

NABOKOV AND ADA

by

BRIAN DAVID BOYD

Department of English

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BRIAN DAVID BOYD

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NABOKOV AND ADA

Committee in Charge:

Professor H.J. Mason, Chairman
Professor P. Brückmann, Supervisor
Professor L. Dolezel
Professor F.T. Flahiff
Professor M. Millgate
Professor R.B. Parker
Professor C. Proffer, External Examiner

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Brian Boyd
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Supervisor: Professor Patricia Brückmann

Ada has tended to hinder the study of Nabokov's works both by its exceptional difficulty and by its appearing to confirm suspicions of Nabokov's artistic and moral self-indulgence. By elucidating Ada this thesis seeks not only to surmount the obstacle of the novel's difficulty but also to demonstrate the book's artistic control, philosophic range and moral force, and at the same time to chart Nabokov's recurrent literary tactics and to analyze the nature of his philosophy and his moral concerns.

Since to appreciate Ada it is necessary to understand the full depth of Nabokov's originality of artistic strategy and the challenge of his philosophical inquiry--and simply because neither of these has been understood before--the thesis commences by considering the nature of Nabokov's style (Chapter 1, which concentrates on Ada) and his thought (Chapter 2, which draws on all his works) before examining each of the Parts of Ada in turn (Chapters 3-9). Ada is seen partly in terms of the differences between a first reading, rereadings, and a "final" reading of the novel but chiefly in terms of the minute correlations of phrase or incident--of a delicacy and complexity unequalled in fiction--which intensify the comedy and adventure of rereadings and establish the seriousness and the surprise of a final reading.

The first two chapters of the thesis examine how Nabokov's curiosity about the position of consciousness in the universe shapes his strategies and style and directs his investigations of the nature of space, time and human consciousness and of the possibilities of forms of consciousness beyond the human. The analysis of Ada will reveal--quietly at first but with increasing resonance--the consistency of Nabokov's ideas of

consciousness and yet the variety of concerns these ideas touch upon:
the infinity of sensation and emotion and thought within the finitude of
human existence; the mysterious possibility of a transmutation of mortal
consciousness into some state of timelessness; the even more mysterious
possibility of conscious design in the universe; the demands of moral
responsibility that are inevitably bound up with the privilege of
consciousness.

CURRICULUM VITAE

BRIAN DAVID BOYD

Date of Birth: July 30, 1952.

Place of Birth: Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Previous Degrees:

B. A. 1973, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

M. A. (Hons.) 1974, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

University of Toronto Registration:

School of Graduate Studies, 1974-1979.

Publications:

"A Plain Clothes Priest." James Joyce Quarterly, 15:2 (Winter 1978), 176-79.

"A Marsh Marigold is a Marsh Marigold is a Marsh Marigold." Vladimir Nabokov Research Newsletter, No. 1 (Fall 1978), 13-16.

"The Mysterious Dozen: A Problem in Ada." Vladimir Nabokov Research Newsletter, No. 1 (Fall 1978), 16-17.

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GRADUATE STUDIES

Studies in Scriblerus: Pope, Swift, Gay and others

P. Bruckmann

Yeats and Joyce

M. J. Sidnell

Modern Drama: Tradition and Experiment:

Ibsen, Shaw, O'Neill, Beckett, and others F. J. Marker

NABOKOV AND ADA

. . . the main favor I ask of the serious critic is sufficient perceptiveness to understand that whatever term or trope I use, my purpose is not to be facetiously flashy or grotesquely obscure but to express what I feel and think with the utmost truthfulness and perception.

--Nabokov, in response to a question
on the critical reaction to Ada

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ABBREVIATIONS

All works by Vladimir Nabokov unless otherwise stated. For full details see Bibliography.

- Ada Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969, and London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, 589 pp.
- BS Bend Sinister. New York: Henry Holt, 1947.
- BSI Introduction to Bend Sinister. New York: Time, Inc., 1964.
- CE Conclusive Evidence: A Memoir. New York: Harper, 1951.
(See also DB, SM.)
- Darkbloom "Notes to Ada by Vivian Darkbloom," in Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970.
- DB Drugie Berega. New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1954.
(See also CE, SM.)
- Defense The Defense. New York: Putnam's, 1964.
- Despair Despair. New York: Putnam's, 1966.
- DS Details of a Sunset and Other Stories. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Eye The Eye. New York: Phaedra, 1965.
- EO Eugene Onegin, by Aleksandr Pushkin, trans. with commentary by Vladimir Nabokov. Rev. ed. 4 vols. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975.
- Gift The Gift. New York: Putnam's, 1963.
- HT A Hero of Our Time, by Mihail Lermontov, trans. and ed. Vladimir Nabokov with Dmitri Nabokov. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958.
- IB Invitation to a Beheading. New York: Putnam's, 1959.
- KQK King, Queen, Knave. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968.

- LATH Look at the Harlequins!. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.
- LD Laughter in the Dark. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1938.
- Lolita Lolita. New York: Putnam's, 1958.
- LS Lolita: A Screenplay. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.
- Mary Mary. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.
- Mason Bobbie Ann Mason. Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to Ada. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1974.
- ND Nabokov's Dozen. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958.
- NG Nikolai Gogol. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1944.
- PF Pale Fire. New York: Putnam's, 1962.
- Pnin Pnin. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957.
- PP Poems and Problems. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.
- Proffer Carl R. Proffer. "Ada as Wonderland: A Glossary of Allusions to Russian Literature." In Proffer, ed., A Book of Things about Vladimir Nabokov. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1974.
- RB A Russian Beauty and Other Stories. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.
- RLSK The Real Life of Sebastian Knight. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941.
- SIC The Song of Igor's Campaign, anonymous, trans. and ed. Vladimir Nabokov. New York: Vintage, 1960.
- SM Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited. New York: Putnam's, 1966. (See also CE, DB.)
- SO Strong Opinions. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.
- TD Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.
- TT Transparent Things. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972.
- U James Joyce. Ulysses. New York: Modern Library, 1934.
- WI The Waltz Invention. New York: Phaedra, 1966.

W2

Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language. Second Edition. Ed. William Allan Neilson. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1957.

W3

Webster's Third New International Dictionary. Ed. Philip Babcock Grove. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1961.

A NOTE ON TEXTS

1. Ada

Charles Kinbote, the deranged annotator of John Shade's "Pale Fire" in Nabokov's novel of the same name, recommends "purchasing two copies of the same work which can then be placed in adjacent positions on a comfortable table" (PF 28). Only one copy of this thesis is necessary, but it will be of no use without a reread copy of Ada lying beside it. For reasons of textual authority and ease of reference, that copy should be either the first American or first English edition (both were printed from the same setting of type):

Vladimir Nabokov. Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle.

American: New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969. [x], 589 pp.

English: London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.

[x], 589 pp.

These are the textual differences between the American (A) and English (E) first editions (the first reading is the correct one):

p. 120, 1.4: Nile is settled stop Speke (E); Nile is settled stop Stanley (A); p. 325, 1.9: he was pregnant (A); she was pregnant (E); p. 589, 1.7: descried (E); described (A).

The Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970) contains fifteen pages of "Notes to Ada by Vivian Darkbloom" (Miss Darkbloom is an authoress, a character in Lolita, an anagrammatic pen name of Nabokov). This edition also contains useful, presumably authorial, corrections of misprints.

The McGraw-Hill, 1969 edition with 626 pages (unfortunately, not even listed in Andrew Field's bibliography)¹ is not a first edition but a Book Club version riddled with textual corruption (for example: "in the Wellings of the lonely and the poor," p. 23, for "in the dwellings of the lonely and the poor," p. 21).

2. Other Nabokov Works

Unless otherwise specified, quotations from Nabokov's works are taken from the first American editions, from the first revised editions of Speak, Memory and Eugene Onegin,² from the first editions of the definitive collections of the stories,³ poems and prose. They will be cited by abbreviation and page number in parentheses following the quotation.⁴

In the case of quotations from works originally written in Russian, only the translation into English will be given (unless there is a variant reading or a different nuance) for prose works whose translation Nabokov has made or supervised, but for poetry the original

¹ Nabokov: A Bibliography (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973). Cf. Brian D. Boyd and Vera Nabokov, comps., "Bibliography," Vladimir Nabokov Research Newsletter, No. 1 (Fall 1978), 24-25.

² Though the revised edition of EO appeared in 1975, Nabokov was working on the revisions while writing Ada and finished them in 1968 (see SO 124). The revised translation, moreover, is the better version.

³ ND, which superseded Nine Stories (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1947); RB and TD, which superseded Nabokov's Quartet (New York: Phaedra, 1966); and DS.

⁴ "EO.3.24" will be used to mean EO, vol. 3, p. 24, "EO.III.xxiv" to mean Eugene Onegin, Chapter III, Stanza xxiv.

will also be cited, as it will when the translations are my own.

3. Transliteration from Russian

The system of transliteration adopted is Nabokov's own, described in his translation of EO (EO.1.xix-xxiv). For English readers this system suggests the pronunciation better than do any others of the many in use. It is based on the new orthography, though in Ada itself, because of special Antiterranean historical considerations, "transliteration is based on the old Russian orthography" (Darkbloom 463).

Russian Character	Transliterated	Russian Character	Transliterated
Аа	a	Пп	p
Бб	b	Рр	r
Вв	v	Сс	s
Гг	g	Тт	t
Дд	d	Уу	u
Ее ⁵	e	Фф	f
Ёё ⁶	yo	Хх	h
Жж	zh	Цц	ts
Зз	z	Чч	ch
Ии	i	Шш	sh
Йй	-y	Щщ	shch
Кк	k	Ыы ⁷	ī
Лл	l	Ээ	e
Мм	m	Юю	yu
Нн	n	Яя	ya
Оо	o	Ьь	

⁵ As ye in "yellow."

⁶ As yo in "yonder."

⁷ Halfway between a very guttural "oi!" and "ugh!"

If in transliteration a "y" is followed by a vowel, the "y" and vowel always form a single letter in the original. If a "y" is preceded by a vowel but not followed by one, then the "y" is н. Thus ya = я, ay = а^н, aya = ая.

INTRODUCTION

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) began writing a part of what was to become Ada in 1959, in Ithaca, New York, but composed the bulk of the novel in Montreux, Switzerland, between the end of 1965 and the end of 1968, partly from material he had garnered in the preceding years.¹ On May 5, 1969, Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle was published in New York by McGraw-Hill.² It was Nabokov's fifteenth novel, his sixth in English, and as he himself has said, "the best of my English romaunts" (LATH 96).

Ada, indeed, is a masterpiece, the only novel since Ulysses that could rank with it. Unlike Joyce's great work, though, Ada is immediately accessible and easily attractive, straightforward enough to be read and enjoyed by anybody who knows English: even though the good reader will recognize that much remains elusive, the book can be read with the speed of unhesitating fascination. Ulysses on the other

¹ For the 1959 beginning of Part 4 of Ada, see SO 122; for Nabokov's description of his hoarding wisps of information at a "very early stage" of a novel's development, see SO 31; for 1962 as the beginning of Ada, see KQK ix-x and interview with Drago Arsenijevic, "Vladimir Nabokov n'aime pas qu'on l'appelle 'le père de Lolita,'" La Tribune de Genève, October 25, 1967; for a first major flash of inspiration in late 1965, see SO 310; for the idea which made "the entire novel leap into . . . existence" in February 1966, see SO 122; and for the 1968 completion date see PP 194 and SO 134.

² In the April 1969 issue of Playboy an advance extract appeared, consisting of almost half of the "Ardor the First" section of the novel (Pt. 1 Chs. 5-6, 9, 15-16, 18-20, 25).

hand makes large demands of its readers even on their first reading of the novel. Indeed, it is a tragedy and a sad paradox that this most humane of books, this lavish celebration of the vitality of ordinary man, finds so few real readers, even amongst the highly literate. But if a first reading of Ulysses is demanding, the novel already offers to those with sufficient energy all the rich pleasures of Joyce's psychology, his evocation of the world's particulars, and above all the ~~pure~~ poetry of choice in his supple prose:

What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, water-carrier returning to the range, admire?

Its universality: its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level: . . . the variability of states of sea: . . . the multiseccular stability of its primeval basin; its luteofulvous bed: its capacity to dissolve and hold in solution all soluble substances including millions of tons of the most precious metals: its slow erosions of peninsulas and downwardtending promontories: its alluvial deposits: its weight and volume and density: its imperturbability in lagoons and highland tarns. . . . (U 655-56)

This is both exacting and at the same time beautiful, a new, hitherto unknown poetry. Yet, as often in Ulysses, there is little additional complexity that can be discovered on subsequent readings.

Joyce can however devise a simpler prose under whose attractive surface lurk unsuspected complexities of relationship:

Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him by the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:

--Introibo ad altare Dei. (U 4-5)

The second sentence of Ulysses contains the novel's first allusion, to the end of George Moore's The Lake (London: Heinemann, 1905): "And

every man must ungird his loins for the crossing" (p. 334).³ Joyce here signals his debt to Moore for the idea of making a priest out of their blasphemous common acquaintance, Oliver Gogarty (Father Oliver Gogarty in Moore's novel, Buck Mulligan in Ulysses). This second sentence in Ulysses also contains the novel's first internal allusion, to the camp mass in Nighttown ("Raises high behind the celebrant's petticoats, revealing his grey bare hairy buttocks" [584]).⁴ These opening lines have rich additional significance: the essential fact of the novel's first chapter (supported by the Claudius-Hamlet, Antinous-Telemachus parallels) is that mock-priest Mulligan has usurped Stephen Dedalus's role as "priest of eternal imagination,"⁵ a fact nicely emphasized by the reprise of the opening lines as the chapter closes with a juxtaposition of Mulligan, swimming priest and Dedalus.

The way Joyce's opening lines operate is the way Ada works throughout. On a first reading, Ada's texture seems less dense than even the uncharacteristically light beginning of Ulysses, but during the process of repeated rereading it becomes unforeseeably more and more complex. What had appeared both lucid and attractively amusing or imaginative on a first reading, a simple, immediately funny exchange, for example--

³ See Brian D. Boyd, "A Plain Clothes Priest," James Joyce Quarterly, 15:2 (Winter 1978), 176-79.

⁴ See Boyd, p. 179.

⁵ James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, ed. Chester G. Anderson (New York: Viking, 1964), p. 221.

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"I guess it's your father under that oak, isn't it?"⁶
"No, it's an elm," said Ada. (92)

--can prove to have relationships with other parts of the work more complex than anything in Ulysses and, often, more profound, artistically, morally, philosophically, than almost anything in fiction.

Ada is a masterpiece, and the aim of this thesis is merely to present what is necessary to the appreciation of this intricate masterpiece. This includes: a general consideration of Nabokov's style and strategies, as manifested particularly in Ada (Chapter 1); a general consideration of Nabokov's philosophy (Chapter 2); and an analysis of the structure of Ada itself. This last, the main task of the thesis, takes place throughout the remaining chapters. "Structure" here is conceived in two ways: first, as the author's setting up of reader expectation and response; and second, as the final systems of relationship by which the novel's art and thought are to be understood and estimated.

The bulk of the thesis deals with these final systems of relationship, but earlier stages of reading must also be considered, for Nabokov's ability to direct the reader's expectations and responses at various stages of reading is unprecedented and an essential part of his most complex works. In Ada Nabokov deliberately controls matters so that one cannot arrive at the book's underlying structures and its

⁶ The misprint "isn't?" for "isn't it?" in the first American and first English editions is corrected in the 1969 Book Club edition, the Penguin edition and the American paperback edition (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Crest, 1970).

deepest worth until after many readings, but also so that one is drawn on to reread and reread even before one has discovered the novel's richest merits. Indeed Nabokov is able to control successive responses to Ada with such precision that a second stage of response can be almost the opposite of a first, and very different again from a third stage during which one apprehends at last the novel's most significant and elusive relationships.

After comparing the arts of writing and reading with the arts of composing and solving chess problems, Nabokov in Speak, Memory describes at length one of the problems he has composed:

I remember one particular problem I had been trying to compose for months. There came a night when I managed at last to express that particular theme. It was meant for the delectation of the very expert solver. The unsophisticated might miss the point of the problem entirely, and discover its fairly simple, "thetic" solution without having passed through the pleasurable torments prepared for the sophisticated one. The latter would start by falling for an illusory pattern of play based on a fashionable avant-garde theme (exposing White's King to checks), which the composer had taken the greatest pains to "plant" (with only one obscure little move by an inconspicuous pawn to upset it). Having passed through this "antithetic" inferno the by now ultra-sophisticated solver would reach the simple key move (bishop to c2) as somebody on a wild goose chase might go from Albany to New York by way of Vancouver, Eurasia and the Azores. The pleasant experience of the roundabout route (strange landscapes, gongs, tigers, exotic customs, the thrice-repeated circuit of a newly married couple around the sacred fire of an earthen brazier) would amply reward him for the misery of the deceit, and after that, his arrival at the simple key move would provide him with a synthesis of poignant artistic delight. (291-92)

Now in Ada too there are thetic, antithetic and synthetic phases of reading. Let us before describing them define their limits. The thetic, simply enough, is a first reading, or any reading by a person who has forgotten what lies ahead. The antithetic phase consists of

intermediate readings, from the second perusal until one has reached the synthetic phase (rather more than twenty additional readings in my own case). In the later stages of this phase, in which one always has some knowledge of the pages to come, it is possible to have a very good command indeed of the text without having reached the essential final relationships. During this lengthy span the reader comes to see more and more of the novel's internal links, for the antithetic arc of the reading spiral is an extended series of exciting local discoveries that seem sufficient in themselves--indeed, wonderfully thrilling. Yet precisely because they have intensified one's appreciation of the parts, of the myriad local interconnections, these discoveries still leave one short of a sense of the whole which courses throughout the book in a surge of unexpectedness and rightness. It is this sense of the whole which does rush through the novel in waves of sudden rightness which signals to the reader that he has reached the synthetic phase and the final system of relationships. Of course although the apprehension of these relationships is accompanied by a shock of verity, a shock as precise in Nabokov's novels as that experienced in solving a chess problem, the "finality" of such relationships still carries on being enriched in a novel as inexhaustible as Ada.

The dissertation will concern itself chiefly with the antithetic and especially the synthetic stages of reading Ada, but a quick summary of the thetic reading of the novel may be useful not only for the sake of definition but also as a refresher and as a reference.

The world of the novel is not our world but Antiterra, an exact replica of the physical configurations of the earth. Our poor globe is

familiar to Antiterrans only as Terra, a probably mythical planet believed in only by madmen, men of genius, and religious faddists. The action of the novel takes place between 1868 and 1967, but though time is the same on Antiterra and Earth, history is a little buckled, "not only because the history of each part of the amalgam did not quite match the history of each counterpart in its discrete condition, but because a gap of up to a hundred years one way or another existed between the two earths" (18). If on our world "La France possédait autrefois, dans l'Amérique septentrionale, un vaste empire"⁷ and the Russians sold Alaska to the United States in 1867, Antiterrans anywhere in North America may live, in the late nineteenth century, in pockets of French and especially Russian civilization unabsorbed by the predominant Anglo-American culture. Antiterran technology, too, has differed from ours ever since the "L disaster" (17). After this mysterious cataclysm which somehow "had the singular effect of both causing and cursing the notion of 'Terra'" (17), electricity has been banned and even decreed indecent. Because hydraulic systems have been invented to replace the electricity needed for "very important 'utilities'" (147), telephones belch and gurgle absurdly throughout the book.

The whole novel is the story of the long and happy incestuous love affair of Van Veen and his sister Ada. Though ostensibly cousins, both are the children of Demon Veen and Demon's cousin's wife Marina.

⁷ The opening lines of the Prologue of *Atala* (1801), by François-René de Chateaubriand: *Atala, René, Les Aventures du Dernier Abencérage*, ed. Fernand Letessier (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 29.

Aqua, Demon's wife and Marina's twin sister, gives birth to a still-born boy just after unmarried Marina produces Van, who is substituted for the dead infant without half-mad Aqua's comprehension. Two years later Marina is again made pregnant by Demon and suddenly accepts a proposal from Demon's cousin Dan Veen that she had turned down months earlier. Shortly afterwards she gives birth to Ada. Four years later she has a child by her husband. This daughter, Lucette, is thus half-sister to Van and Ada, though Van appears to be the son of Aqua and Demon and Ada to be the daughter of Marina and Dan. That they are siblings, a fact which they discover soon after first making love, does not trouble Van and Ada in the least; the only consequence of the discovery is that the children recognize how carefully they must hide their love from their parents.

Because Van and Ada's mutual passion is so intense and continuous, the novel's plot is organized around their meetings, their periods together, their separations. In 1884 Van, aged fourteen, and Ada, aged eleven, meet at Dan Veen's summer home, Ardis Hall. They soon fall in love and become lovers. But being still children, they must part at the end of their blissful summer and return to their different schools. In 1888 their affair is actively resumed, again in summertime and again at Ardis, but Van flies from Ada in a rage of jealousy, and his fierce and brooding pride keeps them apart until 1892. In November of that year they set up house together in Manhattan. Early in February of the following year, Demon discovers his children living together as lovers, compels them to separate and marries Ada off to one Andrey Vineland. In 1901 the novel's subplot reaches its

tragic climax when Lucette, Ada and Van's half-sister, ever more desperately in love with Van, commits suicide after she sees her love will never be requited. Four years later, shortly after Demon's death removes the last family obstacle to their rejoining, Ada and Van reunite adulterously in Mont Roux, Switzerland, and are about to elope together when Ada's husband is discovered to have advanced tuberculosis. Ada leaves Van to tend her husband, who lingers on until 1922. Upon his death the lovers rejoin, to spend their last forty-five years "traveling together and dwelling in the various villas, one lovelier than another, that Van has erected all over the Western Hemisphere" (588-89).

It is during the last ten of these forty-five years together that Van sets about writing Ada. Because he intends to have this memoir published posthumously, Van can make it a frank celebration of his love for his sister. As he reworks and reworks its lambent pages; Ada listens in, adding marginalia, demurrers and applause. The revisions do not stop until death folds the couple into the page: they "die, as it were, into the finished book" (587). Van and Ada concentrate very much on the radiant youthfulness and the pure romance of the early days of their love. Time seems suspended, the past magically revisitable, in the amplitude of the Ardis sections (Part 1), which occupy just over half the length of their family chronicle. But amplitude collapses, time gathers speed. The five parts of the book rapidly diminish in size while they cover greater spans of time. The forty-three chapters and more than three hundred pages of Part 1, most of which depict a total of four months in two separate summers,

grotesquely outweigh the final section, Part 5, which covers forty-five years in twenty pages, less space than was required to describe a single dinner party in Part 1. Yet the constantly accelerating slide down the slopes of age and into the abyss of death, the sense of time as ever more rapid loss and the book's odd imbalance are all easily incorporated into its overall harmony and joy.

For while it slips downwards through the years, the novel seems always able to return to its resplendent origin at Ardis. Van and Ada can recreate in full the freshness of their first coming together in their fabulous ancestral park: "Hammock and honey: eighty years later he could still recall with the young pang of the original joy his falling in love with Ada" (70). If at moments we glimpse that Van and Ada are nonagenarians as they recreate their radiant past, their age seems only a partial loss and much more a triumph: for there they are still together, goldenly, youthfully together, in their shared memories of the sunflecked past.

On a first reading Ada is a joyous and passionate unity, a limpid harmony. The enchantment of dream-bright childhood, of early love, and of that youthful tie which endures so that a fully-shared sunset love can bathe bright young memories in its deeper golds is rapturous and rare. The novel is a glowing lyric of emotion recollected together and again and again in impassioned tranquillity. An eighty-year ardour stretches between vivid young love and warmly shared age, and time is easily spanned when Van and Ada wander together in memory through their extraordinary past. The harmony of it all is irresistibly alluring, and as Robert Alter, one of Nabokov's finest critics, wrote in

opening a review of Ada, one feels that "Vladimir Nabokov possesses what is probably the most finely cultivated sense of form of any living writer."⁸

But on a rereading--and here we can see why it is appropriate to speak of an antithetic response, and why some critics, such as Alter himself six years later,⁹ have regarded Ada as flawed--the novel appears disappointingly broken, crumpled, crippled, lacking in coherence. When there are no more unknown developments of plot to draw one on, when one knows in advance how much of what could have been their liveliest years Van and Ada must spend apart, when one senses to what extent each phrase or paragraph or chapter remains unconnected to its context, harmony turns to discord. Joltingly awkward summaries, scenes set adrift, drastic changes in subject and mode, the lack of continuous development, yawning gaps in time casually flitted across, quite spoil all sense of structure. There is a powerful asymmetry, even on a first reading, in the combination of structural diminution and chronological acceleration. Yet when one rereads Ada the novel seems far more fractured than even this asymmetry could require. For despite the imbalance it causes, the tumbling of time is well-defined, in one direction, and obviously part of the author's design. But the ruptures in Ada seem cluttered and aimless, more like unintentional flaws than signs of authorial purpose. There is not a hint that dis-

⁸ "Nabokov's Ardor," Commentary, 48 (August 1969), p. 47.

⁹ Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), pp. 183-84.

ruption has been set up, as in Swift or Sterne, as the author's special plan: rather than a rhythm of disruption, there seems to be only a failure to cohere. Things seem choppy, confused, directionless. Douglas Fowler calls the novel "unfocused and erratic"¹⁰ and adds that never "have the individual parts of one of [Nabokov's] works . . . had less organic relationship with one another" (p. 192). Like others, Elizabeth Dalton simply concludes that Nabokov's gift is for "small-scale effects, rather than for larger structures."¹¹

On a closer inspection, then, the enchanting unity of Ada starts to twist and collapse. But while he was in the middle of writing Ada, Nabokov noted that "in art, as in nature, a glaring disadvantage may turn out to be a subtle protective device" (KOK viii).¹² One cannot help responding to the dissatisfactions of structure in Ada, but one is responding to the illusion of a flaw. One's understanding of the reasons for the apparent lapses of structural control form part of the synthetic phase of response, during which one also discovers unequalled and unforeseeable perfections of structure, as we shall see in Chapters 3 to 9.

But if the antithetic readings are characterized by a certain dissatisfaction, why should anyone want to continue to reread, why should the reader trust the author sufficiently to begin again a work whose "synthetic" solution he cannot expect in advance? The answer is

¹⁰ Reading Nabokov (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974), p. 176.

¹¹ "Ada or Nada," Partisan Review, 37:1 (1970), 158.

¹² This foreword is dated March 28, 1967.

of course that during rereading one's sense of a certain discord in the whole is more than compensated for as one encounters a multitude of minor but fascinating concords. The excitement of discovering local interrelationships, a singularly intense thrill available to any reader with the curiosity to seek elsewhere in the text for the source of an echo, is far greater than any unease, any rather undefinable uncertainties. It is precisely because during rereading one is discovering more and more often the uniqueness and vitality of each minutest part and the bracing complexities of the relationships between part and part that one's initial sense of the overarching unity of the whole has been dispelled, and for the same reason one is enticed to continue to reread, in the never-disappointed expectation of even more surprising and more invigorating discoveries.

In terms of the thetic, antithetic and synthetic phases of reading Ada, the brief summary above of a first reading of the novel is thetic, most of Chapter 1 deals with the antithetic phase, and the rest of the thesis is concerned with the synthetic.

But let us summarize more fully what can be expected ahead. The first chapter is a general consideration of Nabokov's style and strategies, but because its examples are all drawn from Ada it is at the same time a sampler of the delights of the antithetic phase of reading, the period of local discovery--though it also includes two inter-related findings from the synthetic phase. The second chapter concentrates on Nabokov's philosophy, ranging throughout his works from 1916 to 1976. As we shall see later a very clear understanding of Nabokov's philosophy and of the unusual artistic methods by which it is

expressed is a necessary preparation for the synthetic stage of reading Ada. The third to ninth chapters, which follow Ada more or less in the order of reading, deal with the novel's final patterns of relationship. Chapter 3 concerns itself with the first three chapters of Ada, a sort of prologue whose considerable difficulty has deterred some readers but whose lucid and elegant structural functions have not at all been recognized. Chapter 4 appears the simplest in the thesis, because it describes the reader's expectations on a first and on later readings, as these expectations are controlled by the Ardis sections (the rest of Ada's Part 1). Though at some points the chapter depicts our uncomplicated reactions on a first reading of the most straightforward parts of Ada, its real goal is to show how our initial and subsequent, rather different, reactions have been shaped, and this cannot be seen until we approach a comprehensive understanding of the novel. Chapters 5 to 9, the most important in the thesis, deal in consecutive order with Parts 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Ada (with the exception that Chapter 7 assesses Parts 1 to 3 from a different perspective). Though these chapters describe some of the disquiets of the antithetic stage of reading Ada and analyze the structural role of these disquiets, they focus chiefly on the most significant of the relationships that can eventually be discovered within Ada. Attention is concentrated upon the structural, artistic, moral and metaphysical values of these relationships, which are both too complex and too numerous to epitomize in advance.

I

NABOKOV AND THE READER

Two surface features of Nabokov's style are commonly considered the essence of the distinctly Nabokovian: the acuity of visual detail and the insistent phonic play. The first reflects Nabokov's passion for independence, the second his delight in pattern, and as I shall show in the next chapter independence and pattern are the two poles of the axis around which Nabokov's metaphysics and epistemology revolve. In his limpidly precise details Nabokov concentrates on the distinguishing particularity, the unique combination, on the independence of the thing, on the sharply specific moment of observation. In the joyful bump of his sound play--"the dangling end of tangled bangles" (187)¹ or "senescent nonsense, says science!" (354)--he creates an extraordinarily patterned prose.² But I would like to suggest that independence and pattern work in far deeper ways, that they are much more fundamental in making Nabokov's prose the wonderfully individual and

¹ All references are to Ada unless otherwise indicated.

² The patterning of sound and word in Nabokov's prose has been treated in Carl R. Proffer, Keys to Lolita (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), in William Woodin Rowe, Nabokov's Deceptive World (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1971), in Jessie Thomas Lokrantz, The Under-side of the Weave: Some Stylistic Devices Used by Vladimir Nabokov (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1973), in Jane Grayson, Nabokov Translated: A Comparison of Nabokov's Russian and English Prose (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).

charming instrument it is.

It has been appreciated too that Nabokov's style is unique not only on the surface of the prose but at a more profound level of the reading experience--unique, that is, in the challenge that exists between author and reader and in the rewards awaiting the reader who can meet the challenges the author so variously prepares.³ This process of challenge and reward or of resistance and solution draws each reader into the problem of determining the position of consciousness in the universe, a problem which as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter forms the core and mantle of Nabokov's philosophical world.

The nature and the rich purposefulness of Nabokov's style and strategies cannot be understood unless one recognizes--as no one yet has--the full extent of challenge and reward within his works and unless these two inverse forces are seen as Nabokov's means of investigating the nature of consciousness. Even his depiction of the external world operates, as we shall see, by means of the challenge and reward offered to the reader, the "challenge" in the rendering of the external world expressing Nabokov's belief that the world resists the mind so thoroughly because it is so real, because it exists so resolutely outside the mind, the "reward" recreating Nabokov's own experience of the inexhaustible joy of the mind's contact with the world.

Nabokov always considers both the limitations and the possibili-

³ The dynamics of the relationship between author and reader in Nabokov's work has been discussed in Proffer, Keys to Lolita, and in Alfred Appel, Jr., ed., The Annotated Lolita (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970).

ties of consciousness. He finds particularly frustrating the fact that man's consciousness is imprisoned within time and particularly exciting the fact that memory should have the power to escape the shackles of the present and reach out into the past. He deplores the deceptions and bias and limitation that result from the confinement of the individual personality but values the liberating power of the imagination, the tenderness and the sympathetic engagement with others that it can achieve. Perhaps most intriguing of all for Nabokov are the possibility of human consciousness's breaking through its limitations to higher states of truth, and the possibility of there being conscious design in the universe somehow, somewhere, accessible to man. Challenge and reward function in Nabokov's work in ways that reflect all of these fascinating facets of the problem of consciousness, and for this reason, as we shall see, they are present at every level of the reading experience.

But let us for the moment concentrate upon style, keeping in mind the fundamental importance to Nabokov's thought of independence and pattern and the nature of consciousness as we consider how the experience of reading his work differs from that of reading other fiction.

At each moment in reading we try to apprehend the presence and purpose of the author's choice behind each movement of the text. We try also to be aware of the relationship between the part of the text immediately before our attention and other parts of the work being read. In Nabokov's novels the relationships of part to part and reader to author are peculiar in four different ways. Each of these

peculiar kinds of relationship may be seen on its own or in conjunction with others; each may manifest itself in the minutest level of the prose or in the largest features of the whole work; it is their combination that makes the process of reading Nabokov so unusual, so unpredictable, challenging and delightful.

The peculiar relationship of part to part has two opposite faces. The obverse is the sheer independence of part from part. This is evident in the very choice of material, in the cheekily deliberate "irrelevance" of the elements of a story. Even more important, more devious and radical is Nabokov's subversion of the usual power of sequentiality to regulate the relationship of part to successive part and to control the options of the writer and the operations of the reader. It is difficult to describe the absence of inert continuity in Nabokov's novels, the rare independence of the force or the over-ready suggestiveness of consecutive order that Nabokov grants to each minute particle of the fiction, but perhaps it could be put thus: one creative choice does not lead on to or even limit the next; even within a sentence there may be complete changes of subject or setting, sudden switchings of every kind, from vast significance to microscopic detail, from third person to first, from compassion to indifference; the direction, speed, tone, voice, time, setting, characters, status or thought of any chapter, sentence or part of a sentence may have any or no relation to what has gone before and what will follow. Each moment in the reading process seems curiously independent of every other moment.

The reverse of this independence of narrative elements is the

patterned and pointed recurrence of parts. Nabokovian recurrence occurs in complex, delicate and elusive ways. It may be of a small verbal element--in Ada there are several hundred different verbal leitmotifs--or of a major structural feature, a tiny detail of character or a resonant thematic echo.

The relationship between reader and text or author also has two opposite aspects. The obverse might be most broadly termed "resistance," the author's arranging that the reader will be unable to detect the nature or purpose of the author's choice. On the local level resistance may appear as an external allusion or an internal cross-reference that one cannot trace. It may occur anywhere as the illusion of excess or defect, of, for instance, a formless over-profusion of subjects or of a too ruthlessly concentrated form (Ada has been criticized for both). It may appear, too, on the level of moral evaluation: Nabokov's indifference to his human subjects or his too close identification with some of them, his ruthlessness in judging his characters or his deplorable indulgence.

