfit that became more memorable, more that of a chauffeur. A navy-blue overcoat with a peaked cap (sometimes a helmet) and his black riding boots, leggings. This was part of a political show, as the French President was personally known for his stiffness and reserved character.

“We wish you (good) health,” is a group of soldiers reply to a senior officer’s greeting. This is a Russian expression. At first, this seems odd here and out of place, because it both is and isn’t. The *is* notes the disruption of the narrative and the *isn’t* points to how this does fit together to the bigger picture by alluding to another work of literature. How Nabokovian!

The picture becomes more complete by combining the details of both versions where the little heir (the Tsarevich), Alexie is also dressed up. Little Alexie is wearing a Circassian outfit, complete with weaponry. One famously worn by the Cossacks from the North Caucasus.

Next is the description of Alexie’s fur sisters and how they are dressed. Here we come across some discrepancies and differences. In SM, the sisters are said to be tall (they weren’t) and dowdily dressed (unfashionable? but how). Rather the Db text notes that the sisters were prominent (they were) and terribly dressed (a different meaning than being unfashionable). But why are they terribly dressed? Also, another detail talks of the sisters sharing jokes. Now, if only

we could go back in time and run that same newsreel, then we might be able to determine what this is all about and what the Romanovs have to do with Poincaré. I have an idea. Lights, please.



Left to Right: Anastasia, Olga, Nicholas II, Alexei, Tatiana and Maria.

All the sisters were Grand Duchesses. The Kuban Cossack Guards are in the rear.

Here is a still photograph that was most likely in that newsreel. There's the little heir, Alexie. Alexie's all of 12 in this picture, which was taken around December 1916. The children came to visit father, Nicholas II, and also pay a visit to the troops. Sounds Poincaré-ianly familiar. Height-wise, Nicholas was around 5' 7". Of the sisters, only Tatiana is taller than her father. Anastasia (age 15 here) being barely taller than her brother, does not merit a descriptive moniker of her being tall. Prominent yes, tall no.

The sisters, like the entire royal family, lived inside a privileged bubble. What comes across now, with the added context of a 1,000 words picture, is the terrible dress of the sisters. What they wore when visiting the troops and staging for the still publicity shots and the newsreels. In the middle of World War I, the sisters Romanov are wearing their fur-trimmed coats and pearls. Father and son also are dressed up as fighting Cossacks, just like the real one's behind them, complete with cartridges and daggers, in their Circassian dress. One wonders how careful Alexie's handlers were with him to keep that dagger away from his hemophilia.

And to top it off, don't forget those hats. Those "big, bashful" hats. Can the bigness of the hat help with the bashfulness? Or are they simply two opposing words: BIG and bashfulness. Would the newsreel show the girls joking with each other behind their big hats? Is that a simple deduction or might there be more to this? Is this all a joke?

The Four Sisters Stand Out

After finding the picture and reviewing the texts, three distinctive phrases from the *Drugie berega* text stand out: здравия желаем *We wish you good health*, в черкеске *in a Circassian fashion*, and своих частных шуточек *of their private little jokes*. That and what about all those Cossack Guards? How then do these apparently four disparate pieces have anything to do with each other? And now we get to the *isn't* part mentioned on page 10.

While never contending absolutism (since such is not a possibility for mortals), this passage in Db has a verifiable and a high degree of mathematical probability that connects same to those guards in that picture. I speak of Leo Tolstoy's 1863 novel, Казаки *Kazaki / The Cossacks*.

All four factors (A-D) can be found in these excerpts from *The Cossacks*:

A. Казаки *Kazaki* / *The Cossacks*, by Leo Tolstoy. Chapter XI

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— “Кошкильды!” — сказал он. — Это по-татарски значит; здравия желаем, мир вам, ихнему.

— “Кошкильды! Я знаю, — отвечал Оленин, подавая ему руку.

