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ABSTRACTS

Christine Fouirnaies

Nabokov's Madeleine: Voluntary, Involuntary, and Photographic Memory in *Speak, Memory*

This article elucidates Vladimir Nabokov's engagement with Proustian concepts of memory by examining the illustrations that he added to *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (1966). Marcel Proust famously denigrated photography, associating the medium with voluntary and thus to him inauthentic memory (in contrast to authentic, involuntary memories, the kind most famously prompted by the *In Search of Lost Time* madeleine cake). Nabokov also draws parallels between photography and voluntary memory, but unlike Proust, these are presented as commendable aspects that also characterize his own memory work in his autobiography. Nabokov's references to photography in the main text of *Speak, Memory* and the way he treats photographs in his captions thus highlight Nabokov's difference from Proust in his valorization of consciousness in aesthetic production. Further unsettling Proust's understanding of photography, Nabokov's manuscript notes and the resulting captions demonstrate that the photographs did incite the kind of unintentional memories that *In Search of Lost Time* champions. Nabokov's captions can thus be seen as sites where he gives expression to more immediate, less processed responses to his past. Approaching the illustrations as privileged points of access to Nabokov's sentiments, the article ends by probing what the compilation of photographs and the writerly responses to them reveal about his affective relationship to family members and to Russia.

Sonja Pykkö

Disclosing Structures: Scenes of Confession in *Pale Fire*

The role that confession plays in Nabokov's fiction remains poorly understood, though the same can be said for confessional fiction in general. Part of the problem lies in the slipperiness of the word "confession" itself, which is why this essay begins by defining confession as a performative speech act through which the speaking or writing subject seeks to form, reform, and transform herself, addressing herself to another who is called to act as a witness to this creative act of self(trans)formation—a process akin to Nabokov's own description of a poet (not a "loony") who "peels off a drab past and replaces it with a brilliant invention" (*Pale Fire* 188). Based on this capacious definition, the paper proposes reading *Pale Fire*, arguably the most elusive of Nabokov's confessional fictions, as the confession of the fictional editor, Charles Kinbote. Examining Kinbote's note to line 550 of the poem, where Kinbote confesses having been "tarrying on the brink of falsification" from the very beginning, I argue that Kinbote's commentary begins to act *as* his confession, allowing Kinbote to accumulate the kind of moral self-distance that serves as the basis for his reform. This reading is foregrounded

by an analysis of two other interpretive strategies that are common in *Pale Fire* criticism: the "dialectic" reading that seeks to discover the truth of the text and the "paranoid" reading that promises to uncover a secret, a hidden truth. Whereas both of these strategies position the critic as the one who must disclose a truth that is *not* confessed in the novel, reading *Pale Fire* as Kinbote's confession in a deconstructive manner, as I propose doing, allows the novel to be endlessly "unfolded," to use Gilles Deleuze's metaphor, bringing to the fore the materiality of the text itself and the interpretive choices it imposes on its readers.

Brian Boyd

Ada's Hide and Seek

Even for compulsive re-readers and annotators, *Ada* continues to yield important surprises. Some I have noticed after only a half-century of intense engagement with the novel (especially "you goose," and new aspects of "fire," "burn," French, and fairy-tales) take the form of internal echoes which could in theory be noticed by ideal first-time readers but which Nabokov hides under our noses by relying on the limits of human memory and attention, the differences of context, and the overloadedness of other, more foregrounded, patterns and allusions. The patterns reveal much about the key characters and their contrasting natures and relationships, about the novel's ethics, structure, and implications, and about Nabokov's epistemology and understanding of reader and character psychology.

Priscilla Meyer

The Hidden Nabokov

Not simple autobiography or mere camouflage, the relationship of Nabokov's fiction to his life shows his conscious process of misdirection. We can identify some autobiographical material that Nabokov hid, and why. Jane Grayson concluded that "in his later production Nabokov's personal experience appears in a less recognizable form. There it is digested, sometimes even parodied." She finds increasing self-consciousness, irony and detachment, and "a developing preoccupation with pattern and artifice" in the later work.

The Gift, Invitation to a Beheading, Speak, Memory and *Pale Fire* conceal some of Nabokov's off-stage concerns—physical distress, terror of possible imprisonment and death, grief at abandoning Russia forever, fear that if he were to lose his Russian literary tradition and his literary identity, it would be tantamount to death—as well as the distressing might-have-beens found in *Pnin.*

Nabokov's 1945 poem, "An Evening of Russian Poetry," is emblematic of the way he conceals the pain of emigration in his novels: the poem's narrator is stylized, arch, comical, composed, but his agony slips through the surface of his presentation to American undergraduates in untranslated Russian, hidden from his anglophone audience.

Leona Toker and Maria Emeliyanova

"In Collaboration with the Author": Some Traces of Self-Translation in Nabokov's Short Stories

Vladimir Nabokov's pre-war Russian language short stories were translated into English, whether by his son Dmitri or by others, but, in the novelist's lifetime, always "in collaboration with the author." The extent of this collaboration sometimes amounts to self-translation, that is, not to *improving* the text but to *changing* its details, the way a translator has no right to do while the author is entitled to revisions. Most often such changes were made in the awareness of the horizons of the new audience; but they also reflect modified attitudes to the material and suggest which meanings it was important for Nabokov to emphasize and which it was important for him to preclude. We discuss such traces of self-translation in three of Nabokov's short stories. The changes made in the 1973 "Torpid Smoke" ("*Tyazhyolyy dym*," 1935) help to set the story in the times of the Weimar republic rather than after the Nazi 1933 takeover of power, thus *forestalling* interpretations that could compete with the main theme. The changes in the 1976 "Details of a Sunset" (original published as "*Katastrofa*" in 1924) enhance the valorization of joy, confronting the wide-spread stigma on the sense of happiness as silly. The changes made in the 1947 "Spring in Fialta" (the original published in 1938) are, however, more closely associated with Nabokov's current concerns, in the period of translation, rather than with those in the year of composition.

Eric Naiman

"The Vane Sisters" and Women's Suffrage

This article explores the possibility that Nabokov's famous example of trick reading and trick writing may be one of his most political pieces of writing as well. Drawing upon the author's insistence on the story's place of composition—Ithaca, New York—the article places the story within the context of the women's rights movement that was born in nearby Seneca Falls. The early women's movement was closely allied with spiritualism, a central topic in Nabokov's story. Combining close reading with an historicizing focus, the article discusses the poetics of the story while simultaneously exploring the relationship between sexual predation and the acute examination of a text. In the end, the article suggests that for all his vaunted non-politicism, Nabokov may have been a vessel possessed and guided by the demands for female "participation," just as his story's narrator was. On the plane of meta-fiction, the Vane sisters manage to vote.

Gavriel Shapiro

Vladimir Nabokov and Italian Renaissance Painting

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977) is widely recognized and highly regarded as a writer of world renown. It is less known that in his childhood and early youth he entertained the idea of

becoming a landscape painter. It is still less known that he was also a great connoisseur of art, specifically of Italian Renaissance painting. In this article, I endeavor to showcase Nabokov's enviable familiarity with Italian Renaissance painting through a diverse array of examples taken from his works spanning more than fifty years. In addition, I seek to examine some of the reasons for his employment of these pictorial masterpieces in his literary oeuvre.