The reverse of resistance we shall call "solution." As we have already seen, Nabokov talks of reading as if it were like solving a chess problem. Reading his novels at least provides special solutions, and the solving of the myriad little problems Nabokov sets the reader has a powerful inductive effect. The pure thrill of finding an allusion, of locating the precise source of a teasing echo, of suddenly catching an obscure pun or seeing what should have been an obvious joke makes the reader alert, curious, eager to find new puzzles to solve. When the new and richest solutions are reached they may offer

one an unexpected insight into the essence of a novel's structure or the penetrating surprise of being forced to recognize one's own errors of moral perception.

Let us turn to Ada now to see the reading process in motion. But first it should be stressed that the examples given below are in a sense deliberately minor. It will be seen that even slight examples of the absence of inertia, of recurrence, resistance and solution are so phenomenally complex that explanation cannot be brief. The following instances have been chosen partly for the sake of economy of exposition and clarity of definition, and their scope is not at all meant to suggest that the effects are confined to the very local ones considered here. The larger effects will be considered throughout the last seven chapters.

The last paragraph of Ada's Pt.1 Ch.25 ends Van's 1884 summer vacation at Ardis, his uncle's country manor, where Van and Ada have become intensely impassioned, lyrically lucky lovers. It is September, and fourteen-year-old Van must return to school. He does not know when he will see Ada again. They will meet next, in fact, for an hour in December that year, for another hour in July 1886, for a proper reunion when Van returns to Ardis in 1888. But the radiance of their falling in love will not be repeated, though their passion remains just as intense: the meeting in December 1884 is dampened by jealousy, by company, by sullen suspicion; the July 1886 encounter is a mere spasm of feverish fornication; the full reunion in 1888 is rent by betrayal and jealous rage. With this to come, with the ineffable joy of their early companionship about to end, Van and Ada at their first

farewell are indeed at a major turning point in their lives.

Bouteillan, the butler, is to drive Van in the family car from the family manor to the local railway station. But Van takes the wheel, stops en route at Forest Fork, leaves Bouteillan to wait, and plunges into the undergrowth--where he and Ada have a last tryst, a last caress. Van asks Ada if she will be faithful to him. She replies: "my love, my Van, I'm physical, horribly physical, I don't know, I'm frank, qu'y puis-je? Oh dear, don't ask me, there's a girl in my school who is in love with me. . . ." Van cuts in: "The girls don't matter . . . it's the fellows I'll kill" (158). After one last embrace, he tears himself away:

Stumbling on melons, fiercely beheading the tall arrogant fennels with his riding crop, Van returned to the Forest Fork. Morio, his favorite black horse, stood waiting for him, held by young Moore. He thanked the groom with a handful of stellas and galloped off, his gloves wet with tears. (159)

With this paragraph Ardis the First and the rapturous summer of 1884 are ended. But keep a finger on Our Paragraph.

For the "unsophisticated" who "might miss the point of the problem entirely" (to borrow from Speak, Memory's great chess problem) the paragraph above is immediately delightful. Its "fairly simple, 'thetic' solution" is its wonderful romanticism, the culmination of the bright idyll of Ardis the First, the fierce passion of young Van, and the sheer colour of the lines, in "melons," "fiercely beheading," in horse and groom, "a handful of stellas," "gloves wet with tears."

But the more watchful reader notices details that cry out for explanation, and for him the "pleasurable torments" of the antithetic

reading and the start of the approach to the synthetic are not far behind.

One's most urgent question is "What has happened to Bouteillan and the family car?" There is a very literal absence of inert continuity here--indeed, of any continuity. Horse and attendant groom have appeared as if by spontaneous generation or--though Van seems too unsurprised for this to be a real possibility--by some fantastic metamorphosis of the family's car and butler.

Three months earlier, on his first coming to Ardis Park, Van has to travel from the local railway station to the manor, and in "a miniature of the imagination, he had seen a saddled horse prepared for him" (34). But there is nothing prepared, and he takes "a hackney coach" which chance makes available. As he is driven to Ardis, the coach becomes in turn "the old calèche . . . the sensitive runabout . . . the old clockwork taxi." When he reaches Ardis Hall a "servant in waiting took his horse" (34-35). We are warned not to expect passive continuity⁴

This episode indeed is a very paradigm of the absence of inert continuity in Nabokov's prose. Just as his hero traverses the distance from A to B not by continuing to move through the intervening space in

⁴ The only reviewer to take note of this first journey was John Thompson, "Books," Harper's (September, 1969), p. 124; no reviewer noted the second. Among critics, only Herbert Grabes has discovered the double metamorphic journey, but he considers it merely "a game that the author is playing with his reader's attentiveness" (Fictitious Biographies: Vladimir Nabokov's English Novels, trans. Herbert Grabes and Pamela Gliniars [The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1977], p. 84).

the coach in which he began but by suddenly reappearing at B on horseback, so Nabokov's sentences often provide the illusion of continuous motion in a single direction where there have really been radical breaks, sudden shifts, silent transformations.

The real cheek of the change from coach to saddlehorse is not so much in the fact of the transformation as in the pretence of bland continuity. In the same way Nabokov's sentences violate natural continuity but with a straight face pretend to have been guided by ordinary momentum. The imposture is even more bewitching than the more overt breaks of a Sterne or a Barthelme.

Looking back from a hundred and twenty pages later, from the end of Van's stay at Ardis, from September 1884 and another metamorphic trip between manor and station, we recognize an enchanting recurrence, a daringly original but neat and subtle framing of Van's idyll with Ada. The two metamorphic trips between station and manor and manor and station, indeed, elegantly enclose the excerpt Nabokov had printed in Playboy in advance of the novel's publication.

To return to Van's departure, to the final paragraph of Ardis the First: just who are the horse and groom? The language suggests that the reader should know "his favorite black horse" and "young Moore." But this suggestion of ordinary fictional continuity is a mere feint of resistance: it prompts one to believe one has merely forgotten their earlier appearance. One might strain to recall them, but in vain: this is their only occurrence in the novel. The solution lies in a different direction: they are nothing but local figments of Van's narrative, a silent disclosure of the fact that he sees himself

in romantic terms. The young groom, the black horse and Van galloping off provide a much more fitting atmosphere for the fierceness of passionate separation than a family car and an old bald butler. The romantic scene is a delight--and a warning not to trust Van's posturing, his self-projection, his autobiographie romancée.

The word "stellas" is a demonstration in miniature of the four different motions of the reading process. It is the simplest kind of resistance, an unknown word. But it is also an instance of the absence of inertia: not bound by common standards of appropriateness, Nabokov delights in placing an obscure word in a line of rushing narrative, in interrupting the reader's forward motion with Van by making him scurry aside to a dictionary--though neither OED nor Webster's Third has the word. For the "unsophisticated" a "stella" has a pleasant romantic ring (star, girl's name)--there is a Stella in Nabokov's play Smert' (1923), a Stella Fantasia in Lolita. It has the same apt romanticism for a reader who wants to know more, but what does it mean?

"Stellas" occurs in the second to last line of Pt.1 Ch.25. In the second line of the chapter is the word "asters."⁵ An amusing recurrence⁶--but not the clue it might seem to be. The illusion of

⁵ The sentence begins: "On a sunny September morning, with the trees still green, but the asters and fleabanes taking over in ditch and dalk" (156). Asters are fall-blooming herbs: both "asters" and "stellas" are chosen for their precision, not for empty artifice. There seems to be no specific allusion to Sidney's Astrophel and Stella (pub. 1591).

⁶ Not half as amusing as this utterly bizarre--and surely unparalleled--connection: in between the "asters" and "stellas" of Pt.1 Ch.26 are "star spurs"; in Lolita, on p. 291, we find "aster-like," "star performer" and "stellar care," in the same order.

simple recurrence is as much an instance of resistance as the obscurity of "stella" itself. In fact, the solution--like that of Speak, Memory's chess problem--has a very "simple key move" (after the "pleasant experience of the roundabout route"): Webster's Second defines a stella as "An experimental four-dollar gold piece struck by the United States in 1879-80." Nabokov's historical precision is teasingly ludicrous.

After working out the reason for the sudden appearance of horse and groom, after finding the meaning of "stella," perhaps one next seeks to explain the names Van has given his invented horse and groom. There is a simple, immediately-offered solution: for the Morio-Moore sound play. But this solution itself acts as a kind of resistance by appearing (a common Nabokovian ploy) to obviate the need for further examination--which will reveal that young Moore is in fact Romeo,⁷ and black Morio is Othello.

This pair of simple but oblique allusions encapsulates the whole of Part 1 of Ada. Van, the allusions hint, leaves the young Romeo behind and charges off on the Moor: "Ardis the First" is comparable in the freshness and lyric radiance of its young love only to Romeo and Juliet, while the chapters between "Ardis the First" and "Ardis the Second" and that reunion itself are marked by the ever-deepening shadow of potentially violent jealousy, hinted at for the very first time in Van's words to Ada just before their last embrace of 1884 and Van's tear-blinded departure.

⁷ Cf. the character Julia Moore in Transparent Things and Hugh Person's dream of Giulia Romeo-Julie-Juliet-Julia-Mr. Romeo (80-81).

Each new meeting of Van and Ada is a vital part of the pattern of their impassioned love story. After this last embrace in 1884 they next see each other near Ada's school, Brownhill College. Ada is accompanied by Cordula de Prey, whom Van suspects of being the lesbian lover Ada had hinted at. Despite his having said "The girls don't matter" he is rabidly jealous of Cordula. At the time of their meeting it has been teeming with rain; Ada has on an oilcloth hat but dares not take it off, for she has had her hair cropped mannishly short to ease the throb of her recent migraines and "she did not want him to see her in the role of a moribund Romeo" (169; my italics). Echoes as subtle and thematically precise as this recollection of "Morio . . . Moore" will be found throughout Ada.

Though in fact Nabokov uses hidden recurrence and elusive structuring more often and for more complex purposes, allusion is the form of resistance people might most expect from him. Allusion may be explicitly signaled, as in the case of proper nouns like "Morio" and "Moore," or it may be smuggled quite unsignaled into the context so that one can only spot the allusion if one distinctly remembers its source. In the paragraph we are considering, this is the case in the opening phrase, which Nabokov has quietly lifted from Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" (pub. 1681):

Ripe Apples drop about my head;
The Luscious Clusters of the Vine
Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;
The Nectaren, and curious Peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,
Insnar'd with Flow'rs, I fall on Grass.

(ll. 34-40)

The source and context have a special significance. Throughout Ardis the First Van and Nabokov toy with the Garden of Eden and the (very fortunate) Fall, as Marvell does, and hence Marvell's poem occurs several times in Ada. But the profusion of proffered fruits in this stanza evokes in particular the unfortunate consequences of Van and Ada's fall, the insatiable sexuality it arouses in them both, and thus Van's obsessive jealousy and his peculiar hypocrisy. For he does take every "curious peach" that reaches into his hand. By the 1888 reunion, he tells Ada, he has been unfaithful to her

Six hundred and thirteen times. . . . With at least two hundred whores, who only caressed me. I've remained absolutely true to you because those were only "obmanipulations" (sham, insignificant strokings by unremembered cold hands). (195)

Just after the allusion to Marvell's melons comes one to Rimbaud's ombelle. The phrase "arrogant fenncels" echoes l. 19 of Rimbaud's "Mémoire" (written 1872, pub. 1895): "foulant l'ombelle; trop fière pour elle" (fennel is a member of the family Umbelliferae). Though many of the allusions to "Mémoire" that occur in Ada require a knowledge of the context, this seems not to.⁸

The point of the Rimbaud allusion is a little resistant. The solution may be reached through another example of recurrence. The

⁸ Section III of "Mémoire" is the most difficult part of an extraordinarily tricky poem. Bright light, the little river, "des enfants lisant dans la verdure fleurie" do suggest Ardis, particularly in view of the specifically "Mémoire"-like qualities of Pt.1 Ch.35; and one could see black-haired, black-dressed, cold-handed Ada in "Elle, toute / froide, et noire, court! après le départ de l'homme!" But there is so little context within the Rimbaud lines that an allusion to one of the lines can hardly be considered to imply its neighbours.

passionate farewell of our lovers in 1884 takes place at Forest Fork. It is this spot (mentioned only these two times) that is the locale for Van and Ada's next meeting after the Brownhill fiasco, and their only love-making between 1884 and 1888, just before 8 A.M. on July 25, 1886. This later tryst is a recurrence staged by the characters, no mere verbal recall but a deliberate reliving of their last previous embraces.

It is after this meeting that Van and Ada change the code for their correspondence--encoding is necessary, of course, to keep their incestuous love a secret from parents, prying maids and schoolfriends. Between 1884 and 1886 they had used a simple alphabetic code. "In the second period of separation, beginning in 1886"--that is, after the reunion at Forest Fork--"the code was radically altered" (161), becoming now a numerical cipher geared to the lines and letters of "The Garden" and "Mémoire," which both children know by heart (the two poems had been discussed together by Van and Ada in Pt.1 Ch.10). It is during this new phase of the correspondence that Ada's letters become less frequent. Van's pride is hurt and his jealousy further inflamed--and with reason, for it is precisely because Ada is entangled in affairs with Philip Rack and Percy de Prey that she writes so seldom. Through the pairing of the Marvell and Rimbaud allusions in our paragraph, then, Nabokov sums up in advance the novel's important and multiform letter theme and forelays the jealousy theme that becomes dominant in Ardis the Second.

The interval between Ardis the First and Ardis the Second (1884-1888, Pt.1 Ch.26-Pt.1 Ch.30) seems chaotic and confused and

acridly unpleasant after the unity and harmony and ambrosial joy of the Ardis the First section. This change of structure and tone is utterly essential, for Van and Ada have lost their paradise. Yet it seems quite excessive. The excess is a powerful example of resistance: Nabokov thwarts the expectations he has set up; the distastefulness and brokenness of the interim chapters seem greater than he would have wished to design; all feels a little sickeningly uncontrolled. But the subtle recurrences of the last paragraph of Ch.25 show how firmly under control this chaos is: already Van and Ada's first, unsuccessful reunion at Brownhill, their successful but brief tryst at Forest Fork and the letters that span their separation and adumbrate the jealousy that will lour over their proper reunion are contained in the Morio-Moore allusions and the Marvell-Rimbaud echoes.

On a first reading the exhilarating lyricism of Ardis the First, intensified and specially verified by the fact that the lovers are seen to be still together eighty years later, tides one over the lapses and separations: confident of seeing the characters reunited, one is eager to see the reunion take place, and the separation seems hardly noticed. But on a rereading the sense of disharmony, even of Nabokov's apparent inability to control structure and tone, is very disquieting. It takes a long time to discover, through details like those of our paragraph, that every part of the apparent lapse is meticulously designed, and to reach at last the solution that Nabokov has not merely described the failure to control happiness and promise, but has made the reader experience this loss of control through sharing in his own unostentatious, apparently undeliberate and unrecognized

failure--which is ultimately only an apparent failure.

If the subtler functions of our paragraph have a vital role in enabling us to understand Nabokov's structural strategies, yet another quiet significance is essential in helping us appreciate Nabokov's moral evaluation of his characters. The explosive tumult of Van's emotions is romantically thrilling in his "fiercely beheading the tall arrogant fennels with his riding crop," but the riding crop will make a transmuted appearance in less attractive form. Its role as weapon and emotional outlet at the end of Van's first Ardis stay is matched by the "silver-knobbed cane" (298) at the end of his second idyll at Ardis. This time, Van is fleeing the manor and especially Ada, who has betrayed him with Percy de Prey and Philip Rack, whom he plans to maim or destroy: "you could . . . thrash him with a strong cane--must not forget to choose one in the vestibule closet before leaving forever, forever" (294). But he leaves his cane behind at the railway station and has to buy "his second walking stick . . . a rude, stout article with a convenient grip and an alpenstockish point capable of gouging out translucent bulging eyes" (305). He is wounded in an irrelevant duel and cannot find the walking stick, "so the hospital supplied him with the Third Cane" (312). The cane's sinister threateningness seems about to be unleashed in action, but Van's weapon suddenly proves needless, for Rack, poisoned by his wife, has only days to live and Percy de Prey has already been shot in the Crimean War.

When Van and Ada are reunited in Manhattan late in 1892, Ada has with her an album of incriminating photographs: brother and sister

in amorous poses, as recorded in 1884 by Ardis kitchen boy, "photo-fiend" (205) and blackmailer Kim Beauharnais. (Sample shot: "Another interesting plant, Marvel's Melon, imitating the backside of an occupied lad, could be made out on the floral horizon of a third photo" [405].) When Demon in February 1893 forces his too-loving children to part, Van, smarting from another separation, rushes off to unleash his anger in a manner rather less attractive than that of the 1884 riding crop or even the Three Canes of 1888. Just as the 1888 canes are a more serious form of the 1884 riding crop, so the 1893 implement makes explicit the romantic violence implicit in the "alpenstockish" second cane. For this time Van uses an alpenstock "to release a brute's fury" (445)--to blind blackmailer Kim.

To readers like John Updike and Joyce Carol Oates,⁹ Nabokov seems to be unaware of the repulsive side of Van's self-congratulatory romanticism. In fact, though, Nabokov assesses uncannily well Van's arrogant selfishness, the privilege he claims for his passion. Nabokov does not forget for a moment the implications of Van's self-willed ardour; he deftly incorporates criticism by such hardly noticeable means as making the wild bitterness of the riding-crop scene contain already an anticipation of Van's ugliest deed. To the careless reader Nabokov appears simply to sanction the real charms of Van's romanticism.

⁹ Updike, "Van Loves Ada, Ada Loves Van," New Yorker, August 2, 1969, p. 70: "But is it intentional that . . . the hero is such a brute?"; Oates, "A Personal View of Nabokov," Saturday Review of the Arts, 1:1, January 6, 1973, 37: "He then assigns worth--which may seem to us quite exaggerated, even ludicrous, as in Ada, to a few selected human beings. . . ."

In fact he lets the reader succumb to these charms and then recognize his mistake.

Our paragraph, then, begins in fiery romanticism and in an apparent absence of relationship to anything else--the miraculous and comic disappearance of butler and car, the spontaneously generated groom and horse. But the emphatic independence of narrative continuity gradually discloses a wealth of intricate recurrence: the metamorphic run from station to manor at the beginning of Ardis the First is balanced by the transformation on the return trip; the jealousy theme, the next meetings at Brownhill and at Forest Fork and in Ardis the Second are all foreshadowed, as are Van's Byronic rage at the end of his next sojourns with Ada. The resistance of the Shakespeare, Marvell and Rimbaud allusions and the probably more difficult internal allusions similarly only gradually gives way to solutions, to the appreciation of the masterly control behind the apparent lapse in the 1884-1888 separation, to the evidence of a tireless criticism of the romanticism that at first seems so attractive.

1. Independence and the Absence of Inertia

The immediate charm of Nabokov's narrative style lies in its capacity to make each moment of reading so unrestricted by every other moment. What creates this rare freedom is the vibrant independence of each of the elements of the fiction and the unprecedented ability of the prose to move from one strikingly independent element to another in any way at all, with any degree of rapidity or retardation, lucidity or

elusiveness, elegance, clumsiness or sheer preposterousness. Nabokov's narrative does not, like a smooth-flowing treacle, move steadily on by the pressure of its own sweet consistency. It can develop by breaks, sudden shifts, "spontaneous" creation.

Let us consider first the independence of each element in the fiction.

The objects and events and characters in Nabokov's fiction may be pointedly irrelevant, emphatically independent of the rest of the work--like the young groom Moore and the saddlehorse Morio, without antecedent or consequence:

The poor fellow died that night in his sleep, leaving the entire incident suspended in midair within a nimbus of bright irrelevancy. (470)

A dead and dry hummingbird moth lay on the window ledge of the lavatory. Thank goodness, symbols did not exist either in dreams or in the life in between. (510)

Nabokov particularly values the autonomy, the separate vitality of what he creates, an object or an instant or a character suddenly there and itself, with no purpose whatever in the development of a story or in the assignation of its meaning. In a sense, this is a special kind of realism, a challenge to the principle of artistic selection. Reality is not chosen, it is infinitely detailed, each part of it has its own independent life whether it affects us or not, and in the same way a flash of light, a gesture, a character is allowed into a Nabokov novel even if it has no part in the protagonists' lives. But simultaneously there is an anti-realistic effect: because something is without antecedent, with no place in the scheme of things, with no need

to be there, one is very conscious of the fresh choice of the artist that has fetched this something, that has created it in a totally new burst of individual fancy.

It is the special combination described above that Nabokov so enjoys in Gogol's creation of independent and irrelevant vitality: on the one hand, a challenge to artistic selectivity as if on behalf of multiplex and undesigning reality and on the other a revelling in the creative powers the artist's magic wand can set loose. Nabokov writes with infectious fascination about the "torrent of 'irrelevant' details" (NG 148) in Gogol's work, the "spontaneous generation" (NG 83) of "'secondary' dream characters [who] pop out at every turn of the play (or novel, or story) to flaunt for a second their life-like existence" (NG 42): "Note how the newborn Anonymous Vlassovich manages to grow up and live a whole life in the space of a second" (NG 47):

Like Gogol, Nabokov can create a character bursting with his own quiddity and gloriously irrelevant to the rest of the work. In the following instance Nabokov goes even further, permitting the reader to watch the spontaneous generation not only of a character but of a whole region:

. . . Dorothy Vineland retired to a subarctic monastery town (Ilemma, now Novostabia) where eventually she married a Mr. Brod or Bred, tender and passionate, dark and handsome, who traveled in eucharistials and other sacramental objects through the Severniya Territorii and who subsequently was to direct, and may still be directing half a century later, archeological reconstructions at Goreloe (the "Lyaskan Herculaneum"); what treasures he dug up in matrimony is another question. (532)

"Mr. Brod" (a Russian root for "wander" and Swedish for "bread,"

appropriate for one who "traveled" in "eucharistials") "or Bred" (Russian "delirium") comes into existence, marriage and two careers in half a sentence, to disappear from the novel at once on a cadence of flippant unconcern, having flaunted the colourfulness of his improbability.

Not content to create only a momentary character, Nabokov establishes in the same swift-moving half-sentence a momentary landscape, a whole regional history and geography. In the rest of the novel northern North America, particularly Canada and Alaska (on Antiterra "Canady," to avoid a superfluous "ada," and "Lyaska," from the Russian "Alyaska"), merges mysteriously with our Russia. But in four lines of sudden detail--"a subarctic monastery town," a traveler "in eucharistials and other sacramental objects"--the frozen zones instantly spring to life as The Devout North, seething with the Russian Orthodox faith, only to disappear as thoroughly as Mr. Brod or Bred. A context now exists, though, for two other facts in the novel: Varvara, the fourth of Chehov's Four Sisters, as the play is known on Antiterra, comes in "Act One from her remote nunnery, Tsitsikar Convent" (429), and Marina, who plays the part of Varvara, is later found in "Tsitsikar--flirting there with the Bishop of Belokonsk" (437).¹⁰ It is an enchanting enrichment of the novel's landscape, enchanting and utterly preposterous, though Nabokov's friend Prince S. M. Kachurin did

¹⁰ "Tsitsikar" is a combination of Tsitsihar in North Manchuria and Sitka in Alaska (mentioned on p. 71 of *Ada*) rather than a perversion of Lake Titicaca; "Belokonsk" is a Russian "translation" of the Yukon's Whitehorse.

die "in an Alaskan monastery" (PP 141).

Our half-sentence also gives birth to a geological as well as a religious history. Mr Brod or Bred married Dorothy Vineland in "Ilemma, now Novostabia": Lake Il'men, near Novgorod, is fused with Iliamna, the largest lake in Alaska and also the name of the local volcano. Since the ancient Roman town of Stabiae was destroyed by Vesuvius in A.D. 79, along with Pompeii and Herculaneum, the phrase "Ilemma, now Novostabia" implies that the volcano Ilemma has recently erupted, causing its town (perhaps still devastated) to be renamed. Presumably, however, it was a much earlier eruption which caused Goreloe to be "burnt" or "scorched" (its meaning in Russian), if the "reconstructions" Mr Brod or Bred is directing are "archeological." If, indeed, the eruptions are real: Ilemma is foreshadowed in a "pet nightmare" Dorothy Vineland has years before she goes near Lyaska, in the throes of which she sees "the eruption of a dream volcano" (514). She thrusts a report of the nightmare before Van, a distinguished oneirologist. Van finds Dorothy Vineland obnoxious in general and resents in particular her foisting her dream upon him. Perhaps, as narrator, he invents her colourful fate, her marrying "a Mr. Brod or Bred, tender and passionate, dark and handsome," perhaps not.

But it is not only the fantastic that Nabokov shows as spontaneous generation, that he encircles with a "nimbus of bright irrelevancy." Details of visual description, too, flaunt their vivid independence. Nabokov is celebrated for the precision of his visual details, yet it is not the precision alone that imparts that special tang to his descriptions but rather the whole sense of the splendid

autonomy of the thing described. This autonomy comes of course partly from the unique combination of details that individualizes the thing, but it also stems from the delicate implication that the description is "irrelevant," that it is chosen purely for itself and not for any function it has in the novel, and from the way in which the suddenness and enchantment of the description can stress the creative power of the novelist's invention.

The first contribution to the thing's "resplendent independence" (SO 226) is the vividness of Nabokov's details. His observation is meticulous and original, his combination of details unique; so that one moment is forever distinguished from all others:

a tortoiseshell comb in her chestnut hair caught the amber light; the French window was open, and she was holding one hand, starred with a tiny aquamarine, rather high on the jamb as she looked at a sparrow that was hopping up the paved path toward the bit of baby-toed biscuit she had thrown to him. (48)

But there is also a keen sense in Nabokov's descriptions that the thing need not have been described, or at least that such detail was not necessary. The "rather high on the jamb," the "starred with a tiny aquamarine" and the superb "baby-toed" in the sentence above are there for the position, light and shape of the things themselves rather than for any necessary part they play in action or characterization. It is this sense of the unnecessary that provokes William Gass to call Nabokov's descriptions "fussily decorative, like insistent blossoms on a swatch of chintz."¹¹ Gass does not recognize the inten-

¹¹ "Mirror, Mirror," New York Review of Books, June 6, 1968;

tional presence of the "nimbus of bright irrelevancy" that grants the thing described an independent right to exist. In the following lines one feels it natural (in terms of novelistic convention) for Van to describe so tenderly the girl about to become his lover, but the description of the tablecloth and the honey-smeared butter are especially attractive because there is so little need to describe them:

Her hair was well brushed that day and sheened darkly in contrast with the lusterless pallor of her neck and arms. She wore the striped tee shirt which in his lone fantasies he especially liked to peel off her twisting torso. The oilcloth was divided into blue and white squares. A smear of honey stained what remained of the butter in its cool crock. (75)

The charm and magic of such description lie of course partly in the precision, but also in the suggestion of irrelevance emphasized by the dislocation in the sudden move from Ada to tablecloth. These things are simply there, splendidly so, independent of any design of the author except his desire to put them there for themselves, sharply isolated. (Nabokov, the scene as a whole shows, feels no necessity to create a convincingly solid realistic backdrop for his action and certainly would abhor any "symbolic" reading of the details.) Robbe-Grillet advocates this purity of the object: "Que ce soit d'abord par leur présence que les objets et les gestes s'imposent. . . . gestes et objets seront là avant d'être quelque chose."¹² As in life, things are

rpt. in Gass, Fiction and the Figures of Life (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 111.

¹² "Une voie pour le roman futur" (1956), in Pour un nouveau roman (Paris: Minuit, 1963), p. 20.

bright, opaque, merely there, themselves, independent of other things and of any special relevance, any human "'significations' (psychologiques, sociales, fonctionnelles)" (Robbe-Grillet, p. 20). By the "bright irrelevancy" of his details Nabokov, like Robbe-Grillet, produces a reality truer (because it catches one--as things in life do--by the sudden presence of things) than that of "realism," though unlike Robbe-Grillet Nabokov avoids the programmatic, achieves economy and leaves a sense of enchantment in a thing's autonomy from human purpose.

Nabokov's visual descriptions are not only vividly detailed and "unnecessary" but also hint at the magical power of artistic creativity. A second ago nothing, and now a vivid and entrancing image: "they crouched on the brink of one of the brook's crystal shelves, where, before falling, it stopped to have its picture taken and take pictures itself" (267). Because Nabokov does not require the steady accompaniment of a fictional setting, because the details appear in a flash without antecedent or context or function except their own sharp-edged vividness, each description seems a miracle of creativity, each object depicted seems purely and brightly itself.

If each moment in reading seems strangely unrestricted by every other moment, then, it is partly because anything in a Nabokov novel--a play of light, an object, a gesture, a character--can seem so suddenly created and so independent of everything but itself.

But even more important and more remarkable is the freedom of narrative motion, the endless variety with which the most individual and heterogeneous material is linked together, that special openness of narrative possibility that I have termed the absence of inert

continuity.

There is nothing in Nabokov's work of automatic or even probable consecution. It is as if there is a gap after each word or each slightest motion of the prose, and in that brief shadow of a pause time for an astonishingly free exercise of creative choice: not just a search for the next word, but a questioning whether continuity should persist or whether instead a new detail or a new character might be abruptly invented, whether the tone should be drastically changed, whether the speed should be altered, the time shifted, a joke made, a new subject picked up, a fresh scene entered. Each choice not only may not lead on to the next, it may not even limit it. And even if one choice does lead on to another, in the chink between the two can still be inserted something utterly different.

In the process of composition Nabokov literally does insert new material in between two parts of a sequence: "I don't write consecutively from the beginning to the next chapter and so on to the end. I just fill in the gaps of the picture" (SO 16); "I do not begin my novel at the beginning. I do not reach chapter three before I reach chapter four, I do not go dutifully from one page to the next, in consecutive order; no, I pick out a bit here and a bit there, till I have filled all the gaps on paper. This is why I like writing my stories and novels on index cards, numbering them later when the whole set is complete." (SO 32) This provides a good image for the lack of inert continuity: anything may be composed on its own separate card and then inserted into what becomes a more or less natural sequence. But of course the fact of the lack of inert continuity in Nabokov's

works is not explained or accounted for by his methods of composition: he could have composed on index cards and yet have written like Proust.

Since any part of one of Nabokov's narratives may have any or no relation to what has gone before and what will follow, continuity may be as thoroughly violated as when Bouteillan and the family car suddenly disappear and are replaced by groom and horse. Yet if he does refuse to keep within ordinary continuity Nabokov usually does not let the narrative declare itself to be disruptive or digressive. He more often prefers to stock it with the disruptive, the digressive, the fantastic and unnecessary while imparting to it a rapid motion that provides the illusion of a harmonious whole--just as the voyages from station to Ardis or Ardis to station provide the reader used to the lull of continuity with a deceptive calm, the illusion of unbroken motion. Nabokov can change his direction and speed at every step while he appears to be moving evenly forward.

Sometimes, of course, Nabokov flouts the force of narrative momentum as directly as Swift, Sterne or Barthelme. He may use a form that seems opposed to narrative flow--notes and index in Pale Fire and a philosopher's treatise, the labels from a herbarium and a parodic blurb in Ada--or, on the local level, he may wreak wonderful havoc upon the flow of the sentence. The following lines are the close of Ardis the Second: this time the Russian coachman Trofim Fartukov is driving Van from Ardis to the railway station, and this time there is no last embrace with Ada, for Van is fleeing from her and her unfaithfulness:

"Barin, a barin," said Trofim, turning his blond-bearded face to his passenger.

"Da?"

"Dazhe skvoz' kozhaniy fartuk ne stal-bi ya trogat' etu frantsuzskuyu devku."

Bārin: master. Dázhe skvoz' kózhanīy fártuk: even through a leathern apron. Ne stal-bi ya trógat': I would not think of touching. Étu: this (that). Frantsúzskuyu: French (adj., accus.). Dévku: wench. Úzhas, otcháyanie: horror, despair. Zhállost': pity. Kóncheno, zagázhenó, rastérzano: finished, fouled, torn to shreds. (300)

(The frantsuzskaya devka in question, by the way, is the maid Blanche, whom Trofim soon marries.) The accurate but stubbornly pedestrian glosses--"this (that)," "French (adj., accus.)"--and the need to stop and start all the time are zany inappropriate to narrative motion, and it is especially and splendidly outrageous that the outburst of anguish in the last lines should retain the impersonality and indifference of the glossator's forms while suddenly resuming the narrative thread.

More often, however, Nabokov preserves continuity yet within it exercises enormous freedom to make the easy and obvious but tremendously invigorating shifts that are one of the first and most enduring charms of his work for any reader. Just before the scene above we see Van, reeling from the news of Ada's unfaithfulness, adopt a mechanical patter of activity to keep his despair at bay while he prepares to leave Ardis forever:

Good morning, and good-bye, little bedroom. Van shaved, Van pared his toe-nails, Van dressed with exquisite care: gray socks, silk shirt, gray tie, dark-gray suit newly pressed--shoes, ah yes, shoes, mustn't forget shoes, and without bothering to sort out the rest of his belongings, crammed a score of twenty-dollar gold coins into a chamois purse, distributed handkerchief, check-book, passport, what else? nothing else, over his rigid person

and pinned a note to the pillow asking to have his things packed and forwarded to his father's address. Son killed by avalanche, no hat found, contraceptives donated to Old Guides' Home. (295)

The first sentence wears a mask of Dickensian sentimentality through whose misted-over eyeholes narrator, character and reader peer fondly together at the little bedroom. The mask is abruptly torn off, the intimacy discarded, when tone and point of view switch to the impersonal, the cold, in the insistently externalized "Van shaved, Van pared his toe-nails, Van dressed." The insistence is relaxing into ordinary third-person narration when suddenly but easily the sentence dips into Van's consciousness ("shoes, ah yes, shoes, mustn't forget shoes"): Van is trying to make trivial objects and activities fill his mind and thus leave no room for pain. The sentence withdraws again into authorial reporting and darts once more into Van and out again while it carries on the rushed methodicalness: "what else? nothing else, over his rigid person." The changes in point of view excellently and immediately convey the state of mind of this "dead man going through the motions of an imagined dreamer" (295). But the next sentence, while preserving Van's brittleness and his sense that he might as well be dead, is a purely absurd leap into a clipped telegraphic style and an imagined scene, for it is June and far from any alps when Van envisages death by avalanche. The lines are ludicrous in their choice of detail ("no hat found") and attractively and irrelevantly ridiculous ("contraceptives donated") despite the tone of anguish that should prevail.