— Э, не знаешь, не знаешь порядков! Дурак! — сказал дядя Ерошка, укоризненно качая головой. — Коли тебе кошкильды говорят, ты скажи алла рази бо сун, спаси Бог. Так-то, отец мой, а не кошкильды. Я тебя всему научу. . . .

— Вот я какой человек. Я шутник! — И старик засмеялся. — Я сяду, отец мой, я устал. Карга? — прибавил он вопросительно.

— А карга что значит? — спросил Оленин.

— А это значит: хорошо, по грузински. А я так говорю; поговорка мог, слово любимое: карга, карга, так и говорю, значит шутю.

“*Koshkildy!*” he said. “It means in Tatar, ‘We wish you good health,’ ‘Peace be with you,’ in their language.”

“*Koshkildy!* I know,” Olenin answered, offering him his hand.

“Uh boy, you don’t know. *Boy*, you don’t know of the customs! Fool!” said Uncle Eroshka, disapprovingly by shaking his head. When they tell you *koshkildy*, boy you say, *alla razi bo sun*, *God save you*. That’s right, my father, and not *koshkildy*. I’ll teach you everything, kid.” . . .

“That’s the kind of man I am. I’m a joker!” And the old man laughed. “I’ll sit down, my father. I’m tired. *Karga?*” he added questioningly.

“And what does *karga* mean?” asked Olenin.

“And that means: *good*, in Georgian. That’s what I say. A saying could — a favorite pet word: *karga*. *Karga*, so I say. It means I’m joking.”

This one box is becoming bigger and bigger! Bear with me, as we unpack this one Russian box inside the other.

A quick review of both texts in the original Russian and their English translations show the interconnections with the text cited from Db on page 9.

Russian/English word phrases in

Drugie berega / Other Shores

В. здравия желаем,

We wish you good health.

С. в черкеске,

in a Circassian fashion,

“Щегольство в одежде состоит в подражании черкесу.” (Ch. IV)

“The panache, the flamboyant style, in clothing consists in imitating the Circassian.”

Д. своих частных шуточек)

of their private little jokes)

Kazaki / The Cossacks

В. здравия желаем, (Ch. XI)

We wish you good health.

С. в подражании черкесу.

in imitating the Circassian.

Д. Я шутник! I'm a joker! (Ch. XI)

значит шутмю. It means I'm joking. (Ch. XI)

Я шутник, I'm a joker, (Ch. XII)

я шутник, “ ” (Ch. XII, repeats)

Besides the exact match of the two words in B above, there is a lot going in the Chapter XI passages that connects back to Db. To understand on a deeper level, first we must look at the not so obvious levels of language usages and barriers that exist in *The Cossacks*.

Setting the Scene for Chapter X1 of *The Cossacks*

The main character is Olenin, a 18-year-old spoiled aristocrat, gambler, womanizer and a general reprobate who decides to leave Moscow for adventure and to find a purpose or meaning for his life in the 1840s. He sets off for the Caucasus to enroll in the army, accompanied with his serf. It is in the glory of the Cossacks' life, in all their primitive and earthly ways, that Olenin looks to

escape the stranglehold of Moscow society. Upon arriving at the village where he is to be stationed, Olenin will be billeted in a private home. While he will be paying them for the use of their home, the original owners do not really have a choice in the matter and will have to move out of their new home and move into their old one to comply with the military orders.

On his trip down to the Caucasus, Olenin has quickly adopted the clothing of the Cossacks. This scene is the first time that Olenin meets Uncle Eroshka, the 70-year-old some village codger. Olenin then invites Eroshka into Olenin's new home for a drink as Eroshka passes by. As Eroshka comes inside, first he bows before the icons in the house and walks over to Olenin, extending his hand in greeting with the Tatar expression of *Koshkildy!*

Words Matter — Where Things Get Tricky

Eroshka then goes on to explain what *Koshkildy!* means in Tatar (the language of pride for the Cossacks), being “We wish you good health / здравия желаем,” “Peace be with you / мир вам,” and “*in their language* / по-ихнему.” Yet the words said by Eroshka to explain the meaning of *Koshkildy!* are not just Russian words—which do make sense—but also Russian expressions, which will *not* make sense for the Russian, Olenin, when applied here.