One should note that though such rapid shifts in point of view

as those in the passage above are indeed different from the methods of the "realistic" novel, their purpose is not, as a cliché in the making tries to suggest, to distance reader and story: "point of view is used by Nabokov to keep the reader from becoming too emotionally involved," Herbert Golden writes ("A Study of Games Played in Ada . . .," Diss. Northwestern 1972, p. 2), echoing Alfred Appel's remark that Nabokov parodies "the reader's complete, self-indulgent identification with a character, which in its mindlessness limits consciousness" (Annotated Lolita, p. xxxii). Appel's point is well made, but if Nabokov often distances the reader he also often creates a rare immediacy, and it is because the reader is in uncommonly close contact with Nabokov's first-person narrators that the moral evaluation of his characters is often so difficult, so testing.

It is not only by means of recognizable self-consciousness, not only by such obvious and vivacious shifts as "good-bye, little bedroom. Van shaved . . . what else? nothing else, over his rigid person" or Humbert's famous "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" that Nabokov breaks from the web of habit clinging to continuity. Even where there is no overt manipulation of point of view and no apparent challenge to sequentiality Nabokov's esteem for the fullest possible exercise of consciousness affects his style. Because time is the medium in which the human mind operates and because consciousness becomes most fully itself when it owes nothing to habit and the promptings of ready continuity, when it perceives the openness of its choice and acts to take advantage of this freedom, Nabokov's style is marked not only by self-conscious reflections upon itself but

by its perpetual openness at every instant to all possibilities. What really characterizes Nabokov's prose is not so much its self-consciousness as its astonishing exercise of free choice, its ability to ignore what sequence might prompt even when the narrative may seem vigorously linear.

By nimble transition and subordination, by asides and extravagant qualifications, Nabokov can introduce wildly disparate and centrifugal material and different manners as well as different matter into a sentence to which he has imparted a rapid forward impulse. He can stay within a scene and yet flit out of it, divert from his subject, disrupt his tone, introduce "extraneous" humour and, while doing all this, maintain reckless speed. Consider this sentence:

As an actress, she had none of the breath-taking quality that makes the skill of mimicry seem, at least while the show lasts, worth even more than the price of such footlights as insomnia, fancy, arrogant art; yet on that particular night, with soft snow falling beyond the plush and the paint, la Durmanska (who paid the great Scott, her impresario, seven thousand gold dollars a week for publicity alone, plus a bonny bonus for every engagement) had been from the start of the trashy ephemeron (an American play based by some pretentious hack on a famous Russian romance) so dreamy, so lovely, so stirring, that Demon (not quite a gentleman in amorous matters) made a bet with his orchestra-seat neighbor, Prince N., bribed a series of green-room attendants, and then, in a cabinet reculé (as a French writer of an earlier century might have mysteriously called that little room in which the broken trumpet and poodle hoops of a forgotten clown, besides many dusty pots of colored grease, happened to be stored) proceeded to possess her between two scenes (Chapter Three and Four of the martyred novel). (10-11)

To recognize just how absurdly swift this sentence is, one must keep in mind that it is virtually introducing Marina and Demon: neither has been before the reader in a real "scene" before. Even the very fact

that Marina is an actress has to be introduced, but in three words this is deftly assumed to be known and a general assessment of her talent is under way. The sentence then moves from the general to a particular performance, during which a special magic in Marina's personal charms arouses in Demon the desire to make her his mistress-- which he has done before the first act¹³ and the sentence end. The narrative speed is phenomenal, yet within this speed there is anything but simple continuity. After the opening few words, the beginning of a character assessment, comes a half-digressive comment on the merits of drama, the first broaching of a topic that will recur throughout the novel. It is followed, as the sentence adroitly switches to a particular evening, by an enchanting depiction of setting, in which in ten words Nabokov not only localizes the action at a theatre, but provides a dream-like view of both the auditorium and the night outside, and uses tactile values ("soft," "plush") to dream-transport the reader to both the within and the without: a masterpiece of sudden evocation. Having created the entrancing atmosphere, Nabokov digresses in a series of delightfully irrelevant jokes that ignore the general mood: "great Scott," "bonny bonus" and the utterly implausible "seven thousand gold dollars [not paper money but a groaning sackful] a week [\$364,000 a year] for publicity alone [in 1868]." (As we shall see,

¹³ Assuming that the division between "Chapter Three and Four of the martyred novel" corresponds to the division between Act I Sc. ii (Pushkin's III.xvi-xxxv) and Act I Sc. iii (Pushkin's III.xxxviii-IV.xviii) of Chaikovsky's version of Eugene Onegin (1879) which is implied throughout this scene and is mentioned directly on pp. 158 and 511 of Ada.

these gold dollars are another recurrent theme.) When the parenthesis finishes, the sentence briefly returns to its plot function ("had been from the start of the trashy ephemeron") but is already off on another tone-shattering digression: the angry dismissal in "trashy ephemeron" and "pretentious hack" ignores the romantic mood even more brazenly than the comedy of "great Scott" and "bonny bonus" and initiates another recurrent theme, that of "adaptation" (the adaptation of a work of art to another medium, as of Eugene Onegin from verse novel to opera or play, or of novel into film, of painting into fiction). After easily returning to the "so dreamy, so lovely" mood, Nabokov disrupts it again with a lively comic allusion: since the romance is Eugene Onegin, in which Prince N. is the husband of Tatiana, the role Marina is playing, "Demon is betting the man whom he will enhorn" (Proffer 254). A dash through the theatre's backstage is halted as Nabokov quite "unnecessarily" calls up "a French writer of an earlier century" --Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), in his Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761), Pt.II, Letter XXVI: "Je fus surpris, en revenant à moi, de me trouver dans un cabinet reculé, entre les bras d'une de ces créatures"¹⁴ (a whore)--then shifts direction again to describe the new setting with exquisite evocativeness and precision ("dusty pots of colored grease") and the superb but again "inappropriate" and "extraneous" pathos of the broken gear of "a forgotten clown." As soon as Nabokov informs us that Demon "proceeded to possess her" (by which

¹⁴ Ed. René Pomeau (Paris: Garnier, 1960), p. 276.

time the deed is finished with: subsequent sentences do not continue the subject) an explanatory comment dips in again to the digressive theme of adaptation, and in "martyred" there is a last irruption, a final burst of inappropriate tonal energy.

After one choice has been made, the next remains quite unrestrained by the first; it may or may not develop what went before. Each choice stands independent in Nabokov's work; it is not prompted by automatic continuity but is a fresh act of individual creation, and may be without antecedent. Thus "the great Scott" above is a totally new freak of individual fancy that owes nothing to the developing situation. Here as elsewhere, to be sure, most of Nabokov's choices make at least some contribution to the surrounding scene. Yet many contain matter of no relevance whatsoever to situational development: the sudden burst of "cabinet reculé" and its attendant elaboration furthers nothing in the scene (though Saint-Preux's impossible innocence in Rousseau¹⁵ is amusingly unlike Demon's cynic calculation). The "broken trumpets and poodle hoops" and "dusty pots of colored grease" relate in no way to Marina and Demon, though they are vividly unique, absolutely unforeseeable, unrepeatable, totally magic.

But even more important than the splendid irrelevance in this sentence, so remarkable and so very typical of Nabokov's style, is the way it ceaselessly changes its purpose. Though looking back one can see its primary function is one of plot (the beginning of the Demon-Marina affair), it begins with exposition (Marina is an actress), changes into character assessment (her ability as an actress),

¹⁵ See below, p. 340n.

becomes digressive (the merits of the theatre) only to start setting a scene--at which point the changes in direction only become more rapid. These swift and multiple transitions of function are not at all accidental. Nabokov has said that "In the study of transition a clear perception of matter and manner leads to an appreciation of one of the most important elements of a story in verse or prose" (EO.1.18), and he has read other writers with a keen interest in the possibilities of transition they have actualized: neither Pushkin "nor any novelist of his time," he declares, "had mastered the art of transition that Flaubert was to discover three decades later" (EO.3.80).¹⁶

Such changes in function as those in the Marina-Demon sentence are exactly what Nabokov defines as transition:

If we replace the notions story, character, landscape, recollection, and didactic digression by the letters S, C, L, R, and D, then we can define all types of transition as more or less distinctly expressed switchings from S to C, from C to S, from S to L, from S to R, from S to D, from C to D, and so forth, in all possible combinations and successions, with inner or outer doors and natural or artificial bridges providing passages from one theme to another. (EO.1.19)

Nabokov finds it fascinating to expand the potential of transition: to extend the "combinations and successions" beyond what has seemed possible to other writers, to speed up or slow down the rate of transition, to combine transitional movements with continuing forward motion or to isolate them, to make them smooth or awkward. Slow, isolated,

¹⁶ Cf. also the introduction to The Song of Igor's Campaign, where Nabokov writes that "Among other elements of our author's technique the good reader will note his art of transition and preparation" (SIC 10).

awkward, the following paragraph, a single transition but parodically bumpy about its business, is the very opposite of the multiple glide in the Marina-Demon sentence:

The modest narrator has to remind the rereader of all this, because in April (my favorite month), 1869 (by no means a mirabilic year), on St. George's Day (according to Mlle Lari-vière's maudlin memoirs) Demon Veen married Aqua Veen--out of spite and pity, a not unusual blend. (19)

If this sentence is not allowed to build up any continuity despite its single transition, another may show continuity run mad, "combinations and successions" with a lunatic energy--as if a sprinter were suddenly to repeat his sprint, then to do it again and instead of falling down exhausted set off on a double steeplechase. Demon has challenged to a duel his rival for Marina's love, Baron d'Onsky ("Skonky"):

The challenge was accepted; two native seconds were chosen; the Baron plumped for swords; and after a certain amount of good blood (Polish and Irish--a kind of American "Gory Mary" in bar-room parlance) had bespattered two hairy torsoes, the white-washed terrace, the flight of steps leading backward to the walled garden in an amusing Douglas d'Artagnan arrangement, the apron of a quite accidental milkmaid, and the shirtsleeves of both seconds, charming Monsieur de Pastrouil and Colonel St. Alin, a scoundrel, the latter gentleman separated the panting combatants, and Skonky died, not "of his wounds" (as it was viciously rumored) but of a gangrenous afterthought on the part of the least of them, possibly self-inflicted, a sting in the groin, which caused circulatory trouble, notwithstanding quite a few surgical interventions during two or three years of protracted stays at the Aardvark Hospital in Boston--a city where, incidentally, he married in 1869 our friend the Bohemian lady, now keeper of Glass Biota at the local museum. (14-15)

With its rapid rushes, its irrelevant comic asides, its flurries of additions, its spontaneous generations, its absurd identifications and qualifications, the sentence will neither stop nor keep on its tracks.

This is not mere caprice, but consciousness brilliantly able to demonstrate its freedom within time: as Nabokov has written, "This capacity to wonder at trifles no matter the imminent peril, these asides of the spirit, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest forms of consciousness."¹⁷

Nabokov's deft handling of transition and succession can make the linking of incompatibles wondrously, dextrously, deceptively smooth: the transitions can be so graceful that one misses the full incompatibility of a sentence's parts. It is essential that the reader grasp the independence of each part, that he see clearly the sheer difference between one fraction of a sentence and another so that he can appreciate the style and cunning which enables Nabokov to move from one element to another across a chasm of contrariety.

Van, who usually writes about himself in the third person, records the uneasiness brewing in his fourteen-year-old self in the nights he spent sleeping outside at Ardis in the summer of 1884:

His nights in the hammock (where that other poor youth had cursed his blood cough and sunk back into dreams of prowling black spumas and a crash of symbols in an orchal orchestra--as suggested to him by career physicians) were now haunted not so much by the agony of his desire for Ada, as by that meaningless space overhead, underhead, everywhere, the demon counterpart of divine time, tingling about him and through him, as it was to retingle--with a little more meaning fortunately--in the last nights of a life, which I do not regret; my love. (73-74)

The main flow of the sentence shows a dazzling disregard for

¹⁷ "The Creative Writer," Bulletin of the New England Modern Language Association, N.S. 4:1 (January 1942), 23.

the ordinary limits of continuity. After a brief aside on the nights "that other poor youth" spent at Ardis, Van returns to 1884, to an authorial view of his young self that is, nevertheless, an intimate and poetic recapitulation of his metaphysical qualms upon sensing "that meaningless space . . . tingling about him and through him." Then deftly, suddenly--"as it was to retingle"--the sentence glides from "third person," reported 1884 to 1967, to a mellow and moving address from dying Van to his dying love. The crossing of more than eight decades, from a time before his desire for Ada had yet been satisfied to a time when he can look back on scores of shared years, the change from third-person narration to first-person narration (both addressed to the reader, of course) and then even a sudden and stirring introduction of the second person, the switch from metaphysical panic to the sudden hushing of voice in "a life, which I do not regret, my love"--all this difference and distance is traversed with astonishing grace and ease.

Let us go back now to "that other poor youth." As Van begins to tell of his own nights at Ardis in 1884, he suddenly melts into the nights of his uncle Ivan, who died of lung cancer in 1862 at the age of twenty. Van feels close to the uncle after whom he has been named: Uncle Van, too, had been a summer guest at Ardis in 1861 or 1862 (Dan Veen being his second cousin), and he had slept in an earlier hammock between the very same tulip trees; at eighteen, he was already a famous violinist, just as Van is to be at eighteen a famous metaphysical acrobat. No wonder Van, temperamentally inclined to fierce family loyalty, has such sympathy for his uncle's wretched nights and seems to

sense himself the jolt of the "blood cough" that jars his uncle awake.

But though the sentence easily slides us within the chaos of Uncle Van's nocturnal troubles, we must realize what Van has done: that he has invented this description of his uncle's dreams, invented at least in part a past that occurred eight years before his own birth. He has interrupted his own memoir with a recreated fiction and has done it well: the "dreams of prowling black spumas"--nauseating (spew) black panthers (pumas) foaming (spume) like the conventional "white horses of the sea"--are very immediate, even unpleasantly so. Yet at the same time Van is acknowledging their invented nature, for the black panther dream comes in fact from Ulysses, where on Bloomsday eve Haines dreams of a black panther. Haines's dream is recalled by Stephen often during the course of the following day, in, for example, the dream chapter of nighttown: "Black panther vampire" (U 592).¹⁸

After one swift change in direction, from Van's remembered nights to an invented recollection of his uncle's nights and an adept acknowledgement of that invention, another change follows. Still recording his uncle's dreams, Van uses the verbal skill already exhibited in "spumas" to conjure up another dream and launch a new sally: "a crash of symbols in an orchal orchestra--as suggested to him by career physicians" rapidly changes the direction and tone. Uncle Van, Van proposes, has had a dream quite natural for a violinist, of

¹⁸ For other references to Haines's panther dream, see U 6, 45, 47, 405.

"the instruments in the horsecart" (72), as he scrambles "orchestra."¹⁹ For Van as for Nabokov the rearrangements in dreams are random, without intention or meaning, "kaleidoscopic arrangements of broken impressions, fragments of day thoughts, and irresponsible mechanical images, utterly lacking any possible Freudian implication or explication" (SO 29). Oneirologist and wordsmith Vān heaps scorn upon a putative psychologist who would make an orchal (from Greek *ορχή*, testicle) symbol of the cymbal in the orchestra. Van objects to the symbolist's interpretation, for as he sees it there can be no meaning in a random, almost completely unconscious rearrangement of individual memory. The symbol denies the independence of the mind, the unique context of the dreamer's experience, and it denies too the independence of the thing dreamt: a cymbal is not a testicle simply because both share the characteristic of roundness.²⁰ The "as suggested to him by career physicians" is probably a specific thrust at Freud's clinical use of suggestion after he had abandoned hypnotism and before he had begun to use free association.

¹⁹ The anagram was suggested by Penelope Gilliatt when she was interviewing Nabokov for Vogue: "we started to play anagrams. I gave him 'cart horse' (the solution is 'orchestra'). He took the problem away on what was meant to be a nap, and came bounding into the bar two hours later. . . . 'Her actors,' he said, in try-on triumph, eyeing me, and knowing perfectly well that the answer had to be one word. . . . 'Véra has been doing "cart horse" as well,' he said. 'Eventually she suggested "horse-cart." She hadn't much hope.'" ("Nabokov," Vogue, December 1966, p. 228.)

²⁰ Cf. Nabokov's remark: "Freudians are no longer around, I understand, so I do not need to warn them not to touch my circles with their symbols" (RB 148). Nabokov poked fun at Freudian circles as early as 1931, in "Chto vsyakiy dolzhen znat'?" ("What should everyone know?"), Novaya Gazeta, May 1, 1931, p. 3.

The deftness of Nabokov's transitions should not obscure the enormous independence of each element in his sentences. This particular one jumps wildly in time, from 1884 to 1861 to 1884 to 1967. It shifts in point of view and status from an ostensible third-person reporting to an invented third-person narration, back to the ostensible third person which suddenly breaks into a direct address, yet still in the narrative voice, to another character. It elegantly varies the theme of night: Van's young nights in the hammock in 1884; Uncle Van's nights in the hammock and the last nights of his young life, in 1861-1862; the metaphysics of night, the troublingly "intense life of the star-haunted sky" (73); the last nights of an old life in 1967. The sentence switches drastically in tone and subject, from young desire and aching metaphysical qualms to a nonagenarian's and lover's quietly proud serenity, and from tender sympathy (amid exuberant word-play and acknowledged invention) to a lashing of satiric scorn. The sentence is remarkable for the rich independence of its parts that nevertheless preserve a common continuity. It is fitting that the most independent part of all, a satiric outburst prompted by an invented dream within the impersonal past, should be a plea on behalf of the independence of mind and of things that the symbol threatens.

To savour the particular tang of Nabokov's narrative style one must be alert to the fact that anything he selects--be it a word, a twist of thought, an object or even a character--may have any relation or none to what precedes it and what may follow. The vivid autonomy of even the minutest parts of Nabokov's works and the unequalled energy with which he exercises his freedom of choice are the consequences and

the necessary expression of what we shall see in the next chapter are among Nabokov's most intimate concerns: the independence of things in space, the uniqueness of moments in time, the limitless freedom available within the evolving present to which human consciousness is confined.

2. Pattern and Recurrence

The absence of inert continuity in Nabokov's works means that every choice is singularly free of necessary relation to every other choice, that there can be any relation or none between part and part. Nabokov loves to make one element of his fiction as wildly independent as possible of its surroundings, and yet by nimble transition and rapid motion to disguise that singular independence.

But he can also make the relationship between part and part tightly controlled, much more elaborately patterned than in the work of any other novelist. The patterning of verbal and narrative elements is both more obvious and more hidden than their independence.

The obvious patterning is that which appears within a single attention span. It is often an enchantingly elaborate trouvaille, a complex play of letters or sounds: "back to the ardors and arbors! Eros qui prend son essor! Arts that our marblery harbors: Eros, the rose and the sore." (367) The fun of flourishes like this is that what is so ornately patterned that one could swear it must have been invented for the pattern alone turns out to be absurdly apt: nothing could sum up a major theme and, as we shall see, some of the most important moral evaluations of Ada more appropriately than "Eros, the rose

and the sore." Another form of local patterning is the abundant use of freshly surprising and playful parallelisms: "The early afternoon sun found new places to brighten and old places to toast" (81). Again what looks like dainty design is accurate and precise observation.

But though patterns like these are insistent, the most important are those that are not visible within a single attention span, those that require the alert observation, energetic memory work and imagination needed to spot a transmogrified recurrence.

Because there is no medium of natural fictional solidity in a Nabokov novel, each element of the narrative may be highlighted and isolated even within what may be a very fast flow of phrase or story. Hence whenever anything is repeated, be it a word or phrase, a gesture or an idea, it can and should be seen as a purposive repetition, not the mere lingering on of inert matter in time but a deliberate disappearance of the initial phenomenon and its at least slightly transmuted reappearance elsewhere.

Even something as peripheral as a piece of furniture, the recurrence of which one would suppose to be stable, automatic, without particular significance, may reappear in a flash of surprise. Van, Ada and Luoette like playing Scrabble ("Flavita" on Antiterra): "By July the ten A's had dwindled to nine, and the four D's to three. The missing A eventually turned up under an Aproned Armchair, but the D was lost." (224) The alert reader can spot the D hiding under the Divan on which Van and Ada first came close to making love.

Recurrence operates within Nabokov's novels in many different ways and on a variety of levels. In Ada there are unusually elaborate

networks of verbal leitmotifs and subject motifs that "intergrade, as all things do in this fluid and interesting world of ours, while yielding gracefully to a semblance of classification" (SO 309). There is also a type of recurrence very close to pure resistance, in which pointedly repeated details of physical setting, of characterization and of plot allow one to build up a composite, a mosaic of small details released a few at a time that feign to be no part of a larger picture. Another kind of recurrence is that which resembles solution and which sends one off on exciting pursuits along intertwining trails that all seem to lead to treasure.

The repeatedly modulated phrases of the more conspicuous verbal leitmotifs are usually the first sign to the reader of the extraordinary atemporal patterning of the prose. The most noticeable of all is the one with which Van's parodic blurb for the book begins: "Ardis Hall--the Ardors and Arbors of Ardis--this is the leitmotiv rippling through Ada" (588). But there are so many leitmotifs and so many of the repetitions are so skilfully metamorphosed that it is a challenge and a delight to spot the reappearance that transformation disguises and to observe the divergence and interrelation of motifs. One simple example must suffice. Van, looking at a photograph of a dance at Ardis, remarks to Ada:

"Ah, drunken Ben Wright trying to rape Blanche in the mews--she has quite a big part in this farrago."

"He's doing nothing of the sort. You see quite well they are dancing. It's like the Beast and the Belle at the ball where Cinderella loses her garter and the Prince his beautiful codpiece of glass." (401)

One of the smaller leitmotifs of the novel (nine occurrences)²¹ is "the Beauty and the Beast"; here it merges with the cliché "the belle of the ball." This cliché in turn leads on naturally to Cinderella (in Perrault's version of 1697: "Alors ses deux soeurs la reconnurent pour la belle personne qu'elles avaient vue au Bal").²² Here as throughout Ada the Cinderella motif is associated in charming fashion with the servant Blanche. (It is associated also, in tragic counterpoint, with Van's half-sister Lucette: both girls are unrequitedly in love with Van.) Cinderella loses her garter here, not her glass slipper, an echo of a clue to Ada's unfaithfulness to Van: "and once in a small alder thicket, duplicated in black by the blue stream, they found a garter which was certainly hers, she could not deny it, but which Van was positive she had never worn on her stockingless summer trips to the magic islet" (218).

Note that while the "Beauty and the Beast" leitmotiv is purely verbal, the Cinderella one is both verbal and character-oriented and here, moreover, leads to a different kind of internal allusion. Both the "Beauty and the Beast" and the Cinderella leitmotifs, too, form part of the widespread fairy-tale motif which sets so much of the tone of the Ardis sections. The cutting across different levels of

²¹ Also pp. 180 (beastly, but beautiful), 190, 276, 401, 425, 437 (so that you may interrupt her beauty sleep, lucky beast!), 438 (Bellabestia), 464; 582 (bullies and beasts). Cf. also the story "Signs and Symbols": "Elsa and her bestial beau" (ND 73).

²² Charles Perrault, Contes, ed. Gilbert Rouger (Paris: Garnier, 1967), p. 163.

recurrence and the recombination of divergent melodic phrases are common to all the orchestrated repetitions in Ada.

Very similar to the verbal leitmotifs in their profusion and interlacement are the "motifs" or repeated subjects in Ada, such diverse topics as drama, gravity (magic carpets, maniambulation), translation, incest, orchids, electricity, heredity, the telephone, slang, the adapting of works of art from one medium to another, fairy tales, riches, naming (scientific nomenclature, toponymy), painting. The motifs are beguiling in their multiplicity--which gives the novel much of its encyclopedic quality--and in the eccentricity of their diversification and reentanglement.

Ada's motifs should be understood as controlled artistic devices and not misunderstood, as some have been, as the accidental repetitiousness of indulgence.²³ Every recurrence is deliberately arranged, often with brilliant artistry and--as we shall see in later chapters--with unexpected moral force.

Let us look at a simple sample of the translation motif. We shall examine later (in Chapters 7 and 9) the part the translation below plays in defining the moral and metaphysical dimensions of Ada, but for the moment let us consider merely the comic grace of the recurrence through which Nabokov makes his immediate point, the need for literalism in translation. On a late July or early August morning

²³ Cf. Fowler, Reading Nabokov, p. 17: "There seems to be persuasive evidence [none is produced], however, that . . . the private systems of correspondence . . . the 'wayside murmur of this or that hidden theme,' . . . are annotated red herrings."

in 1884 Ada has to leave Van to give her (French) governess a translation of François Coppée's "Matin d'Octobre" (1874). She shows him the second stanza:

Their fall is gentle. The woodchopper
Can tell, before they reach the mud,
The oak tree by its leaf of copper,
The maple by its leaf of blood. (127)

Casually recollecting the lines of the original--"Leur chute est lente . . . on peut les suivre du regard en reconnaissant"--Van infuriates Ada by denouncing her translation, despite the smoothness of its style and the imaginative means she has found to preserve the feminine/masculine rhymes (suivre/reconnaissant/cuivre/sang).

On a July night in 1888 Demon happens to visit Ardis when Van is again a guest there. When Demon quotes another Coppée poem, "La Veillée," Van mentions that Ada has translated the poet. Ada becomes coy, Demon cites "Matin d'Octobre," Van recites "Ada's" translation:

"Leur chute est lente. On peut les suivre
Du regard en reconnaissant
Le chêne à sa feuille de cuivre
L'érable à sa feuille de sang

"Grand stuff!"

"Yes, that was Coppée and now comes the cousin," said Van, and he recited:

"Their fall is gentle. The leavesdropper
Can follow each of them and know
The oak tree by its leaf of copper,
The maple by its blood-red glow."

"Pah!" uttered the versionist.

"Not at all!" cried Demon. "That 'leavesdropper' is a splendid trouvaille, girl." (247)

"Leavesdropper" is indeed a splendid trouvaille--but for another reason too. Comparing it with the "woodchopper" it replaces, one instantly

recognizes the absurdity that Ada's glib translation whisked one past: Ada's version implies the fall of whole trees, not leaves, and makes nonsense not only of "Their fall is gentle" but of the whole stanza, whose hushed mood is devastated by the unintended crashing of great trees. If one recalls the earlier version, too, one can enjoy the unstated dramatic undercurrent in the later scene, the irony of Demon's "a splendid trouvaille, girl," the reason for Ada's resentful "Pah!"

Perhaps we should also consider briefly the motif of flamboyant riches, which establishes so much of the atmosphere of Ada. Critics have resented the fabulous wealth and the fabulous intelligence with which Van and Ada are endowed; even the sympathetic Robert Alter wonders about "the excess of perfection they must sustain."²⁴ It is as if the riches in Ada were Nabokov's weakly nostalgic recreation of his family's pre-revolutionary wealth or an easy singling out for favour characters with his own exceptional intellectual capacities. In fact we shall see that there is anything but an "excess of perfection" in Ada and Van, that Nabokov insists that talent and pride are not enough.

But even before we suspect the place of the riches motif in the novel's moral scheme (or even before we suspect that the novel has a moral scheme other than carefree sensuality) the motif has amply justified its presence by being so fascinating and funny. Ada can hand a blackmailer "a thousand-dollar note that she happened to have in her bag" (397), Van can outperform the greatest prodigies: "He was ten.

²⁴ "Nabokov's Ardor," p. 50. For a much more hostile treatment, see Fowler, pp. 179-82.

His father had lingered in the West where the many-colored mountains acted upon Van-as they had on all young Russians of genius. He could . . . learn by heart Pushkin's 'Headless Horseman' poem in less than twenty minutes." (171) In just over a quarter of an hour Van can memorize not merely the 481 lines of Pushkin's Bronze Horseman (written 1833, pub. 1837) but a grotesque (and of course non-existent) fusion--inspired by the blend in the preceding sentence of the coloured peaks of Russia's Caucasus range and the American West--of Pushkin's poem and Mayne Reid's western, The Headless Horseman (1866).

It is intriguing to watch the enormous complexity of Ada's components. Nabokov seems almost to have provided the elaborateness of motif as a substitute for the complexities of biological classification in which he takes such delight. The naturalist of Ada's verbal flora and narrative fauna can discover not only the multiplicity of orders of motifs but also the proliferation of gradations within a motif. "Views may differ in regard to the hierarchic element in the classification I adopt," Nabokov writes,²⁵ but it should at least be agreed upon that the riches family divides not only into genera (financial, social, intellectual, sexual, etc.) but also into species and subspecies. The wealth of the Veens, the genus of monetary opulence, includes the healthy "gold" species, which divides into several thriving subspecies: visual gold, the "goldgouts" of Ardis's sunshine; verbal "gold" (Bras d'Or; the Ladore--which starts to inter-

²⁵ "On Some Inaccuracies in Klots' Field Guide," The Lepidopterists' News, 6:1-3 (1952), 41; rpt. SO 320.

grade with verbal leitmotifs around "adore" and then "ardor" and "Ada," for "Live organisms are less conscious of . . . differences than the taxonomist is" [SM, plate facing p. 288]); the "gold dollar" of which we have already caught three specimens: the great Scott's "seven thousand gold dollars a week for publicity alone," young Moore's "handful of stellas" (four-dollar gold coins), and the "score of twenty-dollar gold coins" Van crams into his purse on preparing to flee Ardis in 1888. And one can watch the sub-sub-motif of gold dollars leap across to join the motif of sexual luxuriance in a chance cross typical of the novel: young Van, aroused by young Ada, keeps in his pants pocket "a purse with half a dozen ten-dollar gold pieces to disguise his state" (100).

Quite another kind of recurrence in Ada is that involving not words and abstract subjects but the ordinary elements of narrative, setting, character, even plot itself. This kind of recurrence is linked closely to resistance, for Nabokov infuses narrative with the challenge of discovery.

Setting, character and plot are not distributed neatly packaged, they are not given to the reader. Nabokov releases, only a few at a time, details that seem too slight or too frivolous to be more than colourful passing fancies, but if one connects these deceptively offhand details one finds substance and complexity everywhere in the plot, in characterization, even in the inanimate physical setting.

Nabokov feels no need to provide the steady illusion of fictional solidity. Each detail is strikingly independent: there is no sense that it will form part of a coherent picture (that "nimbus of bright irrelevancy" again). Yet what has seemed momentary and freakish may well

reappear, though the reappearance may not be recognized as such: there may be no manifest or even implicit recollection of the earlier reference, and every detail offered may be new.²⁶ It is up to the reader to make the connection with the earlier occurrence, and to observe how the new details complement or interact with the old. If the reader does this, he can begin to appreciate the rare sensitivity with which even mere props and backdrops are treated.

Even in the physical settings of Nabokov's work, things are not static, automatically assumed to be there; they appear and disappear and reappear, with new information disclosed each time until a whole history is built up. The "Vaniada divan" (373)--it even has its own verbal leitmotiv--has a busy life of its own. The room in which it stands is described in throwaway detail, in farcical pattern:

Ada showed her shy guest the great library on the second floor . . . which Red Veen . . . shunned . . . because he found nothing so depressing as the collected works of unrecollected authors, although he did not mind an occasional visitor's admiring the place's tall bookcases and short cabinets, its dark pictures and pale busts, its ten chairs of carved walnut, and two noble tables inlaid with ebony. (41)

Yet if the reader pays attention he can reconstruct the room in Vermeer-

²⁶ This is the difference between Nabokov's recurrence and that of Dickens, another master of the principle. Dickensian recurrence almost always assumes the immediate recognition of the earlier occurrence of a pattern--"Barkis is willing," say--and often leaves the reappearance unaltered. It is more satisfying when the reappearance is transmuted (a new example of Micawber's verbosity, say, rather than the ultimately tiresome "Something will turn up") and at its most thrilling when the reappearance assumes no recognition, as in the bizarre wood/locomotion pattern in *Our Mutual Friend* (wooden legs, staff, club carried while walking) which is rather like the riding crop/cane/alpenstock pattern in *Ada*.

like detail, thanks to information released piece by piece, and thanks to a storm of facts that bursts long after Van has left Ardis.

Anyone doubting that the static can acquire life should consider one of the props within the Ardis library. On his first tour of the room the "shy guest" Van appears to notice something by the window: "A pair of candlesticks, mere phantoms of metal and tallow, stood, or seemed to stand, on the broad window ledge" (41). Ada then takes Van to see his bedroom, where everything "struck him as being intended for a cringing cretin" (42): "An elbow chair with a high back and a bedside stool supporting a brass candlestick with a greasepan and handle (whose double he had seemed to have seen mirrored a moment ago--where?) completed the worst and main part of the humble equipment" (42). Judging by the "mirrored a moment ago" in this second passage, the "pair" of candlesticks in the first scene, "mere phantoms" which "stood, or seemed to stand," shrink to one candlestick and its reflection. Or are those "phantoms" a reflection from the future, from the double Van finds a few minutes later in his room? In the library on the Night of the Burning Barn Van relieves Ada "of her candlestick, placing it near his own longer one on the window ledge" (117). Are both the original candlesticks, "mere phantoms" that "seemed to stand" in that window, now reduced to ghostly fore-images? Has Van, acting as novelist and inventor, merely conjured up these candlesticks as emblems of the inevitability of his and Ada's coming together? Or is there something more? Van, a philosopher by profession, argues that "catching sight of the lining of time" is "the best informal definition of portents and prophecies" (227). Have we just glimpsed the lining of time?

The candlesticks, perhaps, are unusually prominent. But the more usual is hardly less peculiar. That special combination of fantastic isolated detail and quiet reappearance is always ready to build up a history both ample and bizarre. Take the case of Demon's winter home. Even its address, 5 Park Lane in Manhattan, is fabulous, a blend of New York's Park Avenue, London's Park Lane (beside Hyde Park) and New York's Fifth Avenue (beside Central Park). This perhaps would locate Demon's little palazzo between 60th and 90th Streets, and between Fifth and Park, certainly a fashionable enough address even for a millionaire aristocrat. In the 1870's the building sits between two vacant lots, but soon skyscrapers flank it on both sides, "ready to frog-march it away" (149). In 1893 an artist is spotted working on "a large picture of your meek little palazzo standing between its two giant guards" (445), perhaps, adds Ada, "for the cover of a magazine," presumably the New Yorker, known on Antiterria (and in Pale Fire's Appalachia) as The Beau and the Butterfly. In 1904 Demon, having just bought a Hawaiian island, wants to sell the palazzo, which Van does not need, but when the buyer, Mr Sween (Eliot's Sweeney) asks for "some of the pictures . . . thrown in" (506) Demon declines to sell. By 1919 the city fathers can no longer stand to wait for the space, so they have the building burnt down, "but instead of selling them the blackened area as expected, Van gleefully erected there his famous Lucinda Villa, a miniature museum just two stories high, with a still growing collection of microphotographed paintings", (336). An appropriate memorial for Lucette, an art history student, the museum is "open to the public only on Mondays for a token fee of one gold dollar regardless of age or condition" (337).

note the gold dollar again). By mid-twentieth century the building also houses Ada's movies of butterflies, and the "films--and the crucified actors (Identification Mounts)--can be seen by arrangement at the Lucinda Museum, 5, Park Lane, Manhattan" (568).²⁷

Nabokov creates character in Ada as he does physical setting, by the often freakish local flurry savoured for its being unrelated to anything else and by the surprising and subtle recurrence of what had seemed a throwaway detail. The reader is like Luzhin, who always has to recall "some trifle--and there had been so many of them, and at times so skillfully presented, that the repetition was almost concealed" (Defense 214).

If it is delightful to see a momentary fancy like Mr Brod or Bred--and there are many like him in Ada's fabulous cast that runs from Abd-el-Krim and Milton Abraham to Zographos and Zotov--it is even more delightful to see the recurrence of what had seemed only an ephemeral fantasy. The younger Miss Fortune, Van's father's "secretary's eighteen-year-old white-gloved sister (with a bit part as Van's English governess and milkmaid)" (149) seems to have been invented only for her ridiculous name and for that cheekily improbable conflation of governess and milkmaid. But four hundred pages later that parodic combination and

²⁷ The building seems to be related to the Frick Collection, also the former home of a millionaire (Henry Clay Frick, 1849-1919) and a great private gallery. If 5 Park Lane is taken as being a play upon Fifth Avenue, then the Frick is certainly in the right locale (5th Avenue and 70th St.); it is almost as squat as the Lucinda Museum; while the latter is "open to the public only on Mondays," Monday has always been the Frick's closing day; the Frick has a Boucher room (walls, but not ceiling), while the breakfast room in Demon's home has a "Boucher plafond" (178).

even the white gloves prove to have a hilarious--and hilariously unsavory--aptness: Van in 1922 recalls "the pensive half-smile of a young English governess, in 1880, neatly reclosing her charge's prepuce after the bedtime treat" (545).

Nabokov makes no attempt to provide the ready illusion of fictional substantiality in his characters. Details seem fantastic, disposable, and certainly not composed to create a fictionally rounded character. But this is a mere feint of resistance: if one stays alert and spots the recurrence, one can feel the thrill of rediscovering a peripheral character, say, or the delicate gesture of a more important figure. Depth of character can be discovered if one pays close heed to every detail and notes which ones recur. Nabokov lets fall what appears in its local context a trifling remark, but when, a similarly skittish observation recurs much later one sees that the offhand details are tenderly selected revelations.

Take the case of Dan Veen, a middle-range character, dull, talentless, unimaginative:

He had revisited only a few times since his boyhood another estate he had, up north on Lake Kitezh, near Luga, comprising, and practically consisting of, that large, oddly rectangular though quite natural body of water which a perch he had once clocked took half an hour to cross diagonally. (5)

The detail is bizarrely out of place, amusingly capricious in itself and because it is so uncalled for: this is the only detail we have of Dan's whole youth. But when Van first meets his uncle in 1884 Dan "informed Van that it was going to rain in a few minutes 'because it had started to rain at Ladore,' and the rain, he said, 'took about half

an-hour to reach Ardis.' Van thought this was a quip and chuckled politely but Uncle Dan looked perplexed again." (67) Poor moony Dan obviously has his watch out often: the insipid creature takes to timing things, it seems, in a pathetic attempt to make life interesting, and he obtusely assumes that a perch or rain will move at constant speeds. Absurdly enough, he is proved right about the rain.

Dan, whose nickname is Red Veen, is rather a minor character in Ada, despite being Van's uncle, Ada's putative father and the master of Ardis. For during the times when Van might meet him (when Van is staying on his uncle's estate in the summers of 1884 and 1888) Dan prefers not to visit Ardis. Why? The nickname gives the clue: his red pigmentation (very understated despite the nickname) makes country life in the summer sun uncomfortable for him, and hence "he spent only a few carefully shaded summer weekends at Ardis, his magnificent manor near Ladore" (5). His redness is transmitted to his daughter Lucette, in whom it is a mark of her sensitivity, her vulnerability, her being easily burnt (as she is by her half-siblings). Dan's helplessness is another trait he shares with his daughter, and the stark blackness of Ada's hair must be a painful reminder that his presumptive daughter is really the child of Demon or "Dark" Veen. But to return to Dan's "carefully shaded summer weekends":

Marina remained for almost a minute wordlessly stretching across the table her husband's straw hat in his direction; finally he shook his head, glared at the sun that glared back and retired with his cup and the Toulouse Enquirer to a rustic seat on the other side of the lawn under an immense elm. (89)

Nabokov says no more: it is up to the reader to recall why Dan and the

sun are such enemies.

That newspaper should be noted. After tea on the first day Van sees him at Ardis "Uncle Dan retired to his study, pulling a folded newspaper out of an inner pocket" (68). Nabokov does not say that Dan is dependent on newspapers: the reader must notice. Dan "with a slight cough put on his spectacles, but no morning paper had come--and he took them off again" (125). By now the reader may recognize Dan's newspaper-reading habit as a sign of his sorry unimaginativeness: without his paper he has nothing to fill his vacuity. But not only is this a delicate psychological touch, it also provides marvelous comedy:

He wore suitable clothes for a suitably hot day in the country--namely, a candy-striped suit over a mauve flannel shirt and piqué waistcoat, with a blue-and-red club tie and a safety-goldpinned very high soft collar (all his trim stripes and colors were a little displaced, though, in the process of comic strip printing, because it was a Sunday). (124)

Dan has become one of the characters in the colour comic strips of the paper he is restlessly awaiting--which, indeed, comes late "because of the voluminous Sunday supplements" (128) and the coloured cartoons! Four years and one hundred and fifty pages later the joke quietly returns when we see "Uncle Dan, very dapper in cherry-striped blazer and variety-comic straw hat" (273):

Other facets of Dan's character are composed through equally precise patterns of recurrence: his reckless driving, for instance, or his hilarious inability to appear on time for an appointment. Watching the traits combine is a delight: his bad driving, his missing appointments and his newspaper-reading come together in "Uncle Dan calmly

reading a newspaper in his little red motorcar, hopelessly stuck in black mud on the Ladore road" (400).

A more significant but still muted trait is his poor helplessness in love. When Marina rejects his marriage proposal in 1871, "to air his feelings" he sets off "in a counter-Fogg direction on a triple trip around the globe" (5) (this is two years before Verne's novel is published in our world). During the trip he films his seedy doings, and when in 1881 his empty marriage with Marina is openly breaking up he again finds a palliative in the combination of travel and photography: "a semi-divorced Dan went to some place in equatorial Africa to photograph tigers (which he was surprised not to see)" (151). His attempts to find sexual satisfaction are meek, shabby and mournful. There are squalid hints of pederasty in 1871. In 1876, while Marina is in hospital giving birth to Lucette, he makes "an unexpected (and rather halfhearted, really--let us be fair) pass" (131) at the governess Mlle Larivière, "a bosomy woman of great and repulsive beauty" (77). He tries a furtive fumble with Lucette: "Papa wore one like that on his hateful pink paw. He belonged to the silent-explorer type. Once he took me to a girls' hockey match and I had to warn him I'd yell for help if he didn't call off the search." (466). His final sordid "satisfaction" is in "Bess (which is 'fiend' in Russian), Dan's buxom but otherwise disgusting nurse, whom he preferred to all others and had taken to Ardis because she managed to extract orally a few last drops of 'play-zero' (as the old whore called it) out of his poor body" (435).

In careful contrast to Van's adulation of his father is the intriguing disgust Uncle Dan evokes in his nephew.

He had just finished his first buttered toast, with a dab of ye-old Orange Marmalade and was making turkey sounds as he rinsed his dentures orally with a mouthful of coffee prior to swallowing it and the flavorful flotsam. Being, as I had reason to believe, plucky, I could make myself suffer a direct view of the man's pink face with its (rotating) red "tashy," but I was not obliged (mused Van, in 1922 . . .) to stand his chinless profile with its curly red sideburn. (124-25)

Van's scornful depiction of his uncle and the persistent contrast of his attitudes to Demon and to Dan are two of many diverting minor themes in the novel.

Dan is only a middle-range character. He is, emphatically, dull. He is never presented more than a very little at a time, so that one does not easily see a picture of the whole man. But if we notice the interlocking details and the recurrent patterns we see the careful consistency of his traits, his enormous comic value, the variety of comic effects he produces, the fascinating disgust he elicits in Van, the range of his ruefulness. There is inexhaustible delight in apprehending his character without the help of authorial summaries or commentaries or even, as it seems, without the solid presence of the character. Nabokov seems to let fall a detail too quirky to recur (clocking a perch, say), an action too unimportant or accidental to matter (sitting under an elm); but if we remember the apparent oncer, the incidental action, and connect it with other elements of the same pattern, we realize the richness and tender coherence of character, the engrossing and sorry life Nabokov has created in quiet drabness.

The link between recurrence and resistance is perhaps closest in the case of plot. The most tantalizing instance of recurrent disclosures about a single series of events occurs in the first three

chapters of Ada, where the circumstances of Van's and Ada's births are described, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 3. Here let us briefly consider an event already alluded to, Van's blinding of the blackmailer Kim Beauharnais.

It is essential to Nabokov's purposes that Van--"the charming villain of my book" (SO 143)--at least seems extraordinarily attractive. Hence the blinding incident must not create too overwhelming an effect, particularly on a first reading. This complaint Ada lodges is therefore the most explicit reference to Van's action: "'But, you know, there's one thing I regret,' she added: 'Your use of an alpenstock to release a brute's fury--not yours, not my Van's. I should never have told you about the Ladorè policeman. You should never have taken him into your confidence, never connived with him to burn those files--and most of Kalugano's pine forest.'" (445-46) Ada does not even name Kim or the consequence of Van's fury, though Van in his reply does make clear that Kim is the victim, and that he now is blind. But the emphasis is merely on the fact that Van has somehow unleashed his rage, and if the reader is to see exactly what happens to Kim, he must connect Ada's remark with an earlier passage. In these earlier lines one can see all too horribly what happens to Kim, but not that it is Van who is the attacker: ". . . Kim who would have bothered Ada again had he not been carried out of his cottage with one eye hanging on a red thread and the other drowned in its blood" (441). This disclosure cannot be made less reprehensible by any special pleading, yet it is defused because our attention has been distracted: this is a hurried digression within a digression that occurs at a moment of high (attention-

absorbing) dramatic tension. One should note, too, that the first quotation also involves a distraction of attention: who is the Ladore policeman? When did Ada tell Van about him?

Let us answer these questions by summing up the Kim Beauharnais subplot. In 1884 Kim, the kitchen boy at Ardis, photographs the furtive love-making of Van and Ada, who are known to be first cousins and suspected by at least some of the Ardis staff of being half-siblings. Since Kim's addiction to photography persists, he is able to record Ada with her successive lovers, Dr Krolik, Philip Rack, Percy de Prey, and by June-July 1888, Van again. By 1892 Kim realizes that Van will not oblige by updating the portfolio and when Ada revisits Ardis he shows her the album; she pays him a thousand dollars. In November 1892, having torn out the post-1884 photographs, Ada brings the album with her when she rejoins Van in Manhattan. After she tells Van that she has paid Kim off her exasperated brother points out the obvious, that Kim will still have the negatives, that they will still be at his mercy. When Van tries to find out the whereabouts of former Ardis staff members who might know Kim's exact address, Ada evades his questions. But while they are looking at the photographs together, Van asks:

"Isn't that wheezy Jones in the second row? I always liked the old fellow."

"No," answered Ada, "that's Price. Jones came four years later. He is now a prominent policeman in Lower Ladore. . . ."

(407)

Van then contacts Jones, gets him to locate Kim, who is living in a cottage in Kalugano's pine forest, and brings him along to help burn Kim's files while Van makes sure Kim will never photograph anything

again. As narrator Van remarks on Jones's first appearance: "Years later he rendered me a service that I will never forget" (248). He pays Jones off by placing him and his family in a penthouse apartment he owns in Manhattan. . .

Ada's "I should never have told you about the Ladore policeman," then, is a reference that the reader can identify precisely. But the events must be reconstructed by the reader from details often dropped casually, recurrent references to a single sequence that do not readily disclose either their own interconnections or Van's calculating savagery.

One should also note that disguised recurrence allows one not only to construct a course of events but also to appreciate another level of dramatic tension behind that which is apparent. While Van and Ada are looking through Kim's album, Van declares, "I will have to destroy him" (403), but this seems more an immediate venting of anger than a literal statement of intent. They examine more of the photographs:

Ada was represented by her two hands rearranging her hair while her Adam stood over her, a frond or inflorescence veiling his thigh with the deliberate casualness of an Old Master's device to keep Eden chaste.

In an equally casual tone of voice Van said: "Darling, you smoke too much, my belly is covered with your ashes. I suppose Bouteillan knows Professor Beauharnais's exact address in the Athens of Graphic Arts."

"You shall not slaughter him," said Ada. "He is subnormal, he is, perhaps, blackmailerish, but in his sordidity there is an istoshnly ston ("visceral moan") of crippled art. . . ."

(406)

Though Van's "equally casual tone" has the "deliberate casualness" of

the Old Master, and though Ada recognizes Van's intentions are not to be taken too casually, it is only when one appreciates how Van does locate and dispose of Kim that one realizes exactly how he is scheming here. When Ada happens to mention Jones's present position, Van is even more calculating:

"He is now a prominent policeman in Lower Ladore. Well, that's all."

Nonchalantly, Van went back to the willows and said:

"Every shot in the book has been snapped in 1884, except this one. I never rowed you down Ladore River in early spring."
(407)

Van is accusing Ada of unfaithfulness. One takes the "nonchalantly," then, as ironic, but it is much more heavily ironic when one recognizes that in the second after Ada has let slip how he can get in touch with Jones Van has already formulated his plan of attack and yet has the presence of mind to launch a second attack, against Ada herself.

Like many of the narrative strands in Ada, Van's plotting to dispose of Kim is not presented at once or even identified when the details are disclosed. It is the reader's task to recognize the recurring terms of a series of events, to observe the rich plot unfolding, to appreciate the real drama beneath the ostensibly casual exchange.

Setting, character and plot in Ada, then, each have additional dimensions that are reached through a type of recurrence very close to pure resistance. To perceive these hidden dimensions requires considerable attention to details that are released sparingly, that are each without apparent relation to anything antecedent, without an obvious significance that one can expect to be developed in what follows.

But the most important kind of recurrence is similar not to resistance but to solution: here, a single verbal cluster can release explosive energies of suddenly-perceived relationship. Let us take an example.

Van and Ada are looking at the early days of Van's stay at Ardis in 1884 (the photographs are part of Kim's catalogue):

"Now comes a little boy."

"Zdraste, Ivan Dementievich," said Van, greeting his fourteen-year-old self, shirtless, in shorts, aiming a conical missile at the marble fore-image of a Crimean girl doomed to offer an everlasting draught of marble water to a dying marine from her bullet-chipped jar.

Skip Lucette skipping rope.

Ah, the famous first finch.

"No, that's a kitayskaya punochka (Chinese Wall Bunting). It has settled on the threshold of a basement door. The door is ajar. . . ." (399)

The first photograph of the three is of the following scene, which occurs no more than three days after Van has arrived at Ardis, before he has fallen in love with Ada. The governess, Mlle Larivière, has told Ada to take Van by the hand for a walk:

. . . under the pretext of picking up a fir cone he disengaged his hand. He threw the cone at a woman of marble bending over a stamnos but only managed to frighten a bird that had perched on the brim of her broken jar.

"There is nothing more banal in the world," said Ada, "than pitching stones at a hawfinch."

"Sorry," said Van, "I did not intend to scare that bird. But then, I'm not a country lad, who knows a cone from a stone. . . ."

"Look," said Van, still smarting a bit, "there goes another haw-haw finch." (50-51)

Deft details like Van's boyish pretext for disengaging his hand make the scene an excellent sketch of adolescent awkwardness; the mutual

oneupmanship of these precocious youngsters is charmingly right. Van, not surprisingly, is taken aback by Ada's knowing the bird is a hawk-finch, but taking advantage of her not having seen it was a cone that he threw, he revenges himself in a burst of scathing humility: "But then, I'm not a country lad, who knows a cone from a stone."

The simple "woman of marble bending over a stamnos" becomes in the later photograph the much more elaborate "marble fore-image of a Crimean girl doomed to offer an everlasting draught of marble water to a dying marine from her bullet-chipped jar." Why the expansion? Because the earlier marble woman is also a fore-image of the death of Percy de Prey, who flies from the complications of his affair with Ada in 1888 to become a soldier in the second (Antiterranean history!) Crimean War. After having been "shot in the thigh during a skirmish with Khazar guerillas" (319) Percy recovers consciousness to see a smiling old Tartar trying to talk to him. The "kindly old man" picks up the pistol Percy had dropped and shoots him in the temple. Van imagines Percy's thoughts from the moment of recovering consciousness to his death:

I'm alive--who's that?--civilian--sympathy--thirsty--daughter with pitcher--that's my damned gun--don't . . . et cetera or rather no et cetera. . . . But, of course, an invaluable detail in that strip of thought would have been--perhaps, next to the pitcher peri--a glint, a shadow, a stab of Ardis. (320)

The cross-referencing of the early statue and the stamnos, of Percy's imagined last impressions and the photograph of the "marble fore-image," is superb: note, for instance, that the "broken" jar of the first scene becomes, with the help of Percy's death, "bullet-chipped."

But one should also note that a girl in the Crimea offering aid

to a soldier brings to mind Florence Nightingale--which works a retro-active metamorphosis upon the original hawfinch. And with the "marble fore-image," the "everlasting draught of marble water" and the "jar" we have, via Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819), the stopped time, the marmoreal memorial of his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819).

We, too, shall skip Lucette skipping rope and move to the third photograph, in which Van thinks he sees the "famous first finch" at which he threw the cone. "No," Ada corrects him, "that's a kitayskaya punochka." Note, before we move on, that the bird has settled on a basement door which is "ajar"--and thus ridiculously mimics the earlier bird on a real "jar."

The third photograph refers to a scene just after the cone-throwing incident: "She showed him next where the hammock . . . was stored: this was in the corner of a basement toolroom behind the lilacs, the key was concealed in this hole here which last year was stuffed by the nest of a bird--no need to identify it" (53). The bird Ada does not identify in 1884 is identified eight years and three hundred and fifty pages later: "No, that's a kitayskaya punochka (Chinese Wall Bunting)."

The amusing recurrence is actually a repetition of another fragment, too. We return now to the scene in which Uncle Dan has retired to the shade of a tree to read his newspaper. Greg Erminin, who arrives after Dan has moved off, asks Ada:

"I guess it's your father under that oak, isn't it?"

"No, it's an elm," said Ada. (92)

These two lines form part of five different systems of recurrence. The first of the remaining four is a specific recollection:

"Who cares for Susermans," observed Lucette, with something of her uterine sister's knight move of specious response. . . .
No, it's an elm. Half a millenium ago. (383)

The second is one of the novel's really hard to spot verbal leitmotifs:

"under a tree." Greg's "under that oak" (92) fouls up the correct

"under an immense elm" (89). Later we have, "Love under the Lindens by

one Eelmann" (403), a mixture of some or all of Desire under the Elms,

Berlin's boulevard Unter der Linden and the love-poem "Unter der Linden"

of Walther von der Vogelweide (c. 1170-1230).²⁸ Van also recalls "our

nonstop three-hour kiss Under the Larches" (403: Van's capitalization).²⁹

The third cluster of recurrences is more elaborate. Greg is not the only one who cannot distinguish this oak from an elm: Ada tells Van that Mlle Larivière wants them "to go and look at the grand chêne which is really an elm" (53-54). The "pathologically unobservant" (96) Mlle Larivière's remark becomes part of Van and Ada's theme song, their own adaptation of Chateaubriand's "Romance à Héléne" ("Combien j'ai douce souvenance," pub. 1806). Two of their couplets are:

²⁸ Cf. Lolita 231 ("where are the climaxes in 'Love Under the Lindens'") and see Proffer, Keys, p. 150n, and Appel, Annotated Lolita, p. 408.

²⁹ See also pp. 36 (under the Persian lilacs), 72 (under the weeping cedar), 202 (under the tulip tree), 211 (under the sealyham cedar), 283 (under the liriodendrons), 361 (under a nearby pine), 412 (under the pseudoacacias).

Oh! qui me rendra mon Aline
Et le grand chêne et ma colline?

Oh, who will give me back my Jill
 And the big oak tree and my hill? (138)

Chateaubriand's original lines for this, "Oh! qui me rendra mon H  l  ne, / Et ma montagne et le grand chêne" are, as Darkbloom-Nabokov notes, "one of the leitmotifs of the present novel" (Darkbloom 467). When Van and Ada later examine Kim's photos, there are "several preparatory views of the immediate grounds: the colutea circle, an avenue, the grotto's black O, and the hill, and the big chain around the trunk of the rare oak, Quercus ruslan Ch  t." (398). The oak is not merely rare, it is unique: as Nabokov notes, "The specific name of this invented tree alludes to the beginning of Pushkin's long poem Ruslan and Lyudmila (1820) where there is a cat (chat in French) walking on a golden chain around a fairytale oaktree" (Mason 177). But as Proffer (p. 271) remarks, "Ch  t." also suggests Chateaubriand, and indeed Chateaubriand's "Et ma montagne et le grand chêne" are here in "and the hill, and . . . the rare oak"--and also in the brilliantly simple pun on "grand chêne": "and the hill, and the big chain."

The fourth and most important pattern of recurrence, though, around this "No, it's an elm" is one that runs through three of the passages already cited: the pattern of Ada's naming things, which we have seen in "hawfinch," in "elm," and in "kitayskaya punochka." Two further elements of this pattern must suffice.

The first of these appears in the account of Van's first day at Ardis, when Ada is showing him over the house:

On the first floor, a yellow drawing room . . . was invaded across the threshold by the large leaf shadows of a paulownia tree (named, by an indifferent linguist, explained Ada, after the patronymic, mistaken for a second name or surname of a harmless lady, Anna Pavlovna Romanov, daughter of Pavel, nicknamed Paul-minus-Peter, why she did not know, a cousin of the non-linguist's master, the botanical Zemski, I'm going to scream, thought Van). A china cabinet encaged a whole zoo of small animals among which the oryx and the okapi, complete with scientific names, were especially recommended to him by his charming but impossibly pretentious companion. (43)

Ada is infuriatingly omniscient, even at twelve, in biological nomenclature, and it is a delicate touch--and a relief--that within her entangled digression on the paulownia tree she shows her ignorance of a merely historical name: "nicknamed Paul-minus-Peter, why she did not know." (Rumour had it that the father of Pavel I, 1754-1801, was not Catherine's husband but a Colonel Saltykov.)

We can see here--especially in the "whole zoo of animals"--a minor and ridiculous reason for the Ada-name motif. Ada is not far from Adam, and "Ardis," not far from "paradise," is explicitly linked with Eden. Thus, as Mason notes (p. 16), there is a playful hint of Genesis 2.19: "and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." But more immediately important is the character interaction between Ada, a child who does not know what to say to her big "cousin" but is bright and eager to impress, and Van, not familiar enough yet with Ada to be anything but politely submissive while this torrent of information rushes on, and a little exasperated at having met at last someone of his own brilliance. One should note too the particularly fine Nabokovian (absence of inertia) run-on and shift in "a cousin of the non-linguist's master, the botanical Zemski, I'm going

to scream, thought Van."

The second example of the naming motif shows it merging with the motif of "translation." It also shows Van and Ada rapidly becoming friends and their beginning to exclude others as they deepen their rapport. Marina, Van has noticed, transforms anything into a lecture on the theatre. To keep her at bay, he unleashes Ada and her botanical skill:

Van: "That yellow thingum" (pointing at a floweret prettily depicted on an Eckercrown plate) "--is it a buttercup?"

Ada: "No. That yellow flower is the common Marsh Marigold, Caltha palustris. In this country, peasants miscall it 'Cowslip,' though of course the true Cowslip, Primula veris, is a different plant altogether."

"I see," said Van.

"Yes, indeed," began Marina, "when I was playing Ophelia, the fact that I had once collected flowers--"

"Helped, no doubt," said Ada. "Now the Russian word for marsh marigold is Kuroslep (which muzhiks in Tartary misapply, poor slaves, to the buttercup) or else Kaluzhnitsa, as used quite properly in Kaluga, U.S.A."

"Ah," said Van.

"As in the case of many flowers," Ada went on, with a mad scholar's quiet smile, "the unfortunate French name of our plant, souci d'eau, has been traduced or shall we say transfigured--"

"Flowers into bloomers," punned Van Veen.

"Je vous en prie, mes enfants!" put in Marina, who had been following the conversation with difficulty and now, through a secondary misunderstanding, thought the reference was to the undergarment.

.....
". . . But, to go back to our poor flower. The forged louis d'or in that collection of fouled French is the transformation of souci d'eau (our marsh marigold) into the asinine 'care of the water'--although he had at his disposal dozens of synonyms, such as mollyblob, marybud, maybubble, and many other nicknames associated with fertility feasts, whatever those are." (63-65)

The avalanche of Ada's information bears all before it, like a Rabelaisian catalogue or a Sternean monomania--with, of course, the extra element of a Nabokovian passion for precision and, as we shall see, Nabokovian

cunning at its most complex. Ada's disquisition is especially ridiculous coming from a twelve-year-old and for a quirky and carefully-designed local dramatic purpose.

The drama of the whole conversation is ~~is~~ perverse and captivating. Why, one thinks, should Van think this preferable to Marina's lecturing on the theatre? But then Marina speaks. When the conversation is hitched to her hobbyhorse for a mere second it seems about to plunge into an abyss of tedium, and her leading the conversation suddenly seems a doom to be resolutely avoided. In finishing Marina's sentence, Ada brutally cuts her mother off, but the brutality lies in Ada's getting right the horrible inanity Marina would have used: where else could such a lame interruption hobble? Even Van's slight role is amusing: at first reduced to a vacant "I see" and an even emptier "ah," he suddenly darts in with an apt pun that makes Marina reveal how comically out of her depth she is.

The whole of Ada's disquisition is on the name of a single plant. She provides the correct English common name, the scientific name, an ambiguous local name (it is quite true that in the United States "cowslip" is used for the marsh marigold), then two Russian variants, one with a misapplication. With the introduction of the French name she changes tack towards the translation motif.

The mistranslation she pours scorn upon is Wallace Fowlie's 1946 version of a poem already glanced at, Rimbaud's "Mémoire."³⁰ Ada calls "the transformation of souci d'eau (our marsh marigold) into the

³⁰ In Fowlie, Rimbaud (New York: New Directions, 1946), pp. 76-78.

asinine 'care of the water'" the "forged louis d'or in that collection of fouled French." Her image means simply that this misreading is the richest fake. But it is more than an image: it points to a second unfaithfulness in translation. Rimbaud has:

Plus pure qu'un louis, jaune et chaude paupière
Le souci d'eau

(Purer than a louis, a yellow and warm eyelid:
the marsh marigold).³¹

Fowlie in 1946 had translated it thus:

More golden than a louis, pure and warm eyelid,
The care of the water.

Not only did he botch "le souci d'eau," but he also took away "pure" from "louis": hence the "forged" louis d'or.

Ada's conversational wit is impossibly rich here. But underneath it, unknown to her, shimmer two more Nabokovian jokes.

The "d'or . . . transformation . . . marigold . . . asinine" subliminally flashes out the title of the Latin novel, the Metamorphoses or The Golden Ass, of Lucius Apuleius (fl. 2nd century A.D.). In that novel, of course, Lucius is transformed into an ass--and what it takes to make him whole again is to eat a rose. A flower in Fowlie's translation, too, will turn the asinine transformation back to the original.

³¹ This is a later (1966) translation by Fowlie which, it is only fair to say, is very accurate and much the best translation into English of this poem. In Wallace Fowlie, ed., Rimbaud, Complete Works and Selected Letters (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 123.

Though Ada's "marybud" is another name for the marigold, "mollyblob" and "maybubble" are inventions, produced by fission from the genuine "mayblob" (marsh marigold). The suggestion of popping in "maybubble" combines with "mollyblob" to point unmistakably to Molly Bloom's musing on the blob of a popped hymen: "and they always want to see a stain on the bed to know you're a virgin for them . . . they're such fools too you could be a widow or divorced 40 times over a daub of red ink would do or blackberry juice no that's too purply" (U 754). Fowlie's mistranslation of the word for marsh marigold has, Molly unknowingly suggests, deflowered it.

We have come from the explosive patterns of recurrence in "aiming a conical missile at the marble fore-image of a Crimean girl. . . . No, that's a kitayskaya punochka" passage, through the equally explosive "No, it's an elm," to the mistranslation of "souci d'eau" in Fowlie's version of "Mémoire," where the sub-motif of Ada and names crosses over into the translation motif. It takes many readings before one can appreciate the full structural, moral and metaphysical significance Nabokov expresses through each of these particular patterns (see Chapters 6-9), but long before discovering such significance one is enthralled by the successive enrichments of the patterns themselves. To capture all of the recurrences is exhausting work, and impossible to do at once: one cannot simultaneously explore a number of branching pathways of recurrence each of which is itself continually branching out. But then it is not demanded of the reader: one enjoys what one does find and does not know what one has missed until finding it in turn in another flash of delight. The reader of Ada recalls a single

earlier reference at a time, perhaps, and if he can precisely locate it will find the play between the two passages to be often extremely funny and always rewarding. Each reference caught produces an exhilarating shock of recognition, an encouragement to return again to the novel and to keep one's observation and memory as sharp as possible.

The ever-expanding patterns of recurrence in Ada are not only a means of enticing the reader to return to find designs he knows to be present in the novel but cannot quite trace, and not only a means of imparting certain moral and metaphysical insights that as we shall see cannot be aptly imparted without a necessary delay. They are also an expression of Nabokov's profound fascination with pattern, which as will become apparent in the next chapter is not the arch infatuation of an esthete but something that results from Nabokov's science as well as his art, from his reflections upon his individual experience and his confronting some of the most bracing mysteries of existence.

3. Resistance and Solution

In considering the independence of each small part of Nabokov's fictions and the elaborately patterned correlations between one part and many others, we have already seen a number of instances of resistance and solution, and it will not be necessary to demonstrate again that Nabokov designs his work with an unusual wiliness to keep much of its treasure locked away until the right combination in the reader's memory springs open another casket in the magic cave. But let us consider the range and effects and implications of Nabokov's unusual

strategies as both hoarder and distributor of the wealth of his invention.

No reader can encounter one of Nabokov's major novels without sensing how much has resisted his apprehension, yet the salient force of resistance does not at all prevent one from reading and enjoying before the resistance is overcome. No matter how elusive they may be, Nabokov's works are neither forbidding nor obscure. Indeed, his prose is one of unmatched lucidity, both in the evocation of a pictured world and in the expression of abstract thought. The prose is immediately lively, the inventiveness inspired, the characters utterly new. Nabokov easily makes a first reading delightful, no matter how much one senses one is missing.

Even before they are understood the resistant parts give off a strange flash and sparkle. Let us take an example. Van describes the consequences of banning electricity on Antiterra in a single sentence full of fire and life, wild imagination and special alertness (it is an excellent example of the concatenation of strikingly independent choices in Nabokov's style):

Van regretted that because Lettrocalamity (Vanvitelli's old joke!) was banned all over the world, its very name having become a "dirty word" among upper-upper-class families (in the British and Brazilian sense) to which the Veens and Durmanovs happened to belong, and had been replaced by elaborate surrogates only in those very important "utilities"--telephones, motors--what else? --well a number of gadgets for which plain folks hanker with lolling tongues, breathing faster than gundogs (for it's quite a long sentence), such trifles as tape recorders, the favorite toys of his and Ada's grandsires (Prince Zemski had one for every bed of his harem of schoolgirls) were not manufactured any more, except in Tartary where they had evolved "minirechi" ("talking minarets") of a secret make. (147)

The fabulousness of the narrative details produces a purr of pleasure. Electricity is not only banned, it is indecent (as parentage is obscene in Brave New World, as machinery is banned and ill health indecent in Erewhon). An eighteenth-century Russian prince has a harem of schoolgirls each with a tape recorder in her bed. Even before one understands "'minirechi' ('talking minarets')" the implausible exoticism of the phrase is diverting. Grotesquely mixed with a secretive Tartary (the Soviet Union), it conjures up a superb momentary fantasy: Russia, deprived of electricity, invents an unnamed surrogate for the microphones ("talking" and "mini") it needs for espionage abroad and the loudspeakers ("talking minarets") it needs for stump speeches at home.³²

The treatment of the material, too, is extravagant. The sentence digresses hilariously around its simple grammatical core, "Van regretted that . . . such trifles as tape recorders . . . were not manufactured any more."³³ It friskily tumbles over itself in its eagerness to keep up with itself: "a number of gadgets for which plain folks hanker with lolling tongues, breathing faster than gundogs (for it's quite a long sentence)." That improper transfer of "breathing faster than gundogs" from the desire for gadgets to the speed of the sentence is a master-stroke of authorial audacity.

³² "Minirechi," as Proffer points out (p. 259), is a compound of Latin "mini-" and Russian "rechi," "speeches." The gloss Nabokov gives is as impudently false as one suspected.