The problem stems from how does one effectively communicate an expression, an idiom, from one language to another? This is compounded and becomes multi-layered when we examine what *Koshkildy!* actually means. One of the first issues that arises is as to how to spell out sounds and whether one hears the right pronunciation and accent. How did Eroshka pronounce that non-Russian Tatar word? Was it *koshkildy* or *koshkeldy*? Can one letter matter? When you write out the different syllables, that's all in a single word, right?

Eroshka, the linguistic rascal, has Olenin at a disadvantage. The native speaker easily manages or control the non-native speaker, since the non-native has no basis of reference. Every non-Russian word is foreign. See behind or underneath Eroshka's slippery tongue.

The actual word is *koshkeldy* Кошкельды, not *koshkildy*. And its proper accenting is *Koshkel'dy*, which means "Welcome!" in the Kumyk language, one of the Turkic languages of the region. Кошкельды is an actual town in Chechnya. *Koshkel'dy* as a word has its history masked by actually being two words that became one over time.

Koshkel'dy came from *Kosh kel'dy* and its other variations of *khosh*, *hosh*, *kosh*, *khush* and *keldy*, *geldi*, *geldy*. The original stems reveal and reinforce the meaning of "Welcome!" Other nearby related languages have referential meanings, such as is found in Farsi with "*Khosh amadid!* / *You have come. Welcome!*" or a Tatar saying of "*Khan geldy!* / *Khan is here. Khan has come!*" *Geldi* in Turkish, still retains this in its meaning, *came*. *Koshkeldy*'s word history reveals its original (*Khosh Geldi!*) and still retained meaning: "You are welcome!" This is what you are to say as the host, when greeting your guest.

So perhaps Eroshka merely mumbled, he is a rough sort of fellow. Not known for his education, but more for his wily ways. Uncle Eroshka is a *Zorba the Greek* type of fellow or like a cunning Odysseus. And that is exactly what happens. Eroshka's wily ways reveal his intentional discourse, all the more effective when the victim is clueless as to the perpetrator.

Why so? Explain. I shall do so, Puddin' N' Tain. Ask me again and I'll tell you the same. It's amazing how child rhymes stick in the very front of memory and yesterday's dinner has done disappeared. Because . . . Eroshka then goes on to chide Olenin for responding in kind with his own *Koshkildy!*

And that is not the custom. Noooooo. No way. Here in the village of Novomlinskaya, that is not how things are done. “When they tell you *koshkildy*, boy you say, *alla razi bo sun*, *God save you.*” Uncle Eroshka fixes the newcomer’s words. Of course, other than the phrase, *alla razi bo sun*, he’s still speaking Russian to a Russian.

And what’s with the *boy* stuff? That’s not actually in the literal translation. Is this just a translator’s loose license? Yes and no. Yes, it is not in the literal translation. And no, without the demeaning use of *boy*, a non-Russian reader (which includes me, btw!) has no idea what else is going on.

It starts with the use of ты *скажи*, you *say*. For Russian, like in other languages, there is both a formal and an informal way of addressing people. English as well, used to have these forms with the *formal* word of *you* and the *informal* word of *thou* (since obsolete). Formal usages of the *you* pronoun would be used with strangers or someone you just met. This is the example here, as Eroshka has just met Olenin. The only other times to use the informal *you*, ты (the second-person singular) is with little children or someone who you are intimate with. Neither of which applies here.

Another way to use the formal *you* is when addressing a superior, or someone above your station, or an elder, all out of respect. Here the formal proper Russian form of *you* to use is the second-person plural, вы.