³³ Seen in context, the sentence is even funnier: it is the beginning of an elaborately unnecessary scene-setting, a parody of the grand introduction. In these terms, the sentence may be paraphrased thus: "Van regretted that tape recorders were not manufactured. Had they been, they might have recorded this scene. . . ."

The opening lines shimmer with life even as they signal to the reader an uncaught meaning: "Van regretted that because Lettrocalamity (Vanvitelli's old joke!) was banned all over the world, its very name having become a 'dirty word'" As one pants along the sentence's twisting path, Lettrocalamity, Vanvitelli and his old joke flutter by the wayside with satisfying colour even if they cannot be netted.

But Nabokov has signaled that they are to be caught. Who, then, is Vanvitelli? The Italian name is genuine, but even its most distinguished bearer, the Baroque architect Luigi Vanvitelli (1700-1773), seems an unlikely candidate. "Vanvitelli," though, is also almost exactly the Russian for "Van in Italy" ("Van v Italii"): in other words "Lettrocalamity" may be just Van punning in Italian. As indeed it is: "elettrocalamita" is Italian for "electromagnet." Van has managed to mention electricity without using the dirty word itself. At the same time, he has slipped in an oblique yet exact echo of another euphemism he has employed: the "Letter calamity" is precisely "the L disaster" (17) which led to the banning of the unmentionable magnetic force.

But why is Van's pun an "old joke"? Because Joyce made it in Finnegans Wake: "Call her calamity electrifies man."³⁴ Nabokov does not like Joyce's hydra except for the Anna Livia Plurabelle section (I.viii), from which this sentence comes, and which eleven-year-old Ada and fourteen-year-old Van have read (Ada 54).

It is instructive to note the difference between Joyce's and Nabokov's sentences. Both contain multilingual puns, allusions and

³⁴ New York: Viking, and London: Faber, 1939, p. 207.

internal echoes that form puzzles with precise solutions.³⁵ Joyce's sentence, however, can be read only as a puzzle, and offers no satisfaction beyond disentangling the readings--which still leaves it thin on real meaning. It is offered only to the expert solver. Nabokov's sentence, on the other hand, is extraordinarily generous in its delights: its humour, its rampant digressiveness, its comic convolution, the rich fantasy conjured up in its asides. And even with its meaning untraced, "Lettrocalamity (Vanvitelli's old joke!)" is somehow already full of verve. Nabokov makes quite certain that the fire and the life--and the lucidity--of his prose is such that one need be no decipherer to enjoy it.

Yet his works are clearly designed to resist the reader's apprehension in many ways, and Nabokov himself even parodies this fact in Ada. In 1886 Van returns briefly to America from his studies at Chose (Cambridge). Ada, traveling with her mother and sister from Los Angeles to Ardis and like them suffering from influenza, sends Van a cable that their father, Demon, with whom Van is staying in Manhattan, must not be able to construe:

A hydrogram from Chicago awaiting Van at his father's house on July 21 (her dear birthday!) said: "dadaist impatient patient arriving between twenty-fourth and seventh call doris can meet

³⁵ Joyce's line discloses these "significances": 1) the HCE motif in "her calamity electrifies"; 2) Ital. "elettrocalamita"; 3) the old joke that "Eva," in Latin, is an anagram of "vae" ("woe"): man is "electrified" by the calamity of the Fall, the fall of Eve, the woman called "Calamity"; 4) the fall of Eve is repeated by Anna Livia (all women, like Eve, but also all rivers): the fall of a river provides hydroelectric power for man.

regards vicinity."

"Which reminds me painfully of the golubyanki (petits bleus) Aqua used to send me," remarked Demon with a sigh (having mechanically opened the message). "Is tender Vicinity some girl I know? Because you may glare as much as you like, but this is not a wire from doctor to doctor."

Van raised his eyes to the Boucher plafond of the breakfast room and, shaking his head in derisive admiration, commented on Demon's acumen. Yes, that was right. He had to travel incontinently to Garders (anagram of "regards," see?) to a hamlet the opposite way from Letham (see?) to see a mad girl artist called Doris or Odris who drew only gee-gees and sugar daddies. (178-79)

Ada's telegram is easily deciphered: "Ada (I have to imitate dadaist obscurity) is impatient to see you. She is a patient [i.e., with influenza]. Arriving between twenty-fourth and seventh. Call Ardis, Ladore exchange. (I can meet you) with regard to a trysting place. Best regards." Demon, suspicious of what eludes him, pretends to take the "regards vicinity" as the farewell signature it imitates. Van mocks his father's suspicion, the implicit idea that a telegram can be "resistant," by grossly overreading the message. Absurdly, his parodic exegesis is more resistant than the telegram itself. "Incontinently to Garders (anagram of 'regards,' see?)" is self-explanatory; but "to a hamlet the opposite way from Letham (see?)" requires one to imagine Van transforming "can meet" into "canned meat," dubbing a can of potted ham a ham-let, and reversing it. "To a mad girl artist" comes from "dadaist . . . patient": gaga artist, a patient of Van's (who has a "passion for the insane" [338]) being very likely mad. In the rest of the "interpretation" Van shows daring, learning and cheek: "Doris or Odris" almost reveals the habitually malodorous Ada, of Ardis, in Ladore; "gee-gees" draws upon the etymology of "dadaist," derived from the French baby word, "dada," "gee-gee"; and in "sugar daddies" Van reinterprets

"dadaist" to mock sugar daddy Demon.

This parody of resistance and solution is an amusing puzzle, but in Ada the system of challenge and reward offers much more than the pleasure of a teasing diversion. We have already noted that the interim between Ardis the First and Ardis the Second seems choppy and confused, as if Nabokov were unable to control Ada's structure other than through the unity of Van and Ada's love and the radiant happiness of Ardis. But let us see--let us carry directly on from the passage above:

Van rented a room under a false name (Boucher) at the only inn of Malahar, a miserable village on Ladore River, some twenty miles from Ardis. . . . At 7 A.M. on July 25 he called Ardis Hall. . . .

. . . . Ada herself who had been on the qui vive all night answered from the nursery, where the clearest instrument in the house quivered and bubbled under a dead barometer.

"Forest Fork in Forty-Five minutes. Sorry to spit."

"Tower [one of Ada's pet words for supreme happiness]!" replied her sweet ringing voice, as an airman in heaven blue might say "Roger." (179)

Van is arranging a meeting with Ada at Forest Fork, in honour of their last previous embraces, at Forest Fork in September 1884 just before Van's departure on "Morio, his favorite black horse" (159). Van's "sorry to spit," after all those F's, demonstrates how excellently he remembers and how fondly he cherishes the past, just as Ada's respondent delight shows she too remembers every bright detail. Two years earlier, on that last day at Ardis, Ada wonders when they will meet again:

"When, my love, when again? In Luga? Kaluga? Ladoga? Where, when?"

"That's not the point," cried Van, "the point, the point, the point is--will you be faithful, will you be faithful to me?"

"You spit, love," said wan-smiling Ada, wiping off the P's and the F's. (158)

It is because Van and Ada so treasure every moment they have shared that the happiness of their reunion seems so deserved.

Since Van is phoning from a village not far from Ardis, he can easily reach Forest Fork in forty-five minutes:

He rented a motorcycle, a venerable machine, with a saddle upholstered in billiard cloth and pretentious false mother-of-pearl handlebars, and drove, bouncing on tree roots along a narrow "forest ride." The first thing he saw was the star gleam of her dismissed bike: she stood by it, arms akimbo, the black-haired white angel, looking away in a daze of shyness, wearing a terry-cloth robe and bedroom slippers. As he carried her into the nearest thicket he felt the fever of her body, but only realized how ill she was when after two passionate spasms she got up full of tiny brown ants and tottered, and almost collapsed, muttering about gipsies stealing their jeeps.

It was a beastly, but beautiful, tryst. He could not remember--

(That's right, I can't either. Ada.)

--one word they said, one question, one answer. . . . (179-80)

The "star gleam of her dismissed bike" suddenly and sharply recalls the "asters," the "star spurs," the "stellas" of their earlier tryst at Forest Fork. Ada's feverish "muttering about gipsies stealing their jeeps," moreover, by transforming Van's motorcycle and Ada's bike, recalls just as sharply the metamorphic voyage of "Forest Fork the First." The sheer delight of the reunion, the repetition, the recapture of the past, stressed through details as precise as these, will itself be repeated in the joyful reunions which form the very basis of Ada's structure, of Van and Ada's lives.

Let us look closely at Van's venerable "motorcycle . . . bouncing on tree roots along a narrow 'forest ride.'" At the great picnic on Ada's birthday (July 21, 1888) in Ardis the Second--which as we shall often see miraculously recapitulates the picnic on Ada's birthday

in Ardis the First--Greg Erminin, a neighbour madly but mutely in love with Ada, leaves "his splendid new black Silentium motorcycle in the forest ride" (268). Now Greg had also been a guest at the picnic of 1884, and it was during that picnic, it seems, that he first fell in love with Ada, for the next day he returns to Ardis, hoping to offer Ada a ride on a new black pony (that will be replaced four years later by the new black motorcycle):

A tall rosy-faced youngster in smart riding breeches dismounted from a black pony.

"It's Greg's beautiful new pony," said Ada. (89)

"I mean, I would love lending him to you for a ride any time. For any amount of time. Will you? Besides, I have another black."

But she shook her head, she shook her bent head, while still twisting and twining her daisies.

"Well," he said, getting up, "I must be going. Good-bye, everybody. Good-bye, Ada. I guess it's your father under that oak, isn't it?"

"No, it's an elm," said Ada. (92)

Ada's refusal of the pony and her "No, it's an elm" both reveal to the reader that she does not care at all for Greg, that, indeed, since the picnic of the day before and the journey home (during which, because of an accidental shortage of seats, she had sat on Van's lap) Ada now regards herself as Van's. Greg is at once Van's rival and a proof that Van has no real rivals. Hence when as they make their farewells at the end of Ardis the First Van asks Ada "will you be faithful, will you be faithful to me? . . . it's the fellows I'll kill if they come near you" (158-59) and when Van rides off on "his favorite black horse" (159), the black horse-black pony link only proves that despite the romantic fierceness of his jealousy, he has no cause for fear, for during this

first stay at Ardis he has won Ada's love forever.

When at the reunion at Forest Fork two years later Van's "motorcycle . . . bouncing . . . along a narrow 'forest ride'" anticipates Greg's "new black . . . motorcycle in the forest ride," it also recalls not only Greg's new black pony but Van's departure from Ardis at Forest Fork and his fiery fretting about possible rivals. The Forest Fork reunion stresses again that the joy of Van and Ada's love at Ardis has been proof against any competition.

Ada's half-delirious "muttering about gipsies stealing their jeeps" has verbally transformed Van's motorcycle and her own bike as the Veen family car at Forest Fork two years earlier had been transformed into Van's "favorite black horse." But her phrase also points ahead to 1888, to the second Ardis picnic, to the fact that at this picnic--also attended by Greg, who is still shyly and awkwardly in love with Ada--a real rival to Van is present, a rival if not for Ada's love, at least for her sexual favours.

Greg, who had left his splendid new black Silentium motorcycle in the forest ride, observed:

"We have company."

"Indeed we do," assented Van. "Kto sii (who are they)? Do you have any idea?"

Nobody had. Raincoated, unpainted, morose, Marina came over and peered through the trees the way Van pointed.

After reverently inspecting the Silentium, a dozen elderly townsmen, in dark clothes, shabby and uncouth, walked into the forest across the road. . . .

"How odd," said Marina, scratching her sunlit bald patch.

She sent a footman to investigate the situation and tell those Gipsy politicians, or Calabrian laborers, that Squire Veen would be furious if he discovered trespassers camping in his woods. (268)

Greg's motorcycle is linked not only with Van's old motorcycle at Forest

Fork but also with Ada's "gipsies stealing their jeeps." Shortly after Greg's arrival, the "jeep" itself reappears, again surrounded by those mysterious gipsies:

Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, at that very moment Ada emitted a Russian exclamation of utmost annoyance as a steel-gray convertible glided into the glade. No sooner had it stopped than it was surrounded by the same group of townsmen, who now seemed to have multiplied in strange consequence of having shed coats and waistcoats. Thrusting his way through their circle, with every sign of wrath and contempt, young Percy de Prey, frilled-shirted and white-trousered, strode up to Marina's deckchair. He was invited to join the party despite Ada's trying to stop her silly mother with an admonishing stare and a private small shake of the head.

"I dared not hope . . . Oh, I accept with great pleasure," answered Percy, whereupon--very much whereupon--the seemingly forgetful but in reality calculating bland bandit marched back to his car (near which a last wonderstruck admirer lingered) to fetch a bouquet of longstemmed roses stored in the boot.

"What a shame that I should loathe roses," said Ada, accepting them gingerly. (270-71)

Percy de Prey has in fact been conducting an affair with Ada for some time prior to Van's return to Ardis in June 1888. Though Ada cares little for Percy, she finds it hard to end the affair and knows she must not let her brother find out (Van, a crack shot, would probably kill Percy in the duel he would certainly call). To confirm Van's belief that she is merely pestered by Percy's attentions, Ada is deliberately rude as she accepts her admirer's bouquet: "What a shame that I should loathe roses." Van does however find out about Percy, but only after the hated rival has left for the Crimean War. On being informed about Percy--and about that other lover, Philip Rack, whom Ada is no longer seeing--Van storms from Ardis, taking the cane with which he intends to attack Rack (not enough of a gentleman to be called out

to a duel) before searching out Percy de Prey.

The reunion at Forest Fork seems at first to be a recovery of the past and seems to confirm not only the unchallenged hold Van has won over Ada's affections but also the ridiculousness of his fears two years earlier at Forest Fork. But at the same time the reunion foreshadows the existence of real rivals during Ardis the Second and the well-founded jealousy that will tear Van away from Ardis and Ada.

When Van records that "It was a beastly, but beautiful, tryst" (180) at Forest Fork, he anticipates even more clearly the betrayal that lies ahead. On the day when Van returns to Ardis in 1888, a party is in progress. As the gathering breaks up, Van sees someone he thinks is his former schoolmate, Percy de Prey, kissing Ada's hand. When a minute or two later Ada meets him alone, he challenges her. But she successfully allays these first suspicions:

... was that Percy de Prey? It was. Who had been kicked out of Riverlane? She guessed he had. He had changed, he had grown swine-stout. He had, hadn't he just? Was he her new beau?

"And now," said Ada, "Van is going to stop being vulgar--I mean, stop forever! Because I had and have and shall always have only one beau, only one beast, only one sorrow, only one joy."

"We can collect your tears later," he said, "I can't wait."

Her open kiss was hot and tremulous. . . . (190)

Later that summer, at the picnic, after Percy de Prey arrives uninvited and "royally drunk after some earlier festivity" (273), the burly youth picks a fight with the much lighter Van, who easily outwrestles his opponent. Greg Erminin, who has witnessed the fight, rushes to tell Ada:

"He's all right! He's all right, Miss Veen"--blind compassion preventing the young knight from realizing that she could not

possibly have known yet what a clash had occurred between the beau and the beast. (276)

The Forest Fork reunion, then, is a pivot between Ardis the First, where Van and Ada's love is so powerfully established, where Van has no "rivals" but the hopeless Greg, and Ardis the Second, where Van and Ada's love continues to blaze but where Van's discovery that he has rivals for Ada's attention brings all to a sudden close. In its locale, in the verbal echoes ("sorry to spit," "star gleam") and in the metamorphic voyage, Van and Ada's reunion at Forest Fork seems a deliriously happy recapitulation of Van's departure from Ardis and Ada at Forest Fork two years earlier, and the joy of the reunion seems to confirm that Van had no need two years earlier to fear any rivals. Despite his tearful departure on his "favorite black horse," he had no cause for concern: Ada's love for him had been infinitely above being challenged by poor Greg with his new black pony. That wrenchingly sad departure in 1884 seems redeemed by the momentary reunion in 1886, but this reunion foreshadows the real rival who will emerge during Ardis the Second, and in pursuit of whom Van will flee Ardis--two years to the day after the reunion at Forest Fork.³⁶

As if this structural perfection were not enough, the Forest Fork reunion has an even richer position within the whole of Ada. The two Ardis sections and the intense joy that runs almost throughout this

³⁶ Forest Fork the Second begins at 7.45 A.M. on July 25, 1886. Van departs from Ardis the Second some time between 7 and 9 A.M. on July 25, 1888 (see pp. 6, 266, 283, 284, 285, 296 to ascertain the day and hour).

part of the novel--until Van's final bitter discovery that he has been betrayed--occupy more than half of Ada's total length, and after these two radiant summers, during which time seems suspended, Van and Ada's lives seem to tilt and then tumble, picking up momentum as they roll down the declivity of the years. Though it is impossible not to be moved by the accelerating collapse of time, readers and critics have been worried (as indeed they should be) by the lack of any structure but this collapse. Everything seems jagged and uneven, not so much on a first reading but (for reasons we shall consider in Chapter 5) on a rereading, when one realizes in advance the full extent of each empty stretch of time separating Van and Ada.

But there is great structural control, though it is difficult to see. After their separation at Ardis the Second, Van and Ada reunite in Manhattan in 1892, but are separated by Demon when he discovers his two children living together as lovers. They reunite in Mont Roux, where Ada is staying with the husband Demon has steered her into marrying, and are about to elope together when the discovery that Ada's husband has advanced tuberculosis makes Ada postpone her flight until Andrey recovers his health. He does not recover, but it is seventeen years before he dies, when Van and Ada reunite again at Mont Roux, to remain together for the rest of their lives.

Now as we shall see in Chapter 5 (pp. 327-29) the Manhattan reunion is in several very exact ways a sort of Ardis the Third (the beginning of the Manhattan sojourn, for instance, very distinctly echoes the beginning of Ardis the Second; Van and Ada carefully examine each photograph in Kim's blackmail album of Ardis the First, just as during

Ardis the Second they had kept on leafing through their memories of that first idyll). But this reunion is not at Ardis, on a country estate where Van and Ada can make love out in the park; they are now on a terraced apartment above Central Park and the deliberately emphasized atmosphere of confinement and altitude makes the Manhattan setting very different indeed from the openness of Arcadian Ardis. This setting foreshadows Van and Ada's two reunions in Mont Roux, where they share balconied rooms on the upper floors of a hotel, where again the sense of being well above ground is carefully stressed. Where the two children at Ardis had to get away from the family home (out to the park, to the toolroom, to the pavilion) to make love, Van and Ada at Mont Roux must confine their ardours to the bedroom and are keenly aware of the danger of their being seen together on the streets below their hotel. That there is this special relationship between Manhattan and the two Mont Roux reunions is insisted upon in the opening lines of the chapter depicting the first reunion at Mont Roux:

arriving mont roux bellevue sunday
dinnertime adoration sorrow rainbows

Van got this bold cable with his breakfast on Saturday, October 10, 1905, at the Manhattan Palace in Geneva, and that same day moved to Mont Roux at the opposite end of the lake. (508)

On the next page, Van writes: "Ardis, Manhattan, Mont Roux." There is a superb symmetry here in Ada, despite the novel's radically asymmetric structure: the two Ardis sojourns and the two Mont Roux reunions are balanced on the pivotal Manhattan reunion which is at once an Ardis the Third and a proto-Mont Roux.

But this poised symmetry is foreshadowed by an identical symmetry within Part 1, where Ardis the First sits on one arm of the seesaw, Ardis the Second on the other, and the Forest Fork reunion straddles the middle stretch, looking forward (see) to the bitterness of 1888, looking back (saw) to the bliss of 1884.³⁷

That the fleeting reunion at Forest Fork prefigures the structural role of the major reunion at Manhattan is verified by certain exact correlations such as Nabokov often chooses to confirm his subtlest points. Van is in Manhattan, at his father's house, when he receives that hydrogram from Ada ("call doris can meet regards vicinity") asking that he arrange a meeting. The "can meet" becomes in Van's mock-gloss "a hamlet the opposite way from Letham," and in the letter Ada writes to Van that leads to the Manhattan reunion there is a whole chorus of Hamlet allusions: "Oh dear Van, this is the last attempt I am making. You may call it a document in madness or the herb of repentance, but I wish to come and live with you, wherever you are, for ever and ever. If you scorn the maid at your window . . ." (384-85).³⁸ Because Ada has written her telegram in almost coded form, Demon (who must at all costs not know of her affair with Van) suspects this coy message is indeed from some girl, from some "tender Vicinity." At this remark "Van raised his eyes to the Boucher plafond of the breakfast room and, shaking his head in derisive admiration, commented on Demon's acumen"

³⁷ In formulaic terms the whole novel would be A1, A2, AB, B1, B2; Part 1 would be a, ab, b or A1, A1A2, A2.

³⁸ The allusions are identified below, pp. 397-400.

(178). If the hydrogram itself (the "hamlet" in Ada's message) anticipates the beginning of the Manhattan reunion (the Hamlet in her new message), Demon's response and Van's reaction anticipate its end, when Demon does find out about his children's affair. When Demon takes Van and Ada to his home (where he and Van read that hydrogram in 1886) to deliver the edict of separation, the Boucher plafond reappears in a strange transformation:

Demon lay on a gray couch in his third-floor study. His son stood at the window with his back to the silence. In a damask-padded room on the second floor, immediately below the study, waited Ada, who had arrived with Van a couple of minutes ago. In the skyscraper across the lane a window was open exactly opposite the study and an aproned man stood there setting up an easel and cocking his head in search of the right angle. (439)

Van writes a note to Ada urging her to obey Demon's command:

Do what he tells you. . . . You see, girl, how it is and must be. In the last window we shared we both saw a man painting . . . but your second-floor level of vision probably prevented your seeing that he wore what looked like a butcher's apron, badly smeared. Good-bye, girl. (444-45)

The "butcher's apron" is appropriate to Van's mood, but this butcher-painter, by recalling the painter Boucher (1703-1770), confirms that the Forest Fork meeting is meant precisely to foreshadow the structural role of the reunion at Manhattan.

On a first reading of Ada we notice in the Forest Fork reunion only the delight of Van's return to Ardis and Ada. On rereadings we become more disturbed by the apparent lack of design visible in chapters like this occurring within a period when Van and Ada are separated. This "antithetic" effect is essential, to create in us the same sense

of incompleteness and lack of control that Van feels without Ada.³⁹

But when we finally arrive at the synthetic reading, we find in the two pages of the Forest Fork reunion a perfection of structure that is rare indeed, and only one of many such perfect harmonies in Ada.

Why are we confronted by an ostentatious lack of structure (other than that provided by the unity of Van and Ada's love and the accelerating diminution of scale) long before we are allowed to see the magnificent structural inventiveness? Why does so little of Ada's structural harmony--or, to anticipate, its powerful moral force and its rich metaphysics--appear during the earliest stages of reading? Why, in short, does Nabokov work by challenge and reward?

As we have seen, Nabokov composes his works with special cunning, incorporating material carefully designed to resist the reader's immediate apprehension and to disclose, after some prying, a pearl of hidden purpose. Why? Nabokov's own answer is simple: "I just like composing riddles with elegant solutions" (SO 16). With provocative irresponsibility he attributes his methods to nothing more than his own idiosyncratic taste. The real reasons are neither wholly idiosyncratic nor even partially irresponsible.

Resistance and solution can be an exceptionally efficient means

³⁹ In Chapter 5 it will be explained why on a first reading we do not sense this loss of control: because, in brief, we know from the beginning--as the Veen children in their youth cannot know--that Van and Ada will be together late in life, and because we therefore look forward with eagerness and assurance to the next reunion, hardly noticing the brief lapses of reading time between their periods together. What are brief lapses for the reader span for Van and Ada whole years of separation without any prospect of being reunited.

to economy, an esthetic virtue any artist could appreciate. As in the Morio-Moore paragraph which ends *Ardis the First*, multiple solutions can allow an incomparable concision, offering in a few lines a multifaceted insight into details of character, points of psychology or moral evaluation, into the subtle graces of a novel's structure.

No less important is the sheer interest resistance and solution can engender. Behind the immediate attractiveness of Nabokov's prose lurk beguiling promises of hidden but extricable meaning, delightful incentives to read on and read again. The thrill of finding one reward lures us into seeking out other challenges; in the course of these new ordeals other grails will turn up to quests that had not even begun. But despite all we have found we sense that much remains elusive; since our discoveries have regularly been such piquant surprises we are enticed to return for new pleasures of discovery, to new and spicier islands. This continual return, this repeated rereading, is more deftly encouraged and more necessary in Nabokov's works than in any other fiction.

The complexities and enticements of resistance and solution draw the reader back to the novel until he reaches the point where he can see the fundamental reasons for the very process of concealment and discovery, until he can see the way this process puts in kinetic form the philosophical (epistemological, moral, metaphysical) problem of consciousness, which for Nabokov is "the greatest mystery of all" (BS 186).

Nabokov makes the relationship between reader and text an image and an enactment of the tussle between the individual mind and the world. Reality is elusive, Nabokov feels, not because it is not there

but because human understanding is limited by the very conditions of its being, and because the tireless effort of all the powers of one's consciousness is required if one is to see life as freshly and as sharply as possible. By overcoming the deadening assumption that we know enough about life to cope, by overcoming habit or lack of curiosity or attentiveness, by striving to extend the limits of our knowledge, Nabokov suggests, we can discover the bounty of life: "Pour qui sait regarder, la vie quotidienne est . . . pleine de révélations et de jouissances."⁴⁰

Nabokov encourages the reader to exercise and feel the thrill of exercising all his faculties, to delight in pitting his mind against the world. The process of rereading is essential here: it intensifies the reader's sense of what he does not know, it discourages him from accepting anything without curiosity, it poses more and more of the challenges that make possible the rewards of discovery. Consider, for instance, "mollyblob, marybud, maybubble." On a first reading the attractive euphony may be enough, but curiosity will soon prompt the good reader to reach for a dictionary: one finds that "marybud" is a genuine synonym for "marigold" and that the other two are invented derivatives of the genuine "mayblob." The mixture of obscure fact and plausible fictitiousness is an amusing delight. But after continual rereadings even the smallest details come to seem insufficiently explained by their immediate environment and provoke one's curiosity

⁴⁰ "Pouchkine, ou le vrai et le vraisemblable," Nouvelle Revue Française, 48 (1937), 377.

further--why have these invented words taken these particular forms? --until they render their secret in a sudden flash of surprised recognition (Molly Bloom!). Even now new rereadings may be needed to goad one's imagination (mine took several months to budge) if one is to see how apt the "de-flowering" in Molly's remark on maidenheads is to the loss of "marsh marigold" in translation.

Nabokov designs resistance and solution especially to provide the exhilaration, the unutterable thrill of discovery. Only by making his clues as oblique and deceptive as he does, only by confronting the reader with real resistance that imagination and curiosity must overcome can he ensure that the reader knows he has made his own way to the intoxicating triumphs prepared for him. As lepidopterologist and artist, as chess problemist and thinker, Nabokov knows that there is no substitute for experiencing oneself the sublime excitement and the bracing shock of discovery.

If in its perpetual encounter with the world around it the human mind can be repeatedly frustrated by the limitations of its knowledge, the frustrations are far more than matched by the triumphs of discovery, by the riches that observation, curiosity, memory and imagination can unearth. But there are other kinds of discoveries to be made in Nabokov's works and about one's relationship to one's world that are much less triumphant. Nabokov cherishes the tenderness, the sensitivity, the imaginative sympathy possible to human consciousness. But he recognizes the moral limitations men can impose on themselves through not endeavouring to compensate for the bias of personality and the force of self-interest, through not being ready to imagine the

feelings of others. He compels the reader to discover these limitations of moral imagination in himself and makes the shock of discovery here different indeed from an abstract knowledge of "other people's" faults. For the reader to feel this shock it is essential that at first he does respond according to bias, interest, unimaginative inconsiderateness, and that only upon rereading, perhaps only after numerous rereadings, does he find the acute moral judgments that Nabokov has woven into the fabric of the novel and that he himself has not been able to see. As we shall find in the last five chapters of this thesis moral resistance is a powerful component of Nabokov's work and the solutions can be chastening indeed, proof that the normal laziness of our sympathetic imagination may well make us capable of injuring others, proof that we are habitually disposed not to exercise the full measure of our humanity, that we are ready to limit the moral capacity of our consciousness.

If Nabokov is fascinated by the limits of human consciousness, he is also fascinated by the possibility of there being something beyond these limits, something outside human time and the blindness of human self-interest.

In "ordinary" life one may seem to feel, at rare peaks of consciousness, a strange promise of significance behind the visible world, an invigorating intimation of transcendental sense pressing through the fabric of space and time. Such bracing apprehensions of limitless promise can be among the intensest delights one can find in reading Nabokov. Solutions are not isolated but can give rise to other solutions with unforeseeable alacrity until the promise that the whole work

is about to disclose its secret significance, the mystery underlying its very world, seems to tingle in every word. In The Real Life of Sebastian Knight V writes of his half-brother's last novel:

I sometimes feel when I turn the pages of Sebastian's masterpiece that the "absolute solution" is there, somewhere, concealed in some passage I have read too hastily, or that it is intertwined with other words whose familiar guise deceived me. I don't know any other book that gives one this special sensation, and perhaps this was the author's special intention. (RLSK 180)

Like Sebastian Knight, Nabokov is fascinated by the possibility of sudden vistas of new truth, of a solution to all that has seemed riddling and inexplicable.

At their profoundest level, resistance and solution serve a double purpose in Nabokov's work. The first is the charged accumulation of meaning which builds until the reader is hurled into a new dimension of understanding by a shock that may resemble that which human consciousness might feel in passing from its time-bound mortal condition to a state beyond time in which it could trace the pattern of its world. The second purpose is to offer the reader a uniquely generous opportunity to discover the ever-deeper presence of creative choice in the novel's world and through the thrill of such discovery to partake as fully as possible of the tender thrill of creation. It may be that Nabokov even hints that the second purpose is "somehow, somewhere, connected" (Lolita 316-17) to the first.

But perhaps we can understand all this better if we look directly at Nabokov's philosophy.

II

NABOKOV AND THE WORLD

The driving force in all of Nabokov's work is the "immemorial urge" "to try to express one's position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness" (SM 218). For Nabokov human consciousness exists far above other known orders of being but far below what consciousness might imaginably attain to, and hence he proposes these divisions: "Time without consciousness--lower animal world; time with consciousness--man; consciousness without time--some still higher state" (SO 30). This ascending scale of being, essential to Nabokov's vision of things, is described in its most explicit form in Speak, Memory:

every dimension presupposes a medium within which it can act, and if, in the spiral unwinding of things, space warps into something akin to time, and time, in its turn, warps into something akin to thought, then, surely, another dimension follows--a special Space maybe, not the old one, we trust, unless spirals become vicious circles again. (301)

The structure of Nabokov's whole metaphysics retains this helical design: its initial coil is the world of space, the second the world of time, the third the world of human, time-bound consciousness, and the next, if there is another stage, a consciousness beyond time.

But before examining each of these twists of the spiral, we must take into account two essential qualities of Nabokov's mental make-up.

The first is his "innate passion for independence,"¹ a passion easily visible in his literary attitudes, in the practice of his art, in his science, his philosophy, his politics. The second is his equally marked love for pattern, whether in literature (in the surface ornateness of his prose, for instance), in his own life (his patterning the past in Speak, Memory) or in nature (the complexities of mimicry). "Independence" and "pattern" complement and oppose each other throughout each of Nabokov's divisions of the conditions of being. They form the two strands of his spiral, which thus becomes, like a DNA molecule, a double helix. We shall examine Nabokov's inquiry into the forms independence and pattern take or might take within each of the twists of his spiral.

1. Space

First, then, the world of space, "Furnished Space, l'espace meublé (known to us only as furnished and full even if its contents be 'absence of substance'...)" (Ada 504). When considering the furniture of space, Nabokov has a strong, an unmatched sense of the independence, the utter individuality of each thing, the wonder of its distinctness. In Bend Sinister Krug thinks: "We speak of one thing being like some other thing when what we are really craving to do is to describe something that is like nothing on earth" (173).

For Nabokov the world of furnished space is to be seen, enjoyed and understood in terms of live details: "Only myopia condones the

¹ Nabokov, in George Feifer, "Vladimir Nabokov: An Interview," Saturday Review, November 27, 1976, p. 22.

blurry generalizations of ignorance. In high art and pure science detail is everything" (SO 168). Things exist in specificity; it is the accumulation of details that reveals the independence of one thing from another and from the mind.

Nabokov finds the reality of the external world elusive, but not at all because he doubts its existence outside the mind.² That, he considers, is everywhere testified to by the sharpness of phenomena: "Doubting Tom should have worn spectacles" (SO 79). What makes reality so elusive is that it is infinitely richer than any single person's knowledge of it, or even the sum of science's specifications. The world is so real that it always exceeds our knowledge of its reality; the details of anything in nature--seen "under the microscope of reality (which is the only reality)" (Ada 221)--prove more myriad than man expects:

Reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialization. If we take a lily, for instance, or any other kind of natural object, a lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to an ordinary person. But it is still more real to a botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies. You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable. (SO 10-11)³

² Cf. "Sartre's First Try" (1949): "One has no special quarrel with Roquentin when he decides that the world exists" (SO 230).

³ Nabokov maintains that the scientific accumulation of information is not going to lead to a full human understanding of reality: "the greater one's science, the deeper the sense of mystery. Moreover, I don't believe that any science today has pierced any mystery" (SO 44). An image in Bend Sinister proves the point very well: a human body is now "a trillion of mysteries" "even more mysterious to us than it had

Reality is elusive not because it is doubtful whether it exists outside the mind, but because it exists out there so resolutely, so much beyond man's modes of perception and explanation in its endlessly detailed complexity, so real in even its minutest parts. As Richard Wilbur writes in "Thyme Flowering Among Rocks," the unimaginable inexhaustibleness of detail shockingly confirms the reality of a thing. He comes upon an out-of-the-way thyme flower, full of fantastic detail though the plant's absence would never have been felt and its presence might never have been noticed:

Crouching down, peering
 Into perplexed recesses,
 You find a clearing

Occupied by sun
 Where, along prone, rachitic
 Branches, one by one,

Pale stems arise,

One branch, in ending,
 Lifts a little and begets
 A straight-ascending

Spike, whorled with fine blue
 Or purple trumpets, banked in
 The leaf-axils. You

Are lost now in dense
 Fact, fact which one might have thought
 Hidden from the sense,

Blinking at detail
 Peppery as this fragrance,
 Lost to proper scale. . . .

.....
 It makes the craned head
 Spin. Unfathomed thyme! The world's
 A dream, Basho said,

Not because that dream's
 A falsehood, but because it's
 Truer than it seems.⁴

And in confirming the reality of the thing, detail also confirms the thing's independence of the mind: "strangely enough," Nabokov says, the split between ego and non-ego "is intensified the stronger the reality of the world is stressed."⁵

Detail not only vouches for the existence of things independent of the mind; it also insists that things are independent of one another: "the unique feature defeats the would-be lumpen."⁶ It is only the laziness and limitedness of human perception that makes us fail to see the differences between things, the live specificity of the phenomenon.

For Nabokov only the perception of a thing's uniqueness is worthwhile. Unless this is grasped, reality has no tang. To grasp it requires the full alertness of the conscious mind, fresh observation, an accumulation of detail, a refusal to sacrifice the discreteness of a thing. The generalization, the abstraction, the symbol, the tarnish of

⁴ Walking to Sleep (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), pp. 33-35.

⁵ "Prof. Woodbridge in an Essay on Nature Postulates the Reality of the World," New York Sun, December 10, 1940, p. 15.

⁶ Vladimir Nabokov, "Faint Rose, or the Life of an Artist Who Lived in an Ivory Tower," New York Sun, January 21, 1941, p. 11.

habit all take away the bright specificity and the independence of the phenomenon. Dreyer in King, Queen, Knave misses the recurrent stab of wonder at the distinctness of things:

Luckily for Franz, his observant uncle's interest in any object, animated or not, whose distinctive features he had immediately grasped, or thought he had grasped, gloated over and filed away, would wane with its every subsequent reappearance. The bright perception became the habitual abstraction. Natures like his spend enough energy in tackling with all the weapons and vessels of the mind the enforced impressions of existence to be grateful for the neutral film of familiarity that soon forms between the newness and its consumer. It was too boring to think that the object might change of its own accord and assume unforeseen characteristics. That would mean having to enjoy it again, and he was no longer young. (106)⁷

While the independence of phenomena in the world of Space is perceived through the alert isolation of detail, the patterns they form involve combination instead of isolation. But though independence and pattern are opposites, they are also complementary. Pattern is most intriguing for Nabokov when its perception requires uncommon attention to individual details, the details of light and shade, say, or of butterfly speciation and distribution. Victor, likely to become an unusually gifted painter, can discern or create elaborate patterns in the colours or shapes of shade because he does not accept the generalized notion of shadow and thus is able to see each shadow's unique tint, its independent characteristics:

⁷ Of the five sentences in this quotation, the second, third and fifth were added in Nabokov's "translation" (1966-1967) of the original Korol', Dama, Valet (1927-1928). The first sentence, too, is largely new.

at six, Victor already distinguished what so many adults never learn to see--the colors of shadows, the difference in tint between the shadow of an orange and that of a plum or of an avocado pear. (Pnin 90)

Similarly Nabokov's examinations of details of organic structure that enable him to differentiate butterflies also enable him to see surprising correlations:

Views may differ in regard to the hierarchic element in the classification I adopt, but no one has questioned so far the fact of the structural relationship and phylogenetic circumstances I mean it to reflect. The whole interest of Hemiargus is that it is allied to Lycaeides etc., while bearing a striking superficial resemblance to an African group with which it does not have the slightest structural affinity. ("On Some Inaccuracies in Klots' Field Guide," SO 320)

For Nabokov the most fascinatingly complex and bracing example of pattern in "the spatial world, which not only man but apes and butterflies can perceive" (SM 21-22), is natural mimicry in plants and animals. He finds the subject "a game of intricate enchantment and deception" (SM 125)--a double deception indeed, for the first is practised on the predator or pollinator, the second is reserved for the human investigator who by detailed observation recognizes the full complexity of the pattern and who must wonder at its being so deliberately designed, as it seems, for man's eyes. Nabokov writes:

The mysteries of mimicry had a special attraction for me. Its phenomena showed an artistic perfection usually associated with man-wrought things. Consider the imitation of oozing poison by bubblelike macules on a wing (complete with pseudo-refraction). . . . "Natural selection," in the Darwinian sense, could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of "the struggle for life" when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation. (SM 124-25)

In The Gift Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's father, a lepidopterologist, tells Fyodor "about the incredible artistic wit of mimetic disguise, which . . . seemed to have been invented by some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man" (122).

Nabokov's fascination with the patterning in mimicry is a compound response. First there is the sheer esthetic pleasure of complex design. Next comes the inexplicability of the pattern: the ornate and excessive elaborateness seems to rule out both chance and necessity. Last and perhaps most important is the eerie impression that the full elaborateness of the pattern seems to have been hidden specially for eventual discovery by man. We shall see that Nabokov finds the same compounded fascination in the other kinds of pattern he investigates in the higher arcs of his spiral of being.

2. Time

Time, Nabokov insists, is quite distinct from space. The hero of Look at the Harlequins! is subject to numerous mild insanities, the greatest of which is his not being able to "tell the difference between time and space" (LATH 252): no sane man could fail to distinguish them, Nabokov implies. Van Veen declares:

We reject without qualms the artificial concept of space-tainted, space-parasited time, the space-time of relativist literature. Anyone, if he likes, may maintain that Space is the outside of Time, or the body of Time, or that Space is suffused with Time and vice versa, or that in some peculiar way Space is merely the waste product of Time, even its corpse, or that in the long, infinitely long, run Time is Space; that sort of gossip may be pleasing, especially when we are young. . . . (Ada 541)

Time is a dimension of being much more difficult to comprehend than space, and accordingly Nabokov's twin interests in independence and pattern manifest themselves in the world of time in ways much more complex than those of the world of space. Here Nabokov's zeal for independence leads him to deny the existence of the future while his contrary enthusiasm for pattern leads him to examine the workings of fate.

If Nabokov establishes the independence of things in the world of space by insisting on the unending individuality of each thing, on specificity and detail, he establishes the independence of events in time by denying the future: "the future does not exist" (SO 184); "the basic element of the future . . . is its complete non-existence" (BS 43). The idea that there is a future "somewhere ahead" to which we will arrive in time is false, he points out: "the future has no such reality (as the pictured past and the perceived present possess); the future is but a figure of speech, a specter of thought" (TT 1).⁸

The idea of the future is an extrapolation from succession in the past: "At best, the 'future' is the idea of a hypothetical present based on our experience of succession, on our faith in logic and habit" (Ada 560). We hypothesize, not too unreasonably, that the succession of moments that was noted as a feature of experience in the past will continue--though Nabokov shows that even this is far from inevitable

⁸ The denial of the future is not a common philosophical position. Indeed, I can think only of the British philosopher C. D. Broad, who argued that "the future does not exist so long as it is future" (Scientific Thought [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1923], p. 69), but later rather abandoned the idea. Nabokov's analysis of the concept of the future, however, seems sounder than the work of most philosophers.

(Ada 536). But "at worst, we perform trivial tricks" (Ada 560): we extrapolate from the succession of definite states in the past to an assumption of such definite states in "the future."

Every moment "is an infinity of branching possibilities" (Ada 561), and if the state that is now the present is later than an earlier moment that had been "present," that does not make this Now the future of that earlier "Present." What lay ahead of the earlier Present was not this Now and an infinity of equally precise intervening and succeeding states, but infinite openness, an infinite succession of moments (again hypothesizing "on our experience of succession, on our faith in logic and habit"), each of which is an infinity of possibilities. That each Present after the first marked one took such-and-such a precise shape does not mean that such a shape was necessary, it merely happened to be.

We can call a given state (say, what happened on January 15, 1870) a "future" of a past moment (say, January 1, 1870) only because it is itself past. At January 1, we could postulate, "based on our experience of succession," a certain time lapse, say two weeks. But for the inhabitants of January 1 no state January 15 exists, no being, only an infinite set of possibilities. The state January 15 that matched the postulated time January 15 can be seen to have been "the" so-called "future" of January 1 only by virtue of its having been of its being past--which still does not mean that on January 1 the way January 15 actually turned out was somehow "realer" than other possibilities.

To rephrase the argument: the basic flaw in the idea of the

future is that it is assumed to contain events, not possibilities.⁹

Somehow events are considered to exist before they become. Why does this false notion arise? Simply by analogy with earlier-than and later-than relationships in the past: "Some time after Mrs Brown became pregnant, she gave birth to Eberthella. Therefore Eberthella's birth was in the future at the time of Mrs Brown's conceiving." But one cannot project the "future" back into the past in this way: Eberthella's birth at the time of Mrs Brown's conceiving was no realer (though, perhaps, more likely) than the possibilities of Mrs Brown's death before delivery or of the fetus's aborting. At the time of Mrs Brown's conceiving, "Eberthella's birth" is "later," but it is a possibility, not an event; now, after Eberthella's birth, one can say that the birth is later than the conception (as one cannot now say, for example, that the fetus aborted), but that is totally different. An earlier-than/later-than relationship between events--between possibilities that have

⁹ This assumption is made almost automatically by many philosophers. It invalidates, for instance, J. M. E. McTaggart's discussion of time, as seminal for twentieth-century philosophy as the work of Bergson: "Each position [in time] is Earlier than some, and Later than some, of the other positions. And each position is either Past, Present, or Future. The distinctions of the former class are permanent, while those of the latter are not. If M is ever earlier than N, it is always earlier. But an event, which is now present, was future and will be past." ("The Unreality of Time," Mind, N.S. 17 [1908], 458.) McTaggart distinguishes two series of relationships between "events," the "A series" (past, present, future, depending on the position of the observer) and the "B series" (earlier-later), and finds that they contradict each other and thus prove time unreal--a conclusion accepted rather unquestioningly by such renowned philosophers as Quine. In fact, the A series has events on the "past" side of any "present," and only possibilities on its "future" side. In the B series, similarly, a "later than" event is not an event but only a possibility at the earlier time; or if the series is restricted by a more rigorous definition to events, then it can only include present and past.

"become"--is quite unlike a relationship between any present moment and later possibilities.

If, then, the future can be said to exist, it is only as a continuity hypothesized on the basis of "our experience of succession, on our faith in logic and habit," and it consists not of "future events," which do not exist, but of infinitely branching possibilities--and what sort of consistency does that leave the future?

That the future is open--that the future is only possibility and that every moment is an infinity of branching possibilities--does not imply that all possibilities are equally likely to become events. It is a question of detail: the set of possibilities at each moment is infinite less because anything may happen (our world of "logic and habit" is unlikely to become a tadpole) than because the world is infinitely detailed. It seems likely that there will be a sunset tomorrow, but will I see it? Will I be facing it with a view unobstructed by whatever my surroundings will be and by whatever the weather will be? How will the sun strike what cloud-formations? What will I be thinking then? Van Veen writes for Nabokov:

nor do I believe that the future is transformed into a third panel of Time, even if we do anticipate something or other--a turn of the familiar road or the picturesque rise of two steep hills, one with a castle, the other with a church, for the more lucid the forevision the less prophetic it is apt to be.

Suddenly emphasizing that chance is the infinite product of the interacting of infinite details, the passage continues:

Had that rascal behind me decided to risk it just now he would have collided head-on with the truck that came from beyond the bend, and I and the view might have been eclipsed in the multiple smash. (Ada 550)

The infinite details in this scene include all Van Veen's past life, which alone explains why he is driving at this time in this direction; the details of his day; the invention of the internal combustion engine; the power of Van's new car; the exact configuration of the road (the engineer's choice and the road authority's plans as well as topographical features); the impatience and the whole character and history of the driver behind Van; the business designs of the enterprise despatching the truck, and so on. The loose interactions of trillions of details suddenly coincide to raise the unforeseen possibility of the crash; further subtle combinations of chance happen to make this possibility (really, this group of possibilities) not the actual event of the present, then past, moment.

In Transparent Things, one of two Nabokov novels principally about the future (the other is King, Queen, Knave, in which the arrangements of a murder are an exercise--easily foiled by life--in foreseeing the future), the superhuman narrators, who can see any level of matter or time past, cannot see "the future" any more than the human characters can. They observe that a person's destiny is not

a chain of predeterminate links: some "future" events may be likelier than others, O.K., but all are chimeric, and every cause-and-effect sequence is always a hit-and-miss affair, even if the lunette has actually closed around your neck, and the cretinous crowd holds its breath. (92)¹⁰

¹⁰ In Dedushka (The Grandfather) (Rul', October 14, 1923, p. 5),

To sum up: for Nabokov, time is an inexplicable continuity of succession, a succession that we assume will continue. But a time does not exist independent of the events and states (including states of consciousness) which by their relation constitute that time.¹¹ Now only the present or a past moment contains events or states. The so-called future is at best the assumption of continued succession, but "exists" as a succession not of states, but of possibilities. Any slice of simultaneous states or events that does form a "present" is inherently no realer before becoming present than other possibilities, and can therefore constitute no time before becoming present. No future time is a time; "the future" is at best our assumption of continued succession; it "exists" only as branching possibilities.*

Nabokov's dismissal of the future is not only philosophically sound, essential in his view to the very nature of Time, but also a satisfaction of his passion for independence, for the freedom (in this case) of human action and thought. Van Veen speaks for his creator when he says that the future is

an untranslated play, the Passer-by recalls his being saved from the guillotine at the last minute (he was standing on the scaffold with shoulders already bared) by a cry of "Fire!" It is curious that Nabokov should echo this forty-nine years later.

¹¹ This is the generally-accepted relational theory of time: that it is meaningless to envisage a stretch of time, whether one second or one century, in which there is absolutely no change in anything, in matter, motion or thought, on any level of being, known to us or not, in any plurality of universes. The theory was put forward, in opposition to Newtonian absolute time, by Leibniz (see the Third and Fifth Papers in The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence, ed. H. G. Alexander, [Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1956]), whom Nabokov greatly admires (EO.3.30). Cf. EO.2.275: "as if time can exist apart from its 'products.'"

At every moment . . . an infinity of branching possibilities. A determinate scheme would abolish the very notion of time. . . . The unknown, the not yet experienced and the unexpected, all the glorious "x" intersections, are the inherent parts of human life. The determinate scheme by stripping the sunrise of its surprise would erase all sunrises-- (Ada 560-61)

Nabokov's dismissal of the future coexists in his novels with something apparently quite incompatible with his strenuous insistence on freedom: the intrusive designs of fate. When Nabokov considers the world of pure time, his belief in utter independence leads him to deny the existence of the future, but his fascination with the mysteries of pattern induces him to experiment with the mechanisms of fate, that patterner of human lives. Readers have objected to the intrusiveness of Nabokov's Fate, but in fact Nabokov examines the subject from every angle with scientific precision and tentativeness, not a novelist's rampant irresponsibility..

He treats fate exactly as a maker of fine patterns, a master craftsman: "Let me pick out several fatidic points, cleverly disguised at the time, within the embroidery of our seven winters" (LATH 57). But the phrase "cleverly disguised at the time" reveals the essential qualification on fate's craft: it is visible only in retrospection. Nabokov writes:

As with so many phenomena of time, recurrent combinations are perceptible as such only when they cannot affect us any more-- when they are imprisoned so to speak in the past, which is the past just because it is disinfected. (BS 43)

The lurking presence of Quilty and his part in Humbert Humbert's fate is obvious to the reader of Lolita--but only since Humbert, because he is

looking back on his past, can make it clear to the reader:

I now warn the reader not to mock me and my mental daze. It is easy for him and me to decipher now a past destiny; but a destiny in the making is, believe me, not one of those honest mystery stories where all you have to do is to keep an eye on the clues. In my youth I once read a French detective tale where the clues were actually in italics; but that is not McFate's way-- (212-13)

What may be the patterns of fate can be clumsy, subtle, or inexplicable: the heavy hand of calamity; a delicate flexibility that may be chance or design; the baffling presence of coincidence or foreshadowing.

At its simplest, fate may be mere calamity, the heavy-handedness of life. Fate acting through catastrophe may form its intrusive patterns either through consequences or through causes. When on the very eve of Humbert's arrival in Ramsdale lightning burns down the McCoo house,¹² where Humbert expects to board, the causality seems, in human terms, no pattern but only stupendous chance, the insurance man's "act of God." But in later retrospection it can be placed in the significant pattern of Humbert's nymphetolepsy, for because of the emergency he is offered a room by Charlotte Haze, Lolita's mother. In a subsequent accident,

¹² Lightning is specified as the cause of the fire in LS. The information that follows comes from both Lolita and LS. The miscegenation is illicit (some parts are mutually exclusive: the Junk setter becomes the Jung collie) but triply justified: the burning of the McCoo house, Charlotte's accident and the "pest of a dog" are in both works; Nabokov came to regret omitting the McCoo house scenes from the novel for which they were written (LS x); and certain emphases in the treatment of fate are added to the screenplay as compensation for the loss of Humbert's reflections on the theme--which only shows how essential Nabokov felt it to be to any treatment of the Lolita story--or to make explicit the motivation implicit in the novel.

Charlotte's being killed by a car, it is the elaborate causes that form the suggestive pattern of fate. There is a mixture of pure chance (the coincidence in space and time of dog, car, and tear-blinded Charlotte) and of pure but totally undesigning causality (the discovered diary, the letters it calls forth that must at once be posted across the street, the blinding tears):

I had palpated the very flesh of fate--and its padded shoulder. A brilliant and monstrous mutation had suddenly taken place, and here was the instrument. Within the intricacies of the pattern (hurrying housewife, slippery pavement, a pest of a dog, steep grade, big car, baboon at its wheel), I could dimly distinguish my own vile contribution. Had I not been such a fool--or such an intuitive genius--to preserve that journal, fluids produced by vindictive anger and hot shame would not have blinded Charlotte in her dash to the mailbox. But even had they blinded her, still nothing might have happened, had not precise fate, that synchronizing phantom, mixed within its alembic the car and the dog and the sun and the shade and the wet and the weak and the strong and the stone. (Lolita 105)

The two major accidents together form a pattern of bizarre coincidence which seems to suggest fate is controlling all to bring Humbert and Lolita together. But this leaves out the constant meshing of chance and free will: had not Humbert been tempted by the thought of lodging with Ginny McCoo, he would never have come to Ramsdale; had not Charlotte been tempted (LS 28) by the thought of "a professor of French poetry" (LS 23) she may not have offered to take in the McCoo's stranded lodger; had not Humbert by chance spotted Lolita, he would not have stayed at 342 Lawn Street; had not Charlotte, overripe for love, forced Humbert to choose marriage or departure, the nymphetolept would not have married her and thus ensured his access to Lolita after Charlotte's death; had Humbert's cruelty not appeared in the diary, had Charlotte's

possessive curiosity not led her to it, and so on, and so on. When lightning installs Humbert in Lolita's house, when Lolita's mother is eliminated by a car, fate's axe falls as if only in fulfilment of Humbert's dreams. Yet even this dreamlike grossness of fate would have meant nothing in Humbert's life without free will and chance.

"Fate" may work by the gross intervention of accidents in life. But, Nabokov suggests, it may also be operating busily in ways less discernible and more flexible than we have ever suspected.

Fate's method might be to combine chance and causality with such delicacy and flexibility, such reluctance to appear overtly, that only a faint hint of persistence could alert one to the possibility of fate's having an end in mind. It might prepare for its designed end a subtle plan delicately combining chance and apparently unrelated threads of causality, and if "a minute mistake (the shadow of a flaw, the stopped hole of an unwatched possibility, a caprice of free will) spoils the necessitarian's pleasure" (RLSK 97), it might then work out new plans of equal delicacy until its purpose is fulfilled. At an ominous moment in *Ada* Demon's suddenly swerving to avoid an acquaintance "advancing toward him . . . along his side of the street" foils an elaborate little plan, but "precisely in regard to such a contingency, Fate had prepared an alternate continuation" (433-34).

If one were to look back on and examine minutely a major change in one's life, it might be possible to discern a pattern in what had seemed an aimless meshing of chance and slack, seemingly discrete strands of causality. Knowing the significance of the outcome might enable one to discern the pattern of persistence in the seemingly random

antecedents of the event. In The Gift unrelated scenes and lines of plot prove to have been near-meetings of Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev and Zina Mertz; when they finally meet it is an apparently incidental by-product of other lines of development in Fyodor's life. It is only after their love has blossomed that Fyodor (and with his help the reader) discovers how fate seems repeatedly to have striven to bring himself and Zina together. Is it simply his new sense of the sweet inevitability of his love for Zina that leads Fyodor to see the pattern of Fate's successive attempts to unite them? Or is it rather that his love prompts him to examine the past with the tenderer care needed to distinguish "the development and repetition of the secret themes of an evident fate"?¹³ Is the design Fyodor discerns only a reflection of his wishes or, as the novel suggests, has he glimpsed fate, has he had a special insight into the flexible patterns of purpose in time?

The structural basis of Success, the second novel of Nabokov's Sebastian Knight, is surprisingly like that of The Gift. When the past is examined to see how two lovers were first brought together, the circumstances of their meeting are seen to be a combination of chance, routine, irrelevant lines of causality:¹⁴

¹³ This quotation comes from Nabokov's foreword to the Russian version of his autobiography: "Its aim is to describe the past with the utmost exactness and to search out the significant outlines in it, namely: the development and repetition of the secret themes of an evident fate" ("... razvitie i povtorenie taynih tem v yavnoy sud'be") (DB 7).

¹⁴ Cf. two more remarkably similar expressions of exactly the same theme: "awed at the bungling of destiny" (Krug's wife after discovering a missed opportunity of meeting Krug earlier in life, BS 137); "I met the first of my three or four successive wives in somewhat odd

The meeting is or seems accidental: both happen to use the same car belonging to an amiable stranger on a day the buses went on strike. . . . The author's task is . . . to discover the exact way in which two lines of life were made to come into contact,--the whole book indeed being but a glorious gamble on causalities or, if you prefer, the probing of the aetiological secret of aleatory occurrences. . . . Working backwards the author finds out why the strike was fixed to take place that particular day and a certain politician's life-long predilection for the number nine is found to be at the root of the business. . . . Another false scent is the stranger's car. . . . (RLSK 96)

To find exactly why man and girl come to stand side by side on the curb it is necessary to trace the life of each back a little way, and it is discovered that

there have been at least two occasions in these two peoples' [sic] lives when unknowingly to one another they all but met. In each case fate seemed to have prepared such a meeting with the utmost care; touching up now this possibility now that one; . . . leaving nothing to chance. (97)

But unforeseen chance or free will do jam these elaborate traps. Yet

fate is much too persevering to be put off by failure. And when finally success is achieved it is reached by such delicate machinations that not the merest click is audible when at last the two are brought together. (98)

Nabokov raises the possibility that, could the past be scrutinized finely enough--with a novelist's power or the endless curiosity of a gifted lover--a pattern of fate might emerge: fate with infinite care combining possibilities and, if foiled, preparing "an

circumstances, the development of which resembled a clumsy conspiracy. . . . Yet out of those very mistakes he [the "main plotter"] unwittingly wove a web, in which a set of reciprocal blunders on my part caused me to be involved and fulfil the destiny that was the only aim of the plot." (LATH 3)

alternate continuation" (Ada 434). The successful continuation might, indeed, prove to be that in which fate's plan of attack had been most oblique. From one angle it seems a mixture of pure chance, routine, and the casual crossing of lines of causality; from another, the triumph of and key to another of destiny's designs. Because so subtle a fate would allow freedom, the possibility of failure, it would be hard to discern, yet the very persistence of its efforts after early failures would form the pattern that would disclose the secret intent.

The most disturbing kinds of fatidic pattern in time are those (abundant in Nabokov's novels) of temporal coincidence and of apparent foreshadowing, of portents and prophecies. Even these, though, do not break the "no future" rule. They can be considered prophetic only after the event: "the innocent incident will turn out to possess, if jotted down and looked up later, the kind of precognitive flavor . . ." (Ada 361).

In Transparent Things even the considerably more than human consciousnesses of the ghostly narrators do not see any future, but they do recognize two types of what appear to be prophetic signs: images of falling and of fire. Aware of the plans of an arsonist, they link the two groups of signs and expect that Hugh Person will die trying to jump from his hotel room to escape the fire. They are wrong: the fire kills him too quickly. The fire motif is confirmed to have been prophetic only in retrospect,¹⁵ but it seems to have been created by a

¹⁵ By this time the fall motif is understood to be merely echoing the past, the deaths of Hugh's father and wife.

patterner, someone who can create the future he wants. One has to leave the confines of the book's world to see who this is: Nabokov. Or, to interpret the metaphor, such mighty control of fate and future could exist, but only infinitely beyond even the enormously expanded human consciousnesses of Transparent Things, only in the hands of a creator in a realm of being forever beyond their access.

At this level pattern in time, perhaps the pattern of a fore-knowing fate, is eerie, and invigoratingly unfathomable. A fatidic "number, a dream, a coincidence," Nabokov says, "can affect me obsessively--though not in the sense of absurd fears but as fabulous (and on the whole rather bracing) scientific enigmas incapable of being stated, let alone solved" (SO 177). Perhaps one can only say, with Van, that "portents and prophecies" make one feel one is "catching sight of the lining of time" (Ada 227).

3. Consciousness

After space and time comes the third arc in Nabokov's spiral of being, the richest we know: consciousness in time, or "time with consciousness--man" (SO 30). For Nabokov "consciousness is the only real thing in the world and the greatest mystery of all" (BS 186).

Human consciousness, Nabokov insists, is intimately bound up with time, a medium "quite different from the spatial world, which not only man but apes and butterflies can perceive" (SM 21-22). Having dismissed the future, he finds the present and the past left for human consciousness. Indeed, human consciousness is absolutely distinguished

from the animal, Nabokov considers, by its special relationship to both aspects of time, to present and past. Man's consciousness, by being reflexive, "conscious not only of matter but also of its own self" (*Lolita* 262), has a unique involved detachment from the present:

Being aware of being aware of being. . . . if I not only know that I am but also know that I know it, then I belong to the human species. All the rest follows--the glory of thought, poetry, a vision of the universe. In that respect, the gap between ape and man is immeasurably greater than the one between amoeba and ape. (*SO* 142)

Human consciousness has a special relationship to the past, too, a detached involvement, in the capacity of memory. Completing the remark above, Nabokov declared that the "difference between an ape's memory and human memory is the difference between an ampersand and the British Museum library."

Nabokov's rage for freedom makes him feel that man is cruelly confined, by the very nature of his consciousness, to the present moment. Yet at the same time within the present man's reflexive consciousness is wonderfully free, the bounty of sense, emotion and thought glorious. Through memory, moreover, man is further liberated, able to range beyond the present moment, at least in imagination. And when memory is working at its highest, when it is patterning the past, Nabokov feels that man can taste the flavour of full independence, of a consciousness no longer bound by time.

Nabokov repeatedly stresses that human consciousness is inseparable from the time in which it dwells, the mobile present of perception. "I can imagine anything," Van insists (*Ada* 478), yet the mind is quite

strictly finite: it operates only within the present. At no time in one's life can one think to oneself (and be right): "This is not Now."¹⁶ As Van says, "This nowness is the only reality we know; it follows the colored nothingness of the no-longer and precedes the absolute nothingness of the future. Thus, in a quite literal sense, we may say that conscious human life lasts always only one moment." (549-50)

Because human self-awareness dwells only in the present, the human "sense of Time is a sense of continuous becoming" (Ada 559), a perpetual sense of present being from which self-consciousness cannot advance or retire, coupled with a recognition of the utter absence of all other moments in which one has known just this intense feel of presentness, the feeling that this is the moment of my being. Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev suggests the paradox in this present one cannot stay within yet can never step out of is merely the result of an illusion that is built into the structure of man's mind:

Our mistaken feeling of time as a kind of growth is a consequence of our finiteness which, being always on the level of the present, implies its constant rise between the watery abyss of the past and the aerial abyss of the future. (Gift 354)

Nabokov strongly suspects that the human sense of becoming and of time is illusory, for it accentuates the utter difference between all one's past experience and one's self-awareness in the present:

Certain mind pictures have become so adulterated by the concept of "time" that we have come to believe in the actual existence

¹⁶ Not to be confused with statements like "the moment in which I am saying this is already gone."

of a permanently moving bright fissure (the point of perception) between our retrospective eternity which we cannot recall and the prospective one which we cannot know. (BS 173-74)

The dwelling of human consciousness within the absurd present is an inescapable confinement: "the prison of time is spherical and without exits" (SM 20). This is the greatest of all barriers to the freedom Nabokov longs for. He rages at "the walls of time separating me and my bruised fists from the free world of timelessness" (SM 20). The mind is confined in the present and away from the past, from events that have been, from "immobile time" (LATH 168). By the nature of human consciousness we are locked from the vivid being, the rich self-awareness of even the personal past we have lived through.

Nabokov's passion for independence, for untrammelled enjoyment, makes him see the position of consciousness in time as one of humiliating limitation. Yet his exasperation at this limitation comes not from any feeling of the paltriness of the gifts of consciousness, but from a sense of their fantastic richness: he bemoans "the utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence" (SM 297). That an individual's self-awareness should be limited to the present moment and obliterated by death is grotesque in the face of the riches of perception, emotion and thought and the enormous freedoms of the mind.

If one's confinement to time is ridiculous, one's freedom of consciousness within time is exhilarating. Depicting his simultaneous recognition in infancy of selfhood and time, Nabokov writes:

I felt myself plunged abruptly into a radiant and mobile medium that was none other than the pure element of time. One shared

it--just as excited bathers share shining seawater--with creatures that were not oneself but that were joined to one by time's common flow, an environment quite different from the spatial world. (SM 21)

It is within the restrictions of time that one savours the boundless delights of consciousness: sense, emotion, thought.

Perhaps no writer has cared as much as Nabokov for the rapture of the senses, the precision of perception, the glory of consciousness in its apprehension of the things of the world. At one moment he is scientific sensualist and poetic pedant: "the little Vaporiser fellow [the caterpillar of the Persian Vaporiser, a tussock moth], its black coat enlivened all along the back with pointed tufts, red, blue, yellow, of unequal length, like those of a fancy toothbrush treated with certified colors" (Ada 55). At another, he wafts the reader back to the curiosity and sweet terror of childhood in a masterpiece of empathetic recreation, using touch, smell, sight and sound to place one wholly within the thudding boy who

had the fantastic pleasure of creeping through that pitch-dark tunnel, where I lingered a little to listen to the singing in my ears--that lonesome vibration so familiar to small boys in dusty hiding places--and then, in a burst of delicious panic, on rapidly thudding hands and knees I would reach the tunnel's far end, push its cushion away, and be welcomed by a mesh of sunshine on the parquet under the canework of a Viennese chair and two gamesome flies settling by turns. (SM 23)

Because Nabokov is interested in the non-human, some poor readers have concluded he is not interested in the human, in human emotions. But it is just because of the bounty, the inexplicable magnitude of emotion that Nabokov feels he needs to know the place of

human life in the cosmos, amidst the non-human:

Whenever I start thinking of my love for a person, I am in the habit of immediately drawing radii from my love--from my heart, from the tender nucleus of a personal matter--to monstrously remote points of the universe. Something impels me to measure the consciousness of my love against such unimaginable and incalculable things as . . . the dreadful pitfalls of eternity, the unknowledgeable beyond the unknown, the helplessness, the cold, the sickening involutions and interpenetrations of space and time. . . . I must know where I stand, where you and my son stand. (SM 296-97)

The quick flicking from emotion to emotion in the short stories, a giant wave of tenderness in Speak, Memory; quiet married love and helpless loneliness in Pale Fire, unjust misery in Bend Sinister or "Signs and Symbols," the wry pathos of a Pnin, the happiness of young Van and Ada, the intricacies of twisted passion, cruelty and real and tender love in Humbert Humbert--these are some of the fascinatingly rich and strange possibilities of emotive consciousness. If Nabokov treats emotion in bizarre, unsettling ways it is because he feels how bizarre and unsettling this tumult of feeling is in "obscenely brief" lives on a "pinpoint planet" (Ada 314-220).

"I trust that my reader . . . will agree with me that there is nothing more splendid than lone thought" (Ada 540). The rapid range, the teasing energy, the metaphoric and metaphysical tumble of Nabokov's works celebrate the munificence of thought even when they show thought unable to keep up with itself:

Now let us have this quite clear. What is more important to solve: the "outer" problem (space, time, matter, the unknown without) or the "inner" one (life, thought, love, the unknown within) or again their point of contact (death)? For we agree, do we not, that problems as problems do exist even if

the world be something made of nothing within nothing made of something. Or is "outer" and "inner" an illusion too, so that a great mountain may be said to stand a thousand dreams high and hope and terror can be as easily charted as the capes and bays they helped to name? (BS 173)

Perception, emotion, thought--the materials of consciousness all have the endless wealth, the boundlessness in which Nabokov delights, even if the medium of their coming into being, the brief present of awareness, seems a cruel limitation.

And although one can--Nabokov always does--imagine consciousness existing under far freer conditions than having to be confined to this present moment, consciousness within the present of perception is wonderfully free. The narrating voice in any of Nabokov's novels may act as an unnoticed lens (the eye of history in direct communication with the reader's eye), passively observing a scene it feigns not to have created or, caught by a sudden sparkle, it might move in, a magnifying glass now, on a cluster of details. It may then start to take stock of itself perceiving, let slip it is actually creating, wrench itself awkwardly out of the consciousness it has been transparently following or glide unnoticed into another. Or it may withdraw while the scene goes on, and remember or create something quite different, or address itself or anyone else, or watch itself remembering or creating or "[b]eing aware of being aware of being" (SO 142). What better way of letting the reader share in the capacity of the mind to delight in the world or itself, to stay within its physical situation or withdraw into the space behind sensation?

Nabokov does find the present of consciousness grotesquely

restricting in comparison with the freedom he can imagine. Yet he also feels the vast bountifulness of the materials of consciousness and the glorious freedom, within the present of self-awareness, of the mind's manoeuvres: "I love and revere the present."¹⁷

Though human consciousness operates only within the present, it has access to wider reaches of time. True, the future is excluded, for if "we make a third compartment of fulfilled expectation, the foreseen, the foreordained, the faculty of prevision, perfect forecast, we are still applying our mind to the Present" (Ada 560). But the past does exist, even if one has access to the funds of personal past in one's account only over the counter of the present.