When Eroshka berates Olenin, he is consistently using the familiar form of *you*, even in the verbs. — Э, не знаешь, не знаешь порядков! Дурак! “Uh boy, you don’t know. *Boy*, you don’t know of the customs! Fool!” While Olenin is just 18, he hardly is a child. Additionally, Olenin is a Russian cadet and should command respect. Yet, he does not get it. And Olenin

doesn't even get how much disrespect he is being given, since his language comprehension does not coincide with Eroshka's.

Here Eroshka is both right and wrong at the same time in being both literal and not. Yes to say *Koshkildy!* has somewhat of an equivalence with 'We wish you good health' and 'Peace be with you,' but it is not in the Tatar language. While all three expressions are greetings, only *Koshkildy!* is a greeting of a welcome from a host to a guest.

Even the greeting phrase of здравия желаем is wrong. This form of Russian greeting has a military origin of soldiers greeting a senior military officer. Yet this form is plural. "We wish you good health." The normal expression from an individual is "Здравия желаю I wish you good health." By this Eroshka then has not extended a personal wish, rather he has given Olenin a plural, generic wish.

The second greeting of "Мир вам" (*Mir vam*) "Peace be with you" is basically used by churchmen and religious people, and also comes from the old times. The village, where the story is set, is populated throughout by Old Believers, an ultra-conservative sect that broke away from the main Russian Orthodox Church due to the reforms instituted by Patriarch Nikon in the 17th Century.

Both of the 'supposed' equivalent translations for *Koshkildy!* are then по-ихнему "in their language," which would be the Russian language here. The *their* is the *other*, the *non-native* — who is Olenin.

Cunningly masked, as well, is that Eroshka is the one who first says the greeting of "*Koshkildy!*" As noted earlier, this is what a host says to their guest upon greeting them: "*Khosh Geldi (Hosh Geldy)! "You are welcome!"*" Olenin would be correct in saying "*Koshkildy!*" as the host. What Eroshka has done and put forward is that Olenin is the guest and Eroshka is the host.

Olenin is the non-native, taking over someone's house. He is the guest and a temporary boarder. Eroshka and all the other locals are the only hosts, the natives, who barely tolerate these non-natives, these outsiders, strangers. So that should be then end of it.

And not.

Eroshka continues on. He then tells Olenin what he is supposed to say, but these are words to be said by a guest, not as a host. Olenin is a guest in the Caucasus. Eroshka comes into Olenin's rented house, billeted at one of the best houses in the village of Novomlinskaya. Hence, Eroshka has reversed the situation and is fooling the Fool. His words continue to have tricks in them: "Коли тебе кошкильды говорят, ты скажи алла рази бо сун, спаси Бог. Так-то, отец мой, а не кошкильды. Я тебя всему научу. When they tell you *koshkildy*, boy you say, *alla razi bo sun*, *God save you*. That's right, my father, and not *koshkildy*. I'll teach you everything, kid." With this kind of teaching, it might be best to flunk out now.

What does Olenin hear in those foreign words said by Eroshka? Olenin hears *alla* алла, not the sound Аллах / *Allakh*, being how the word for *Allah* sounds in Russian. Even the printed text does not have the A capitalized to indicate this is a name. Who or what is алла to Olenin? That is a female Russian name that has nothing to do with Islam or a mosque. Olenin would not know that Alla is a variant of Allah in Tatar. Eroshka knows that and Olenin would not. What is going on is called Russian-Tatar code switching and Eroshka is at the handle of that switch and masterfully controlling it.

Eroshka's been rude and deceiving and coyly so. Even his disrespect seems lessened by Eroshka calling Olenin "my father отец мой," a word used for a superior or a sire. This term is also used in other languages such as when calling a priest, *father* or *padre*. In one sentence

Olenin is called *my father* (respect) and a *kid* (the use of *you* тебя – 2nd person singular, disrespect, a slight).