For man the past exists only in terms of memory operating within the present of consciousness: "I also know that you, and, probably, I, were born, but that does not prove we went through the chroral phase called the Past: my Present, my brief span of consciousness, tells me I did" (Ada 535). Yet on the other hand the present "is but memory in the making" (Ada 559), what we perceive is "a form of memory, even at the moment of its perception" (Ada 221). Thus to the extent that our present perception of a particular scene is alert and precise, our chance of being able to recall it accurately in memory is increased, our capacity to transcend the confinement of a later present is enhanced. Nabokov has no peers in being able to recreate a remembered scene with all the specificity of the original perception. Across a gap of forty

¹⁷ In an interview with Willa Petchek, "Nabokov since Lolita," Observer Magazine, May 30, 1976, p. 17.

years, he writes,

I note the small helicopter of a revolving samara that gently descends upon the tablecloth, and, lying across the table, an adolescent girl's bare arm indolently extended as far as it will go, with its turquoise-veined underside turned up to the flaky sunlight, the palm open in lazy expectancy. . . . (SM 171)

An individual expands the dimensions of his existence, escapes the limitation of the isolated present, not only by being able to recall a particular scene from the past but by being able to discern the continuity in his memories. For Nabokov, indeed, the very definition of personal identity is the retention of specific memories and the apprehension of their continuity: "'To be' means to know one 'has been'" (Ada 559). If personal identity is defined thus, the responsibilities of memory are enormous, the "shaping and strengthening of that backbone of consciousness, which is the Time of the strong" (Ada 559). The order and exactness of one's memories form the measure of the very degree of one's existence--in a way, a horrifying thought:

Oh, he remembers his old enemies, of course, and two or three books he has read, and how the man thrashed him for falling off a woodpile and crushing to death a couple of chicks: that is, a certain crude mechanism of memory does function in him, but, if the gods were to propose that he synthesize himself out of his memories, with the condition that the synthesized image be rewarded with immortality, the result would be a dim embryo, an infant born prematurely, a blind and deaf dwarf, in no sense capable of immortality. ("Tyrants Destroyed," TD 24)

If the past is accessible to the human mind only through traces available to present consciousness, this does not mean that only the present exists, that the past ceases to exist. The inaccessibility of the past seems tantamount to its no longer existing, to its being in a

sense unreal. But it is in no way comparable with the inaccessibility of the future. In the future, events do not exist, only possibilities; nothing has come into being. In the past, events have come into being, and their inaccessibility to our consciousness is a reflection not on the state of existence of these events but on our consciousness. The master, clutching a pencil with an abraded eraser, sits in his arm-chair; outside, beyond the balcony, a coot scoots. The moment is real, and it is not less real because in a year's time it is accessible, if at all, only in a mental trace. The past exists all around, Nabokov suggests, but outside our consciousness: "had our organs and orgitrons not been asymmetrical, our view of Time might have been amphitheatric and altogether grand, like ragged night and jagged mountains around a small, twinkling, satisfied hamlet" (Ada 539). Or again, "everything is the present situated like a radiance outside our blindness" (Gift 354). Thus the past is fully accessible to the ghostly narrators of Transparent Things, human consciousnesses that have passed through death. It is not directly accessible to mortal man, but to know through the indirections of memory that one inhabits the past can be to recognize that one shares the "deathless reality" (Mary 62)--perceivable and perhaps even perceived by some more-than-human consciousness--of a past event.

Nabokov writes: "I witness with pleasure the supreme achievement of memory, which is the masterly use it makes of innate harmonies when gathering to its fold the suspended and wandering tonalities of the past" (SM 170). He likes to treat mortal memory, "individual recollection, and its expression in words" (SM 24), as the forerunner of a

consciousness to which the past is directly accessible, not merely evocable in the present through traces in the memory, the forerunner of a consciousness which can endlessly reinvestigate the past, discovering new patterns, new harmonies. Such a form of consciousness would satisfy Nabokov's passion for full freedom (freedom from confinement to the present and away from the past) as it satisfied his love for pattern.

In his autobiography Nabokov tells of a general, a friend of the family, who in 1904 shows four-year-old Vladimir a disappointing little match trick. In 1919 a man in peasant attire who asks Nabokov's father for a light turns out to be the general in disguise. "What pleases me is the evolution of the match theme. . . . The following of such thematic designs through one's life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography." (SM 27) The discovery of pattern of this type not only affords an immediate esthetic thrill but seems to Nabokov to prefigure the powers of an immortal consciousness for whom time did not exist and who could bring to light endless pattern in an always available past. Such arranging of pattern in events, Nabokov feels, is the supreme negation of time and the restrictions it places on consciousness: "I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another." (SM 139) Cincinnatus C., in Invitation to a Beheading, uses exactly the same image for the timeless patterning of time. "Not here," he writes, not in this world, but

there time takes shape according to one's pleasure, like a figured rug whose folds can be gathered in such a way that two designs will

meet--and the rug is once again smoothed out, and you live on, or else superimpose the next image on the last, endlessly, endlessly, with the leisurely concentration of a woman selecting a belt to go with her dress. . . . (93-94)

Nabokov delights in the freedoms of human consciousness, the unending richness of the materials with which it can work. But his passionate desire for independence makes him see human consciousness as a very confining state compared with the greater freedoms he can imagine--the freedom, above all, to move out of the cell of the present, into the presence of all that has come into being, and to enjoy endlessly the riches of time available under such a dispensation. Memory always allows a partial release from ruthless enslavement to the present, but it is only when memory satisfies his passion for pattern that Nabokov feels he is near to savouring the full freedom of timelessness, consciousness without the degradation of loss.

4. Beyond

Nabokov, as we have seen, proposes that "if, in the spiral unwinding of things, space warps into something akin to time, and time, in its turn, warps into something akin to thought, then, surely, another dimension follows--a special Space maybe, not the old one, we trust, unless spirals become vicious circles again" (SM 301). The new dimension is only a proposition, but it is true that if one wants to know the position of human consciousness in the universe one must take into account the possibility of states beyond consciousness. Is human consciousness final in the universe, or is it an arc of a continuing spiral

of being? May it even itself become, after death, the next arc? Not to know the answers to these questions, Nabokov thinks, is tantamount to gaping dumbfoundedly at life's "complete unreality," at "the marvel of consciousness--that sudden window swinging open on a sunlit landscape amidst the night of non-being."¹⁸

Nothing could be more surprising than suddenly to discover that the night of non-being was in fact unglimped day. But such surprise is essential to Nabokov's thought: the possibility of a sudden shift in understanding that the persistence of human consciousness beyond death would entail, the possibility of a drastically non-human way of seeing the universe that would be open to some higher forms of consciousness. With the unimaginable change in vantage from the human to the non-human, from the mortal to the timeless, everything might be fantastically different. Everything that has seemed to us solid might start to flap in the cosmic breeze, everything that has seemed opaque might become translucent or incandescent, every value we have might be instantly readjusted. Finding out that consciousness exists beyond its human form could change all our previous notions in a trice. The novelist R., whose ghost "actually" writes Transparent Things, records on his deathbed that "the favors of death knowledge are infinitely more precious than those of love" (82). "Death knowledge" seems all-deciding indeed after a passage such as this:

This is the moment when a wave of light suddenly floods the book. . . . We feel that we are on the brink of some absolute truth, dazzling in its splendour and at the same time almost homely in its perfect simplicity. By an incredible feat of suggestive

¹⁸ Feifer interview, p. 22.

wording, the author makes us believe that he knows the truth about death and that he is going to tell it. In a moment or two, at the end of this sentence, in the middle of the next, or perhaps a little further still, we shall learn something that will change all our concepts. . . . "The hardest knot is but a meandering string; tough to the fingernails, but really a matter of lazy and graceful loopings. The eye undoes it, while clumsy fingers bleed. He (the dying man) was that knot, and he would be untied at once, if he could manage to see and follow the thread. And not only himself, everything would be unravelled;--everything that he might imagine in our childish terms of space and time, both being riddles invented by man as riddles, and thus coming back at us: the boomerangs of nonsense. . . ."

. . . And the word, the meaning which appeared is astounding in its simplicity: the greatest surprise being perhaps that in the course of one's earthly existence, with one's brain encompassed by an iron ring, by the close-fitting dream of one's own personality--one had not made by chance that simple mental jerk, which would have set free imprisoned thought. . . . (RLSK 178-79)

What fascinates Nabokov is not the possibility of some specific revelation--he would think anything we could imagine almost certain to be wrong (and too dull) because imaginable--but the shock of the intensity and completeness of the change from "imprisoned" human thought.

Imprisoned indeed: man's knowledge of the universe he inhabits, Nabokov feels, is harshly confined. Man is capable of perceiving his own and previous twists of the spiral of being--space, time, consciousness--but even these remain beyond his comprehension: "We shall never know the origin of life, or the meaning of life, or the nature of space and time, or the nature of nature, or the nature of thought" (SO 45).

We do not know why the visible universe exists, what are the conditions of its existing, or what role chance and design have in the whole.

Fyodor states the case with delightful dismissiveness: "The absurdity at which searching thought arrives is only a natural, generic sign of its belonging to man, and striving to obtain an answer is the same as

demanding of chicken broth that it began [sic] to cluck" (Gift 354).

Human reasoning is inevitably circular: "human thoughts, admirably coordinated though they may be, cannot escape the confines of their private circle of hell" (KOK 225). Adam Falter, who has become quite non-human after having had the essence of things revealed to him, tells his interlocutor: "Logical reasoning may be a most convenient means of mental communication for covering short distances, but the curvature of the earth, alas, is reflected even in logic. . . . logical development inexorably becomes an envelopment." ("Ultima Thule," RB 169).¹⁹

Man cannot reason outside the circle set by the limits of his being; cannot know what sort of consciousness could "enjoy other varieties of being and dreaming, beyond man's notion of Time" (Ada 536) or how human life might appear to a consciousness outside the bounds of human thought. But that man knows nothing of what lies outside his circular cell need not mean that there is nothing there. There may be nothing beyond human consciousness, but it is just as possible that man's utter ignorance of states beyond his own is merely another instance of his confinement. Nabokov considers there is no need for the possibility of other states of being to depend on notions man's limited thought can form.

Surely, Nabokov asks, it is imperative for man to know what he cannot know: whether other states of being exist. If there are states

¹⁹ The image of the circle of human thought recurs throughout Nabokov: see, for instance, Despair 73 and BS 173. In Bend Sinister the central character, Krug, is one of the foremost philosophers of his day; his name is the Russian for "circle."

of being beyond the restrictions of human consciousness and beyond human apprehension, do we participate in them after death? Nabokov knows we cannot answer this, but his passion for the fullest freedom makes him imagine what a "yes" to this question might mean. If remote states of being exist, do they participate in our world? Nabokov's imagined yesses to this question reveal his strange love of pattern. But while he is a prolific producer of possible, often enticing, sometimes disconcerting, answers to these humanly unanswerable questions, he never disregards the limits of the knowable.

Let us consider the first of these questions, whether there is human participation in a freer state of consciousness; "the free world of timelessness" (SM 20) outside man's confinement to the conscious present and to mortality. Nabokov sees human consciousness as a circular prison, a vicious circle, but he sees the possibility of going beyond it: "The spiral is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free." (SM 275) Perhaps what seems to be the confining circle of human consciousness can break free of itself, can begin to spiral outwards. A peep past the brain's iron ring might come in the momentary insight of ecstasy, and a final breaking free in death--"not the crude anguish of physical death but the incomparable pangs of the mysterious mental maneuver needed to pass from one state of being to another" (TT 104). And if a state beyond death cannot be examined by the reason, it can be explored by the imagination.

Perhaps at special moments the mind can see beyond itself, perhaps "the hereafter stands slightly ajar in the dark" (LATH 26).

Nabokov writes of "shadows linking our state of existence to those other states we dimly apprehend in our rare moments of irrational perception" (NG 145). One should not be misled by the "dimly" and the "irrational" here: Nabokov is no infatuate of mystic fog, and his "irrational perception" is ~~not~~ less than rational, but super-rational, lucidity and beyond. A possible hint of something larger than human consciousness is likely to come only when consciousness is already working at its alertest, when mystery is met by acuteness: "It is certainly not then--not in dreams--but when one is wide awake, at moments of robust joy and achievement, on the highest terrace of consciousness, that mortality has a chance to peer beyond its own limits" (CE 29).²⁰

When perception, emotion or thought are pulsing through one's being in a wide-awake surge of ecstasy, love or inspiration the spirit can find "loopholes, translucences in the world's finest texture. . . . and stealthily into the eternal pass through" ("How I Love You," PP 81).²¹

²⁰ In the Russian version, Nabokov adds: "na machte, na perevale, za rabochim stolom" ("on a mast, on a [mountain] pass, at the work table") (DB 42). This then becomes "from the mast, from the past and its castle tower" (SM 50). The passage and its permutations, the "highest . . . consciousness" of the first version, the added "pass" of the second, and the "past" of the third, are strangely echoed in Ada 549: "Now blows the wind of the Present at the top of the Past--at the top of the passes I have been proud to reach in my life, the Umbrail, the Fluella, the Furka, of my clearest consciousness!" The "castle tower" of the past (SM version) might with this hint (a point of clear sight "at the top of the Past") be taken to mean the present of consciousness.

²¹ In the Russian original: "Lazeyki . . . prosveti v tonchay-shey tkani mirovoy. . . . i v vechnoe proydı ukradkoyu naskvoz'" ("Kak ya lyublyu tebya," PP 80).

Nabokov admits that such an intimation of something beyond mortality's limits, beyond ordinary apprehension, cannot be clear, yet part of its intensity is that it is so inexplicably convincing: "although nothing much can be seen through the mist, there is somehow the blissful feeling that one is looking in the right direction" (SM 50). The conviction remains vague, merely a sense that there is more than the ordinarily visible:

But one day while disrupting the strata of sense
and descending deep down to my wellspring
I saw mirrored, besides my own self and the world,
something else, something else, something else.
("Fame," PP 113)²²

Yet if it is misted and faint "the beyond's fresh breath" (SQ 227) penetrates one's being with an exhilarating hope, an uncertain but invigorating waft of liberation.

But whatever irrational and intense yet very subjective perception suggests, death remains an unpromising blank to man's reason.

Falter in "Ultima Thule" says:

For look what happens in the case of the poor little human mind. Either it has no way to express what awaits you--I mean, us--after death . . . or, on the contrary, death can be imagined, and then one's reason naturally adopts not the notion of eternal life, an unknown entity, incongruent with anything terrestrial, but precisely that which seems more probable--the familiar darkness of stupor. (RB 177)

Nabokov sees both alternatives clearly. Death may be mere nullity,

²² In the Russian original: "No odnazhdi, plasti razumen'ya drobya, uglublyayas' v svoyo klyuchevoe, ya uvidel, kak v zerkale, mir, i sebya, i drugoe, drugoe, drugoe" ("Slava," PP 112).

"blank and black, an everlasting nonlastingness" (Ada 585) or it may be something outside human time, and hence "an unknown entity, incongruent with anything terrestrial": "Death . . . is perhaps a surprise, perhaps nothing."²³

If death is the mere blank of non-existence, Van Veen muses, "what courage man must have had to go through that commonplace again and again and not give up the rigmarole of accumulating again and again the riches of consciousness that will be snatched away!" (Ada 585). Certainly man cannot see anything in death, yet perhaps it is not nothing. With the help of two of his favorite writers, Pierre Delalande (1768-1849) and Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, both his own inventions, Nabokov lucidly suggests how it might be that man could see nothing of a real something beyond death. If man cannot see past death, perhaps it is simply because life reflects only life, and death is a step outside life:

I know that death in itself is in no way connected with the topography of the hereafter, for a door is merely the exit from the house and not a part of its surroundings, like a tree or a hill. One has to get out somehow, "but I refuse to see in a door more than a hole, and a carpenter's job" (Delalande, Discours sur les ombres, p. 45). . . . The other world surrounds us always and is not at all at the end of some pilgrimage. In our earthly house, windows are replaced by mirrors; the door, until a given time, is closed; but air comes in through the cracks. (Gift 321-22)

In an exceptional spiritual state, in a rare systole of the

²³ From the play Smert' ("Death"), Rul', May 20, 1923, p. 13. In the Russian original: "Edmond: . . . smert'-- Gonvil: --bit' mozhet udivlenie, bit' mozhet--nichego."

soul, one may feel one's utter ignorance of the existence of something beyond consciousness to be just slightly relieved. Air does come in through the cracks, Nabokov suggests, "penetrating our being with the beyond's fresh breath" (SO 227). But we remain locked within the house of life, we cannot see out; the mirrors reflect ourselves and our surroundings, we have no access to the outside. Nabokov, with his passion for freedom, seethes at being under house arrest for life and sneaks outside in imagination. Cincinnatus C., sentenced to death, mutters to his executioner:

"You speak of escape . . . I think, I surmise, that there is someone else too who is concerned with it. . . ."

He sighed and paused.

"This is curious," said M'sieur Pierre. "What are these hopes, and who is this savior?"

"Imagination," replied Cincinnatus. (IB 114)

Imagination is for Nabokov the only means to the complete otherness that a persistence of consciousness beyond death would entail. But the imagination he has in mind is not one spurred by faith and disregarding the criticism of reason. He explicitly mocks such feebleness:

There exists an old rule--so old and trite that I blush to mention it. Let me twist it into a jingle--to stylize the staleness:

The I of the book
Cannot die in the book.

I am speaking of serious novels, naturally. In so-called Planchette-Fiction the unruffled narrator, after describing his own dissolution, can continue thus: "I found myself standing on a staircase of onyx before a great gate of gold in a crowd of other bald-headed angels . . ."

Cartoon stuff, folklore rubbish, hilarious atavistic respect for precious minerals! (LATH 239)

Reason tells us that mortal life provides no means to conceiving "eternal life. . . . a moist 'yes' would suggest that you accept the existence of an international heaven which your reason cannot fail to doubt." ("Ultima Thule," RB 177-78) Nabokov, who admits that "in my metaphysics, I am a confirmed non-unionist and have no use for organized tours through anthropomorphic paradises" (SM 297), points out the absurdities of the sentimental "international heaven," the utterly unreasonable "anthropomorphic paradises." There is, for example, the problem of the relationship between the ever-changing mortal condition and the eternal one. What state of the mortal entity would be eternalized?

how can a man who trusts in his reason admit, for instance, that someone who is dead drunk and dies while sound asleep from a chance external cause--thus losing by chance what he no longer really possessed--again acquires the ability to reason and feel thanks to the mere extension, consolidation and perfection of his unfortunate condition? ("Ultima Thule," RB 177)

Or as John Shade puts it,

What moment in the gradual decay
Does resurrection choose? What year? What day?
(PF 40, 11.209-10)

Then there is the problem of mortal interpersonal relationships:

timelessness is bound to disarrange
Schedules of sentiment. We give advice
To widower. He has been married twice:
He meets his wives; both loved, both loving, both
jealous of one another

How to begin? Which first to kiss?
(PF 54, 11.568-81)

Van Veen, translating Shade's lines, stops to ponder both relational problems:

one is free to imagine any type of hereafter, of course: the generalized paradise promised by Oriental prophets and poets, or an individual combination; but the work of fancy is handicapped--to a quite hopeless extent--by a logical ban: you cannot bring your friends along--or your enemies for that matter--to the party. The transposition of all our remembered relationships into an Elysian life inevitably turns it into a second-rate continuation of our marvelous mortality. Only a Chinaman or a retarded child can imagine being met, in that Next-Installment World, to the accompaniment of all sorts of tail-wagging and groveling of welcome, by the mosquito executed eighty years ago upon one's bare leg, which has been amputated since then and now, in the wake of the gesticulating mosquito, comes back, stomp, stomp, stomp, here I am, stick me on. (Ada 586)

In suggesting the absurdity of merely eternalizing human life, reason insists that the imagination should discard its anthropomorphic confines and abandon restraint as it romps in the realms of metaphysical possibility. Even the imagination's wildest flights would be unlikely to be as rich and strange as a consciousness beyond ours:

It isn't that we dream too wild a dream:
The trouble is we do not make it seem
Sufficiently unlikely; for the most
We can think up is a domestic ghost.
(PF 41, 11.227-30)

John Shade captures the sense of challenge and joy perfectly:

Yet, if prior to life we had
Been able to imagine life, what mad,
Impossible, unutterably weird,
Wonderful nonsense it might have appeared!
(PF 40-41, 11.217-20)

Or, as he says in conversation: "Life is a great surprise. I do not see

why death should not be an even greater one." (PF 225)

The fertility of Nabokov's imagination in inventing these "greater surprises" is one of the most fascinating aspects of his writing. Since we know nothing of the nature of electricity, John Shade says, why not suppose that "the gentle dead . . . In tungsten filaments abide":

And maybe Shakespeare floods a whole
Town with innumerable lights,
And Shelley's incandescent soul
Lures the pale moths of starless nights.
(PF 192)

In a rather less charming vein Humbert tells Quilty just before killing him that "The hereafter for all we know may be an eternal state of excruciating insanity" (*Lolita* 299). Even stranger than the straightforwardly-offered metaphysical possibilities and the easy variety of metaphor are the bizarre manipulations of structure and point of view: the rather fluid identities, all ghosts of dead characters in the novel, and somehow concentrated in R., who write Transparent Things (and submit it to a mortal publisher?), or the two dead girls in "The Vane Sisters" who influence the narrator (unbeknownst to him) to think about the possibilities of other forms of consciousness (he remains unconvinced) and actually dictate the story's last paragraph to him without his being able to discern their participation. Perhaps even more bizarre is the case of "Ultima Thule." Sineusov, the narrator, is writing a letter (the story itself) to his wife, who has died, six months pregnant, of tuberculosis of the throat. Sineusov realizes how futile his letter is, yet still tells his inaccessible wife of the strange case of

Adam Falter, his quondam tutor, who has become utterly non-human after having had the essence of things revealed to him (this is all quite convincing within the story). Sineusov seems not to realize that Falter's sudden change is an eerie transmutation of the child his own dead wife was to have borne, and the sign he had so fervently hoped for from that dead woman.

Nabokov assesses carefully the limitations of human consciousness before imagining each transcended in death. By doing this he avoids the logical absurdity of eternalizing the necessarily finite conditions of human existence while at the same time he continues his passionate but lucid search for the greatest imaginable freedom. He delights in imagining the soul's glide into the eternal, away into free timelessness, out of the confines of the human.

As we have seen, Nabokov thinks it grotesque that the present of human consciousness shuts us out from direct participation in the past, that we can have contact with the past, some power to pattern it, some inkling of timelessness, only through fallible individual memory. Death could offer a completely new relation to time: freedom from the pegging of consciousness to the present, freedom of access to the whole of the past. The spectral narrators of Transparent Things can enjoy direct participation not only in their personal by-gones, but in the impersonal past. Thus a plain pencil, drab enough in the world of space, becomes a fantastic character for them in the pageant of time:

Going back a number of seasons (not as far, though, as Shakespeare's birth year when pencil lead was discovered) and then picking up the thing's story again in the "now" direction, we see graphite, ground very fine, being mixed with moist clay

by young girls and old men. . . . It is now being cut into the lengths required for these particular pencils (we glimpse the cutter, old Elias Borrowdale, and are about to mouse up his forearm on a side trip of inspection but we stop . . .). (7)

Death could free the senses from the "straightjacket of the flesh,"²⁴ from the sense-limits of the human body: "the liberation of the soul from the eye-sockets of the flesh and our transformation into one complete and free eye, which can simultaneously see in all directions" (Gift 322). The ghosts of Transparent Things can see through matter, discerning "A mess of sprouts and mashed potatoes . . . performing hand-over-fist evolutions in Person's entrails" (101). But death might change our apprehension of the material world in more drastic fashion. Nabokov reveres the senses and is justly famous for his love of the visual, but he asks

is visibility really as dominant as that in all imaginable knowledge of Nature? Though I personally would be perfectly satisfied to spend the whole of eternity gazing at a blue hill or a butterfly, I would feel the poorer if I accepted the idea of there not existing still more vivid means of knowing butterflies and hills.²⁵

Delalande, therefore, suggests death might bring "a supersensory insight into the world" (Gift 322).

Nabokov recognizes personality--"personality consisting mainly

²⁴ Cf. "v goryachechnoy rubashke ploti" ("in the straightjacket of the flesh"), in "O, kak ti rvyosh'sya i put' krilatyi" ("Oh, how you strain to wing your way"), Russkaya Misl', 6-8 (1923), 162.

²⁵ "Professor Woodbridge . . . Postulates the Reality of the World," p. 15.

of the shadows of its own prison bars" (PF 227)--as another of the great limitations on human consciousness. He writes of V. Sirin, his pseudonymous self, that his "best works are those in which he condemns his people to the solitary confinement of their souls" (CE 217).²⁶ In death "the close-fitting dream of one's own personality" (RLSK 179) might be transcended: "The hereafter may be the full ability of consciously living in any chosen soul, in any number of souls, all of them unconscious of their interchangeable burden" (RLSK 204-05).

Finally, perhaps, the incapacity of man's sense-bound, time-bound, reasoning and mortal consciousness to understand existence, to solve the riddle of being, may also be overcome. For transparent things "there are no mysteries now" (22). Or as Fyodor puts it: "you will understand when you are big" (Gift 354).

For Nabokov it is necessary but impossible to know whether human consciousness warps into something else beyond death. His reason knows that the medium of his existence is "time with consciousness" and presumes that consciousness altered in death would require some other medium, would become "consciousness without time--some still higher state" (SQ 30). Yet his reason also tells him that an eternalization of anything resembling his mortal life is logically impossible. Something drastically other than human life, perhaps, is possible, and imagination may be the shadow of this otherness. Longing for the utmost

²⁶ Unlike the other limitations on man, that of personality can be altered to some degree. Much of the moral force of Nabokov's novels comes from the fact that characters yield to their obsessions and thus let personality become a much greater restriction than it need be.

freedom, feeling that "In this hive [of space and time] I'm / Locked up" (PF 40), Nabokov revels in the power of imagination to range beyond the closed hive of space and time, beyond the locked house of life, to schedule its own celebrations "for Independence Day in Hades" (PF 226).

Nabokov's interest in consciousness combines with his twin passion for freedom and pattern to suggest to him that it is very possible that there are forms of being less finite than human consciousness. It is his passion for the fullest imaginable freedom that makes so acute his sense of the limits of human knowledge and the very conditions of man's being, and that makes him so fascinated by the possibility of human participation in states of being beyond mortal consciousness. But it is his passion for pattern that makes him ponder the presence and significance of design in the world and whets his interest in the possible participation of higher forms of consciousness in the ordinary world of experience.

At special moments everything may seem to swell with an odd pressure of significance. What one perceives appears more vivid than anything that merely occupies space and time. Behind the bright, imperiousness of the world animation seems to lurk, seems, even, to be signaling to one through the very opacity of matter:

Where shall I put all these gifts with which the summer morning rewards me--and only me? Save them up for future books? Use them immediately for a practical handbook: How to Be Happy? Or getting deeper, to the bottom of things: understand what is concealed behind all this, behind the play, the sparkle, the thick, green grease-paint of the foliage? For there really is something, there is something! And one wants to offer thanks but there is no one to thank. The list of donations already made: 10,000 days--from Person Unknown. (Gift 340)

"From Person Unknown": it is no small part of the ecstasy that one feels it derives from a source outside oneself and quite undefinable:

And the highest enjoyment of timelessness--in a landscape selected at random--is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy, and behind the ecstasy is something else, which is hard to explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love. A sense of oneness with sun and stone. A thrill of gratitude to whom it may concern--to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to tender ghosts humoring a lucky mortal. (SM 139)

The intimation of a level of significance to life beyond the human, the importunate hints of something behind the visible, "behind the play, the sparkle, the thick, green grease-paint," are powerfully enticing for Nabokov. Even more intriguing than the momentary pressure of ecstasy, he feels, is the inkling of design, the discernment of a pattern that seems greater than accident, blind necessity of natural law, could account for, invented, perhaps, like natural mimicry, "by some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man" (Gift 122).

Some "chance" events, for instance, seem so well patterned it is hard not to assign them to a patterner. Fyodor watches five nuns, each stooping in turn to pluck a flower. The whole is like a ballet: "it all looked so much like a staged scene--and how much skill there was in everything, what an infinity of grace and art, what a director lurked behind the pines, how well everything was calculated" (Gift 356). In his own person Nabokov expresses the same amazement at the designedness of life: "l'esprit divin semble maintenant mieux installé dans le monde. . . . quel est cet artiste qui en passant change tout à coup la vie en un petit chef-d'oeuvre. . . . J'ai vu des comédies dirigées par quelque

g nie invisible. . . ."²⁷ Nabokov's attribution of the patterned scenes to a director behind the pines, to quelque g nie invisible, is of course only sportive, a playful celebration of the sheer variety of the world, of the fact that some of its innumerable casual combinations chance to seem planned. Delighted by the patterns in everyday events, he plays with the charming hyperbole of imputing the design he has discerned to a designer.

But when he considers not a single event but the patterns formed through a whole life Nabokov conveys a real sense that there might well be planning somewhere, if we only knew how to distinguish such plans. In his own autobiography he seeks for the "razvitie i povtorenie taynih tem v yavnoy sud'be" (DB 7), "the development and repetition of the secret themes of an evident fate." Fyodor in The Gift models his whole novel on what he calls the "ingenious" patterns and deceptions that "fate" or "destiny" has woven into his own life (375-76). In Pale Fire John Shade reveals that the "topsy-turvical coincidence" of his life is "Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense" (63, 11.809, 810), that he has

A feeling of fantastically planned,
Richly rhymed life.

(68, 11.969-70)

It is surely no coincidence that the two characters in Nabokov's fiction who feel most acutely the richness and mystery of the patterning of their lives are the two characters closest to their maker in talent and

²⁷ "Pouchkine, ou le vrai et le vraisemblable," pp. 376-77.

temper and artistic independence.

It is quite possible that there are states of consciousness other than the human and that even the very pattern of the world bears witness to this, if one knew how to read the signs correctly. In Sebastian Knight's The Doubtful Asphodel it is imagined that in death a man finds the answer to all things

written all over the world he had known: it was like a traveller realising that the wild country he surveys is not an accidental assembly of natural phenomena, but the page in a book where these mountains and forests, and fields, and rivers are disposed in such a way as to form a coherent sentence. . . . the meaning of all things shone through their shapes. . . . (RLSK 178-79)

Imagining yet another after life, Nabokov asks:

who can care
for a world of omnipotent vision,
if nothing is monogrammed there?
("Oculus," PP 101)²⁸

Yet if other states of consciousness are somehow present, if their designs are somehow manifest in the world of space and time, neither their presence nor their patterns are accessible to us.

Many characters in Nabokov's fiction imagine, for instance, that the dead may be hovering over them, trying to communicate with them through the things of space and time:

Martin . . . tried to comprehend his father's death and to catch a wisp of posthumous tenderness in the dark of the room. He . . .

²⁸ In the Russian original: "i na chto nezemnaya zenitsa, / esli venzelya net ni na chyom?" ("Oko," PP 100).

even made certain experiments: if, right now, a board in the floor creaks or there is a knock of some kind, that means he hears me and responds. (Glory 11-12)

After his mother's death, "Van tortured himself with thoughts of insufficient filial affection. . . . He looked around, making wild amends, willing her spirit to give him an unequivocal, and indeed all-deciding, sign of continued being behind the veil of time, beyond the flesh of space. But no response came, not a petal fell on his bench, not a gnat touched his hand." (Ada 452) The story "Ultima Thule" is a letter written by Sineusov to his dead wife. He knows just how pitiful his position is: "Are you able to hear me? That's from a banal questionnaire, which ghosts do not answer." (RB 150) But, "[j]ust in case," he says, "I am keeping all the windows and doors of life wide open, even though I sense that you will not condescend to the time-honored ways of apparitions" (182). He notes that "never once since you died have you appeared in my dreams. Perhaps the authorities intercept you, or you yourself avoid such prison visits with me." (151) Nabokov will not permit any "unequivocal, and indeed all-deciding sign," communication even with a form of consciousness still only one stage removed from the human and where a strong "personal" motive is involved.

Similarly Nabokov rules out the possibility of the unequivocal human decipherment of a consciously designed pattern in the visible universe. In a delirium Timofey Pnin tries desperately to determine the exact recurrences of the pattern on his wallpaper:

It stood to reason that if the evil designer--the destroyer of minds, the friend of fever--had concealed the key of the pattern with such monstrous care, that key must be as precious as life

itself and, when found, would regain for Timofey Pnin his everyday health, his everyday world. . . . (Pnin 23)

It is only in delirium that one could think that the visible world does have a pattern that might be humanly graspable. Or in outright madness, as in "Signs and Symbols," where the "incurably deranged" (ND 67) son imagines

that everything happening around him is a veiled reference to his personality and existence. . . . Clouds in the staring sky transmit to one another, by means of slow signs, incredibly detailed information regarding him. . . . Pebbles or stains or sun flecks form patterns representing in some awful way messages which he must intercept. Everything is a cipher and of everything, he is the theme. (ND 69)

From within the confines of human nature we cannot know whether other states of consciousness are present or if their designs are somehow hidden in our world. But, proposes Nabokov, we can imagine we are looking from the other side, from beyond the human. He envisages more-than-human consciousnesses delighting in a world in which they can discern or create endless new patterns, in which they participate by means of subtle and complex designs.

Sensing that his life is "fantastically planned," John Shade feels that he can understand the way things are arranged only by his own activity of imaginative arrangement:

I feel I understand
Existence, or at least a minute part
Of my existence, only through my art,
In terms of combinational delight;
And if my private universe scans right
So does the verse of galaxies divine. . . .
(PF 68-69, 11.970-75)

He suspects that there is point and pattern to existence beyond his knowledge. In coming to know the thrills of "combinational delight," he surmises, he can sample the sort of pleasure higher natures than ours might have in watching over our sphere of existence. By imaginatively imitating the role of attendant spirit, fate or god, he savours the special pleasures of design, and perhaps discerns the hidden justification of the game of life:

It sufficed that I in life could find
Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind
Of correlated pattern in the game,
Plexed artistry, and something of the same
Pleasure in it as they who played it found.

It did not matter who they were. No sound,
No furtive light came from their involute
Abode, but there they were, aloof and mute,
Playing a game of worlds. . . .