Would there be anything else? Oh, YES, you bet! The next time when Olenin greets another local as a guest, he is to say, “*alla razi bo sun, God save you.*” But what will Olenin *actually* be saying?

A check of the various regional Turkic languages shows a range of phrases:

Alla razi bolsın, in Kazakh

Allah razi olson, in Turkish. (God bless you, Thank you.)

Allah iraaızı bolsun, in Kyrgyz

Alloh rozi bulsin, in Uzbek

Allah razi bolsun, in Kumyk

Allah rozi olson, in Azerbaijani

Is it a coincidence that the closest approximation to Eroshka's instructed phrase of what Olenin is to say as a reply, in turn is that of the one from the Kazakh language? The Cossack name comes from Kazakh. *Alla razi bolsın* would be the correct way to reply to a welcome. Saying *alla razi bo sun* (note that *alla* is not capitalized as it should be) would only lead to a puzzled look because it is close, but not quite right. The main point here is that however pronounced or spelled, these are all Muslim expressions. And this is how Olenin is to greet his Old Believer neighbors when they enter his rented house. For if Olenin were to say the expression correctly as *Alla razi bolsın*, he would be greeting every conservative Russian Orthodox with “*May Allah be pleased.*”

God save you is backwards too. The *you* here is for Olenin, not for the other greeter. This is all part of the joke, as Eroshka continually maintains that he is a joker. “That’s the kind of man I am. I’m a joker!” So holding back on one more linguistic puzzle for Olenin is not resistable.

“I’m tired. *Karga?*” he added questionly.” Olenin doesn’t know what Uncle Eroshka means. Why, because it’s a Georgian word? Yes and No. Seems to be a pattern here. Yes, *karga* კარგა is a Georgian word, a variant of *kargi* კარგი, meaning *good* or *all right*. It is also a Russian word with different meanings, dependent upon the region.

In Russian, *karga* карга is a hag, an old woman, an old lady (derisive), a witch, or a crone. In the Southern part of Russia, *karga* kept its original meaning that is also found in some Turkic languages, meaning *crow* or *raven*. [Bear in mind that Tolstoy could speak 13 languages.] *Karga, hag, crow, good.*

“That’s what I say. A saying could — a favorite pet word: *karga*. *Karga*, so I say. It means I’m joking.” And *karga* is never repeated again by Eroshka. In other words, Olenin has no idea what is going on. Is it all a joke, a word game?

Like his name, Olenin, has the stem of the word *olen* олень meaning a *deer*, *buck* or a *stag*. Olenin is оленѝн (olenín), the feminine inanimate genitive plural of оленѝна olenína (*of venison*). And venison is mainly that of large game, being deer or a boar. And you know already who hunts deer and boar in *The Cossacks*. Yes, Eroshka.

Lest this go on forever, perhaps this a good time to bring *The Cossacks* back to the 3rd of the 16 passages focusing on the word “hat” in Nabokov’s semi-autobiographies. The Romanov picture obviously connects with the Kuban Cossacks Guard and Tolstoy’s novel, *The Cossacks*. The other connections center around wrong words used, misunderstood meanings, and the

concept of jokes. When you look at the 1916 picture and the name of Olenin, that then brings up a very American expression: Like a deer in the headlights. The Romanovs posed for the camera and they had no clue. In less than two years, they would all be dead.

A cosmic joke, bigger than any Eroska could pull off. Caught in the swirl of history, the Russian aristocracy and rulers were inexorably pulled into a Charybdis from which many did not escape. Unlike Odysseus, Vladimir Nabokov no longer had a home to go back to. And so that home became frozen in time, built from the Memory of his Past (*Speak, Memory*) and written then from *Other Shores* to be *Conclusive Evidence* that a past subsumed can still be alive in one's mind and heart.



здравия желаем

God save you

We wish you good health

спаси Бог

Peace be with you

мир вам.

END of PART I

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