(PF 63, 11.811-19)

Shade's "it did not matter who they were" echoes Nabokov's own "to whom it may concern" and Fyodor's "from Person Unknown." If some higher force were shaping our lives, we could not understand the nature of such a being—but in imaginatively usurping its functions we might at least see why such a shaping of life would have point and pleasure.

The simplest combinational delight available to a more-than-human consciousness, the nearest to the human, might be that made possible when consciousness shuffles off the shackles of the present, when it has unlimited access to the past. Foreshadowed by the power of human memory to pattern the recollected past (see pp. 141-43), this new delight would be a much more leisurely, infinitely more complex and far-ranging folding of the carpet of the limitless past. It occurs in

its most striking form in Nabokov's work in Transparent Things. The novel's spectral, once-human narrators fold each of Hugh Person's earlier trips to Switzerland within the ongoing time of the present one. They are no longer confined to the imperfectly preserved traces of a personal past, but can revisit another's history. Just for the fun of the pattern, too, they even fold into one of these earlier trips, during which Hugh engages a prostitute, a much more distant part of the past, the trip to Switzerland of "a minor Dostoevski" (SO 195) and his night with another prostitute. }

It would be rather more difficult for post-mortal consciousness to participate in or leave its pattern upon the present. } Transparent Things opens thus: "Here's the person I want. Hullo person! Doeśn't hear me." (1). The spectral narrator is trying to catch Hugh Person's attention but fails. As we have seen, Nabokov will not allow such direct, much too human communication to succeed: "Direct interference in a person's life does not enter our scope of activity" (TT 92).

But a much more oblique kind of participation, an unrecognized "communication," a silent patterning, may be possible. Cynthia Vane, in "The Vane Sisters," has evolved a "theory of intervenient auras": "Fundamentally there was nothing particularly new about her private creed since it presupposed a fairly conventional hereafter, a silent solarium of immortal souls (spliced with mortal antecedents) whose main recreation consisted of periodical hoverings over the dear quick" (TD 227). After her sister Sybil commits suicide, Cynthia, whose "ridiculous fondness for spiritualism" (231) the narrator openly scorns, thinks she can detect in her life the intermittent influence of Sybil's spirit.

The narrator has lost touch with Cynthia for some years when, owing to an unlikely chain of circumstances, he happens to hear of her death.

The chain of circumstances begins thus: while the narrator is out strolling one day, his attention is caught by the eerily beautiful shadows of icicle drips. They deflect him from his normal path as he pursues them from eave to eave, street to street, for several hours:

finally the sequence of observed and observant things brought me, at my usual eating time, to a street so distant from my usual eating place that I decided to try a restaurant which stood on the fringe of the town. (220)

He is just leaving when the red tinge (from a neon light) in the shadow of a parking meter makes him dawdle: he anticipates more visual treats, perhaps a blue shadow from blue neon lights. At this moment another person whom he has not seen in years (and who is merely passing through the town) chances upon him and tells him of Cynthia's death. The news perturbs him. That night, he feels apprehensive in the dark, but decides "to fight Cynthia. I reviewed in thought the modern era of apparitions. . . ." (236) He cannot get to sleep until dawn, when he has "a dream that somehow was full of Cynthia" (237). Yet he finds the dream disappointing. Brave in daylight, he would like to be able to discern Cynthia clearly in the dream. But, he concludes,

I could isolate, consciously, little. Everything seemed blurred, yellow-clouded, yielding nothing tangible. Her inept acrostics, maudlin evasions, theopathies--every recollection formed ripples of mysterious meaning. Everything seemed yellowly blurred, illusive, lost. (238)

The initial letters of this paragraph form an acrostic message: "ICICLES"

BY CYNTHIA. METER FROM ME, SYBIL."

Cynthia's theory of "intervenient auras," then, has been verified, yet the narrator, in providing the proof, remains unaware of it. Dead Cynthia and Sybil have led the narrator to meet the person who can tell him of Cynthia's death; they have shaped his dream but kept it elusive; and they have been rigorous muses in dictating their signature in the story's final paragraph. They have imposed their pattern upon the narrator's life, they have laid claim to the pattern as theirs in another pattern to which the narrator does not have the key--and which, moreover, is his very expression of his failure to grasp their participation. The Vane sisters have respected the narrator's independence, his characteristic visual curiosity, at the same time, paradoxically, as they have ruthlessly imposed their design on his life.

Nabokov is willing to suppose that human life may be shaped by forms of consciousness far beyond his "transparent things" or the inhabitants of Cynthia Vane's "conventional hereafter," far beyond anything like human time, with insight into and even control over the future.

He stresses that from the human point of view the patterns of "fate" can be seen only in retrospect and that it is impossible to attribute such patterns to conscious etiology. A single accident may make the casual appear ominously patterned: in "Spring in Fialta," Nina dies when her car crashes into a circus truck, and suddenly the strangely insistent circus posters previously noticed become awesomely fatidic. Or the very "failure" of fate to impose immediate control on events may seem to form part of fate's pattern, of "the feigned naïveté

so typical of Fate, when meaning business" (SM 229), as in The Gift and in Sébastien Knight's Success.

But pattern in events may be so distinct that it suggests the deliberate, foreplanned artificing of human lives, even if this artifice employs chance and free will and the particulars of personality as its tools. In The Defense Luzhin "goes mad when chess combinations pervade the actual pattern of his existence" (CE 217). Nabokov acts as Grand-master Fate:

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 sequence of humdrum events, with the semblance . . . of a regular chess attack demolishing the innermost elements of the poor fellow's sanity. (Defense 8)

So tightly controlled a patterning of events (which we may not notice fully in life amongst the welter of evanescent details) obviously presupposes a capacity to arrange future events. Such a capacity in turn presupposes a consciousness enormously superior to our own. In Transparent Things the phantomic narrators have a much more than human ability to recognize time's patterns, but as they begin recording the events with which the book opens, even they do not know what the events which close it will be. They do not create fatidic design, though they can highlight the pattern of the past. They write:

Perhaps if the future existed, concretely and individually, as something that could be discerned by a better brain, the past would not be so seductive: its demands would be balanced by those of the future. Persons might then straddle the middle stretch of the seesaw when considering this or that object. It might be fun.

But behind Transparent Things there is a "better brain" that discerns the future. This force, far beyond even the more-than-human consciousnesses of the narrators, knows, even invents, the future, patterns the deadly fires and falls and even the feints of fate. Nabokov has fictionally usurped the role of a foreknowing providence.

John Shade does the same, but acting within the real details of his own past. He senses the unfathomable design of the "contrapuntal theme" in his own life and feels it may be the key to his life, a source of mysterious satisfaction to higher beings. He has no idea of the beings that might have such control over events:

No furtive light came from their involute
Abode, but there they were, aloof and mute,
Playing a game of worlds, promoting pawns
To ivory unicorns and ebon fauns. . . .
(PF 63, 11.817-20)

Nevertheless, he resolves to imitate these powers:

Coordinating these
Events and objects with remote events
And vanished objects. Making ornaments
Of accidents and possibilities.
(PF 63, 11.826-29)

Thus in Canto Two Shade heavy-handedly orchestrates a dreadful night from the past. Knowing the elapsed events, he presents them now as if he were designing them all in advance, as if he were Fate itself composing the elaborate counterpoint of events. The whole calamity seems to have been meticulously foreplanned purely for the plangent ironies of the counterpoint. Shade juxtaposes his uncomely daughter's last night (blind date, humiliation, suicide by drowning) and the tense

banality of her parents' watching television to fill the time until Hazel's never-eventuating return:

Oh, switch it off! And as life snapped we saw
A pinhead light dwindle and die in black
Infinity.

Out of his lakeside shack
A watchman, Father Time, all gray and bent,
Emerged with his uneasy dog and went
Along the reedy bank. He came too late.
(PF 50, ll. 472-77)

Fate seems to have fore-arranged all this for the very purpose of the poignancy and tenderness of the loss.²⁹

Nabokov, like Shade, deliberately and pointedly impersonates fate. Like Shade he realizes that any power which could pattern human lives would have to be far beyond the human, beyond the fathoming of reason. But, he feels, the imagination might be able to imitate this power and to create a "correlated pattern in the game," thereby, perhaps, sharing "something of the same pleasure in [the patterned game of life] as those who played it found." Nabokov's acting as fate is not merely the normal privilege of a novelist to invent his events: in those novels where pattern in human lives is a major concern, Nabokov's role is deliberately and specially intrusive. Nor is his handling of

²⁹ I think that Shade's imaginative imitation of a foreknowing fate is much more daring than merely the counterpoint of Canto Two, that he in fact invents Kinbote, writes the Commentary and fabulizes his own death at the hands of Gradus. Similar readings of Pale Fire have been put forward by Andrew Field, Nabokov: His Life in Art (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), Ch.10, and by Julia Bader, Crystal Land (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), Ch.3. There is considerably more evidence than they have brought forward, but the argument is much too complex to begin here.

fate a mere disclosure of the controlling hand of the novelist, a revelation or celebration of the novelist's powers. On the contrary, he precisely alters the usual powers of the novelist to demonstrate how design in human lives might work.³⁰

By manipulating the power of fate, Nabokov suggests the possibility of design in human affairs without suggesting more about a putative designer than that his participation in the world of our events would be totally out of the realm of our being, as a novelist is "out of" his invented world, forever beyond his characters, and that the rules governing his participation would bear no relationship to the rules of human conduct, of our "real, or at least responsible, life" (Ada 97).

The ethical irresponsibility of the architects of fate is one of the most delightfully curious aspects of Nabokov's examination of the possible patterning of human life. Here we must insist that Nabokov does not deny the ethical responsibility of human conduct³¹ or that there

³⁰ In a similar case, Nabokov was annoyed that the powers of his "transparent things" were taken by reviewers to be metaphors of the novelist's powers: "that kind of generalization is not only a dismal commonplace but is specifically untrue. Unlike the mysterious observer or observers in Transparent Things, a novelist is, like all mortals, more fully at home on the surface of the present than in the ooze of the past." (SO 195)

³¹ Indeed, Nabokov regards this as the only sphere of existence in which we ought to feel sure of anything, and one of his principal objections to Freudian thought is that its stress on early formative influences leads to arguments of diminished responsibility: "the Freudian faith leads to dangerous ethical consequences" (SO 116), in that it can "give comfort to a killer by laying the blame on a too fond, too fiendish or too indifferent parent" (Ada 364).

are moral responsibilities in an artist's work.³² But he does suggest that if there were "architects of fate," their obligation to the human lives they pattern might be the same (none at all) as the obligation of a human artist to the characters he has invented. An artist of fate might employ the moral responsibility of people as a fictional artist employs the responsibility of his characters. He might create his own ends as different from the ends of man's actions as a writer's choices in inventing his narrative differ from his characters' choices in enacting the narrative. Thus the point of Laughter in the Dark is the contrast between the elaborate artistry of fate (the key element of whose pattern is the blinding of Albinus Kretschmar) and the revoltingly evil "artistry" of Axel Rex, who toys with blind Kretschmar's mistress, money, faith and sanity. The purpose of the cruelty in fate's pattern is to elicit an aghast tenderness for Kretschmar, an inconsiderate and unattractive fool, and to elicit horror at the unspeakable vileness of the talented Rex. It has nothing whatever in common with the purpose of the nauseating designs Rex weaves around his live prey.

The idea behind this distinction is a key one in Nabokov's art and thought: that with a sudden shift in viewpoint--say, from the level of the characters to that of the reader, or from the human to the non-

³² Witness, for instance, his attacks on the anti-Semitism Eliot has expressed in his work. The prime responsibility of an artist, Nabokov says, is to truth: "Truth is what matters, isn't it?" (to John G. Hayman, "After 'Lolita': A Conversation with Vladimir Nabokov--with Digressions," Twentieth Century, December 1959, p. 448). Moreover a particular moral or social purpose is likely to thwart the artist's search for imaginative truth, and it is certainly insufficient (SO 33) to ensure artistic value.

human, from the mortal to the immortal--everything may change, every value and significance may be reassessed in a flash. Though in "real, or at least responsible, life" human responsibility and human emotions matter, must matter, more than anything, perhaps these things do not really count in a more ultimate view: "But perhaps what matters is not at all human sufferings and joys, but the play of shadows and light on a living body, the harmony of trifles. . . ." ³³ Sineusov addresses his dead wife:

My angel, oh my angel, perhaps our whole earthly existence is now but a pun to you, or a grotesque rhyme, something like "dental" and "transcendental" (remember?) and the true meaning of reality, of that piercing term, purged of all our strange, dreamy, masquerade interpretations, now sounds so pure and sweet that you, angel, find it amusing that we could have taken the dream seriously. ("Ultima Thule," RB 153-54)

Or, as Sebastian Knight sketches it, after death

"... many ideas and events which had seemed of the utmost importance dwindled not to insignificance, for nothing could be insignificant now, but to the same size which other ideas and events, once denied any importance, now attained." Thus, such shining giants of our brain as science, art or religion fell out of the familiar scheme of their classification, and joining hands, were mixed and joyfully levelled. (RLSK 179)

But surely even with a radical change of perspective the notion of there being a patterner of human lives is rather repugnant? The narrator in "The Vane Sisters" asks: "And what about God? Did or did

³³ From the short story "Draka" ("The Fight"), *Rul'*, September 26, 1925, p. 3. In the Russian original: "A mozhet bit' delo vovse ne v stradan'yah i radostyakh chelovecheskih, a v igre teney i sveta na zhivom tele, v garmoniy melochey. . . ."

not people who would resent any omnipotent dictator on earth look forward to one in heaven?" (TD 228)

But when John Shade recognizes pattern worked into his own life he finds "something of the same pleasure in it as they who played it found," and Nabokov, too, is more delighted than appalled.

If our lives were patterned by a consciousness far greater than ours, it need mean no diminution of the mortal value of our lives. We feel ourselves free to choose, we are responsible, the future does not exist for us or even (as the narrators in Transparent Things show) for any imaginable extension of human consciousness. If our lives are patterned by a force beyond ourselves, that force would seem to create its patterns, as a good novelist does, through individual human freedom.

The patterning of one's life not only need not diminish its human value, its value visible from within mortality, but it might also reveal a resplendent worth to the more than mortal gaze. Nabokov conceives how wonderful it might be to see one's life from above, to glimpse suddenly the complex design of the whole. In Pale Fire Kinbote quotes and Nabokov gleefully appropriates as an apt and serendipitous expression of his own thoughts a passage from the Letters of Franklin Lane. Lane imagines what satisfaction it would be, in "that other land," for one to

"take, like reins from between his fingers, the long ribbon of man's life and trace it through the mystifying maze of all the wonderful adventure. . . . The crooked made straight. The Daedalian plan simplified by a look from above—smeared out as it were by the splotch of some master thumb that made the whole involuted, boggling thing one beautiful straight line." (PF 261)³⁴

³⁴ Nabokov has quoted faithfully from The Letters of Franklin

It would be relief and bliss, Nabokov anticipates, to find that even the muddle and pain of one's life had had a value and a pattern for some transcendent imagination, a purpose and harmony necessarily hidden at the human level. In Bend Sinister it is bungling ineptitude, apparently anything but design, that increases Krug's torture beyond unbearableness, and it is an "infinite relief" (233) when "in a sudden moonburst of madness" he "understands that he is in good hands" (BSI xiv), that his destiny is being controlled by a being far beyond himself, that the misery of his fate is designed with an intense tenderness to show "the torture an intense tenderness is subjected to" (BSI x). Compare this with Nabokov's remark in the Foreword to The Eye:

The forces of imagination which, in the long run, are the forces of good remain steadfastly on Smurov's side; and the very bitterness of tortured love proves to be as intoxicating and bracing as would be its most ecstatic requital. ([10])

Shade, too, feels the tender interest of the forces of imagination in his life, a sense of pattern even behind the anguish of his own loss, and from that "something of the same pleasure in it as those who played it found." For, to twist Nabokov's most famous line from its context, it might not be horrifying, it might even afford a strange bliss, to think that one is "somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (Lolita 316-17).

K. Lane, Personal and Political, ed. A. W. Lane and L. H. Wall (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), p. 464. The book is thrust on Kinbote by the owner of a motor court who moves (suspicious!) like Shade.

Perhaps, Nabokov suggests, every fragment of a person's life might be part of a pattern wrought from above, necessarily unknowable in mortal life. The vicissitudes, the pointless pain of life might all be part of an infinite tenderness that operates in a quite non-human way. Its allotment even of pain, which in human terms would be wantonly cruel, might be a necessary part of the pattern of tenderness.

Whereas the son in "Signs and Symbols" is mad to see reference to his own plight in everything that surrounds him, the reader³⁵ is coaxed into seeing almost every detail of the story as being part of a pattern, an adumbration of the loss that is coming to the boy's helpless and tortured parents. The story ends with three phone calls to the parents: the first two are wrong numbers, the third has not yet been answered when the story ends. If the reader accepts the story's details as signs and symbols, the final phone call must be about to inform the parents that their deranged son has at last succeeded in committing suicide. Yet it remains quite possible that this phone call could prove to be irrelevant, another wrong number, and that what one has seen as "signs" are without signification.³⁵

The son is mad to see everything as signs and symbols; the reader might be wrong, too, to take the story's details as part of a pattern of adumbration. Yet there is a difference: whereas the son is inside his world and without knowledge of its creator, the reader is outside the story's world and views it from a position similar to that

³⁵ See William Carroll's elegant analysis, "Nabokov's Signs and Symbols," in A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov, ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1974), pp. 203-17.

of its maker. And from this position the story would lose the special pointedness of its details if one did not accept the significance of the pattern. But in accepting that significance the reader is decreeing that the third phone call must convey news of the boy's death. To round out the pattern means to inflict insufferable loss on the story's characters.

On the other hand if the pattern does involve an unbearably poignant loss, it also reveals with what care the creator of the pattern has infused each trifle of his created world—with an incredible tenderness, with a compassionate purpose. The pain of the story's world is real, but it is far from being pointless or allotted in a spirit of cruelty. Nothing could be gentler, more loving, tenderer than this elaborate patterning of miseries. In this bizarre irony it is the anguish which completes the pattern and proves the all-suffusing compassion. What is from within the story a pointless accumulation of grief is from outside its created world an exaltation of tenderness and love.

If beyond human consciousness there existed some conscious power to pattern human life it is likely that it would merge at some point (as it does in "Signs and Symbols") with the power to create life. As Emerson (with whom Nabokov has much in common) expresses it:

Or say, the foresight that awaits
Is the same Genius that creates.
(Motto to "Fate," 1860)

Nabokov's investigation of states beyond human consciousness by imaginatively acting as if from the beyond culminates in his playing the role of a creator. Nabokov does not assume this part merely passively,

in the way that every writer of fiction can be said to create his own world, the particular world of the novel. Nor when he actively plays this part is it an empty gesture of fashionable self-consciousness. His deliberate enactment of the role of a creator beyond the created world, of a consciousness behind its works, is an imaginative exploration. It might be quite explicit, as in Bend Sinister, into which intrudes, as Nabokov describes it, "an anthropomorphic deity impersonated by me" (BSI xiv). It might remain implicit but still be carefully delineated. In Transparent Things the more-than-mortal consciousnesses of the narrators are distinguished from the mortal consciousnesses of the characters but also from the creator whose immanence these illumined souls can discern--

We recognize its presence in the log as we recognized the log in the tree and the tree in the forest and the forest in the world that Jack built. We recognize that presence by something that is perfectly clear to us but nameless. . . . (7-8)

--and whose patterns they can highlight but not create. In almost all of Nabokov's works a chief function of the various stratagems of involution is to intimate the presence or the design of the inventor behind the invented world. The author's presence might be glimpsed directly through "a sudden thinning of the texture, a rubbed spot in the bright fabric, allowing the nether life to glimmer through" (WI [vi]), or it might be recognized in a scrambled or parodied appearance of the Nabokov whom we, being outside the work's world, can easily know, but who is forever beyond the characters. Look at the Harlequins!'s Vadim Vadimich does not know his missing wand, his invisible lath, is Nabokov's butterfly net:

What form of mysterious pursuit caused me to get my feet wet like a child, to pant up a talus, to stare every dandelion in the face, to start at every colored mote passing just beyond my field of vision? What was the dream sensation of having come empty-handed--without what? A gun? A wand? (155-56)

The author's design, too, the characters cannot fully discern--though the more artistic characters, like Humbert, Fyodor or Shade do see much of the "correlated pattern in the game" (PF 63)--and though the reader is privileged to be looking from above the invented world he too must strive to discover the hidden and ever-increasing richness of the pattern, the complete pervasion of the creation by arcane design.

The presence and pattern of a creator at once outside his creation yet allowing his presence within it to be suspected or glimpsed are vitally important in Nabokov's work. But it is not the only part of his "creation" that matters. The elements of the created world are not there as blank tiles to be arranged in an abstract mosaic or to spell out the tile-maker's name. Rather, they are valued for their variety, for the fullness with which their separate existence has been realized, for the vitality of their individuality. This applies not only at the level of characters--the freshness and individuality of a Luzhin, a Humbert, a Pnin, a Kinbote--but in every facet of the imagined world. It is particularly noticeable in visual terms: the lavish--to some, infuriatingly lavish--distribution of sharp visual detail, quite pointedly unnecessary in its precision to a story's events and moods:

The forest road remained reasonably smooth if you kept to its middle run (still sticky and dark after a rainy dawn) between the sky-blue ruts, speckled with the reflections of the same birch leaves whose shadows sped over the taut nacrine silk of Mlle Larivière's open sunshade. . . . (Ada 78)

The use of "unnecessary" detail is not a shoddy lack of economy: these details--especially the "sky-blue rut" filled with the recent rain, reflecting the cleared sky, mirroring the leaves overhanging the forest road--are magical and proud, meaning nothing, being only themselves, wonderfully precise creations with the unexpected sharpness of reality, existing in "resplendent independence" (SO 226).

The independence of the created objects as much as the patterns lurking within the creation are part of Nabokov's complete image of a creator. Kinbote, one of the few Christians in Nabokov's work, is sure "that somehow Mind is involved as a main factor in the making of the universe," and adds that

In trying to find the right name for that Universal Mind, or First Cause, or the Absolute, or Nature, I submit that the Name of God has priority. (PF 227)

Nabokov too thinks that Mind is a main factor in the universe: he has declared that "Philosophically, I am an indivisible monist" (SO 85), by which he means that there is "a oneness of basic reality" (SO 124), that mind and matter are one. But unlike Kinbote he thinks the concept of a God of little use. As Falter says in "Ultima Thule":

By the very act of your mentioning a given concept you placed your own self in the position of an enigma. . . . And if it seems to you that from this answer you can draw the least conclusion about the uselessness or necessity of God, it is just because you are looking in the wrong place and in the wrong way. Wasn't it you, though, that promised not to follow logical patterns of thought? (RB 175)

Nabokov does not think that human concepts or logic or language are adequate. Asked "do you believe in God?" he replied:

To be quite candid--and what I am going to say now is something I never said before, and I hope it provokes a salutary little chill--I know more than I can express in words, and the little I can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more. (SO 45)

To express his sense of the possible role of mind in the universe Nabokov employs not the doomed directness and humanness of rational concepts but the indirection and sense-shifting of the imagination. Using the specially honed possibilities of the dynamics of fiction, he builds up something of an image of a creating consciousness, of the way Mind might operate "in the making of the universe."

Suppose one were to usurp in imagination the role of a creating force, what might one choose? Nabokov indicates that if there were conscious design in the universe it might operate by granting full independence and individuation to what it creates and yet at the same time working to reintegrate, repattern the endlessly differentiating. And its highest achievement might be to allow each independent created consciousness its own chance of participating, through the thrill of discovery, in the miracle and glory of its own acts of creation. In a world perhaps called into being by the self-limitation of a creative force, it is perhaps the endlessness of that self-limitation that is behind the endless detail of nature. In that case, the sharp and exhilarating shock of discovering ever-deeper levels of differentiation might be a reward planted for human effort to earn. Perhaps in like manner the bracing surprise of discovering hidden design is a reward for the attention, memory and imagination needed to discern the unceasing richness of pattern in the things of space and time, "the invisible links

' between things" (LATH 40). The sudden discovery of a deeper level of differentiation, of a further plane of pattern, is a piercing delight, perhaps as close a triumph as possible to the thrill and triumph of originally creating this independence, this design. According to Nabokov it was Shaxpere or Shagspere or "William X, cunningly composed of two left arms and a mask. . . . who said (not for the first time) that the glory of God is to hide a thing, and the glory of man is to find it" (BS 107).

If Nabokov's role as author is one means by which he has arrived at or expresses his conception of possible design in the universe, it is not the only means. Let us switch tracks towards Nabokov's other "professional" interest, lepidopterology, and hence towards some evolutionary speculation. While the move will provide a way of summarizing the main points of this chapter, it should also show that Nabokov's conception of design is not merely something unwarrantedly extrapolated from his mode of activity as an author.

Nabokov, we have shown, is fascinated on the one hand with the position of consciousness and on the other with the opposite but inter-related manifestations of independence and pattern. In Speak, Memory he provides an image for the birth of consciousness--both ontogenic, "an infant's first journey into the next dimension" (SM 298) and phylogenic, the "dappled depth" "where . . . man's mind had been born" (SM 297-98)--that joins independence and pattern:

It occurs to me that the closest reproduction of the mind's birth obtainable is the stab of wonder that accompanies the precise moment when, gazing at a tangle of twigs and leaves, one suddenly realizes that what had seemed a natural component of that tangle is a marvelously disguised insect or bird. (298)

The discovery that the insect or bird is separate from (or "independent of") the shrub or tree is indissolubly linked (at least--and as we shall see this is an important qualification--in the case of human consciousness) with the discovery of mimetic pattern. Pattern is in one sense the negation of independence, in that it has quite prevented one from seeing the distinctness of the two things, but in another sense it arises from independence, it cannot be seen until the moment one properly sees the autonomy of bird and tree.

Let us consider the sensations and reflections that race through the mind at a moment such as Nabokov depicts. When one has such an experience of natural deception, it is indeed accompanied by a slightly eerie stab of wonder. So pointed is the surprise that one feels momentarily as if insect and shrub had been specially "planted" there just so that one could be shocked by suddenly distinguishing the two and by noticing the cunning of their similarity. It is natural at this moment even to entertain the possibility that shrub and matching insect have been planted ("by some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man" [Gift 122]?) to evoke the response: "Perhaps these have been planted here for my discovery, for that discovery to lead to my speculation that perhaps these have been planted here. . . ." Nabokov's image, then, includes the complex reflexiveness of consciousness (consciousness speculating on its own methods of observation and conclusion and on its origins), and reflexiveness is for Nabokov the great divide between human consciousness and the animal brain. His image seems to suggest, too, that there is a linkage, almost a logical linkage, between the reflexiveness of human consciousness and consciousness's imagining

the possibility of a design behind furnished space.

But perhaps Nabokov's image is more than a rich and extraordinarily apt comparison: perhaps it is a suggestion of an actual stage in the evolution of consciousness. After the image above, Nabokov continues:

There is also keen pleasure (and, after all, what else should the pursuit of science produce?) in meeting the riddle of the initial blossoming of man's mind by postulating a voluptuous pause in the growth of the rest of nature, a lolling and loafing which allowed first of all the formation of Homo poeticus--without which sapiens could not have been evolved. "Struggle for life" indeed! The curse of battle and toil leads man back to the boar, to the grunting beast's crazy obsession with the search for food. . . . Toilers of the world disband! Old books are wrong. The world was made on a Sunday. (SM 298)

Perhaps the birth of the mind, in evolutionary terms, occurred at that point where the perceptual recognition of the independent presence of some animal mimic did not trigger off the automatic "obsession" of the predator's response:³⁶ in a "voluptuous pause," perhaps, animal perception marveled at the pattern that had delayed the discovery of this separate creature, and thus there began the rapidly rebounding process of self-reflexiveness described above. Nabokov has declared:

It might be said that what Darwin called "struggle for existence" is really a struggle for perfection, and in that respect Nature's main and most admirable device is optical illusion.³⁷

³⁶ Henri Bergson, the only philosopher Nabokov lists among his favourite writers (SO 43) and a fellow spirit in his notions of both time and evolution, stresses the distinction between automatic reaction and choice, between the reactions of the lower animals and the choice implicit in consciousness. See, e.g., Mind-Energy (1919), trans. H. Wildon Carr (London: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 8-9.

³⁷ "The Lermontov Mirage," The Russian Review, 1:1 (November 1941), p. 32.

If optical illusion serves the earlier stages of evolution, the struggle for existence, perhaps it also serves the higher stages, the struggle for perfection, the mysterious birth of consciousness.

Perhaps there is a designing force behind evolution,³⁸ and perhaps its goal is to allow the independent development of forms which are themselves more independent (as human consciousness is freer than animal sensation, animal life freer than vegetative) and which can become conscious of their independence and of the patternedness of things. Or perhaps the goal of design in nature is an evolution even beyond consciousness: on the ontogenic level, a consciousness beyond death, or on the phylogenic, "if for example our genus evolves by imperceptible . . . degrees a novo-sapiens species . . . which will enjoy other varieties of being and dreaming, beyond man's notion of Time" (Ada 536). For if, in the history of a man or of humanity consciousness can emerge out of its absence--and hence be utterly unimaginable to the individual or the species before it has evolved into consciousness--might not something

³⁸ In one of his major lepidopterological articles, "Notes on Neotropical Plebejinae (Lycaenidae, Lepidoptera)," Psyche, 52:1-2 (March-June, 1945), p. 6, Nabokov writes: "While accepting evolution as a modal formula, I am not satisfied with any of the hypotheses advanced in regard to the way it works." It is the enormous complexity of pattern that he considers incapable of being accounted for by present theories of evolution: "I am quite certain that repetitions of structure, on the Siberian tundra and on the paramos of the Andes, on a mountain in India and on an island in the Caribbean Sea, cannot be treated as a result of haphazard 'convergence' since the number of coincident characters in one element, let alone the coincidence of that coincident number with a set of characters in another element, exceeds anything that might be produced by 'chance.'" Cf. this with Van Veen's remark: "some law of logic should fix the number of coincidences, in a given domain, after which they cease to be coincidences, and form, instead, the living organism of a new truth" (Ada 361).

more than consciousness emerge from a consciousness that can have no knowledge of this "something more"?

Let us sum up.

Nabokov's philosophy is an original and far-ranging consideration of the position of consciousness. Nabokov begins by distinguishing between space, time and consciousness as dimensions of being, and postulates that if "every dimension presupposes a medium within which it can act," then after human consciousness, "surely, another dimension follows . . . unless spirals become vicious circles again" (SM 301). Each of these actual or possible levels of being, space, time, human consciousness and "other states of being . . . definitely out of bounds, mortally speaking" (LATH 7) Nabokov explores in opposite directions. His passion for independence draws him along one trail, his bemused delight in pattern along the other. That the inducements are so personal does not detract from an exploration that penetrates so far, that leaves such sensitive and precise records of what the explorer can see, that offers no false maps of the unchartable.

In the world of space, Nabokov contends, the endless particularity of things is a measure of their independence from each other and from the human mind. It is through attention to particularity, moreover, through alert and detailed observation, that one discovers pattern more vivid than the individuality-denying generalization--and especially the bracing mystery of such unaccountable patterns as those of natural mimicry.

In the world of pure time, Nabokov points out, the future is really inexistent. Earlier and later relationships between events can

be seen only in retrospect and are in no way comparable to the relationship between a present or a past event and later possibilities. From the purely human point of view, then, the independence of events and actions in time is preserved by denying the existence of a future. Yet if one looks backward, the past discloses patterns that almost suggest the workings of a fate: perhaps success after repeated bungling, "the feigned naïveté so typical of Fate" (SM 229), perhaps an even eerier hint of a more masterly foreplanning. But though Nabokov shows that events in time might form patterns--just possibly the work of some sort of "fate"--more varied and more subtle than we have thought, these patterns, and hence any forms of fate, certainly respect the independence we call free will.

Human consciousness, Nabokov considers, is distinguished from animal intelligence by its unique relation to time: by the reflexiveness that allows it freedom within the present, by the memory that allows it to retain the past. Nabokov revels in the power of human consciousness, the infinity of human sensation, emotion and thought, the real freedom of the mind within the present. Yet his longing for the greatest imaginable freedom makes him acutely aware that human consciousness must operate within an always circumscribed and ever-receding present. Human memory, though, does allow us an enormous capacity to retain the full measure of our having been. But even memory must operate within the present. The past, that accumulation of receded present moments, is real, Nabokov insists, and it is a sign of the absurd limitation of human consciousness that memory is not a doorway to the past but only a screening room for its perhaps indifferently preserved images. But

human consciousness does get an inkling of a less limited state, Nabokov feels, when memory is at its richest, when it foreshadows a possible state in which one could fold to oneself any part of the past, superimpose endlessly one part of its pattern on another.

At special moments of exhilaration one might feel that one can almost peer beyond mortality's limits. But it is impossible, Nabokov stresses, for man to know if there are states of being beyond human consciousness. Yet man's ignorance of anything beyond need not at all mean that there is nothing to know. Observation tells us nothing of states beyond the human; reason insists that a state beyond the dimension of human consciousness is utterly incommensurate with anything we know. The imagination, thus, is left free, and Nabokov takes advantage of this situation to imagine the limits of human consciousness transcended (which, of course, is also another method of delineating those limits): the limits of the senses, of personality, of reason, and above all the human entrapment within time and within our ignorance of the world's full pattern.

Just as moments of acutest consciousness may seem to hint at a state of individual freedom beyond mortality, so too they may seem to intimate the presence of other states of being beyond the fabric of space and time. Again Nabokov emphasizes that observation and reason can tell us nothing, that mortal man must remain ignorant of any more-than-human consciousness participating in his world. Yet imagination can look as if from the putative beyond. Nabokov raises the amusing possibility that even our very statements that we cannot discern the beyond might bear its pattern. He suggests what sort of pleasure a

designing fate might have in arranging mortal life, how different its ends could be from those of human life. He contemplates by usurpation the kinds of goals an all-creating form of mind might have in the making of the universe. Nabokov's imaginative enactment of the role of a creative force which prizes the autonomy its patterns give and which allows life to become freer and more conscious of its freedom, more capable of discerning independence and design and thus of sharing in the thrill of creativity is delightful and a wonderfully generous conception.

But Nabokov knows that though his peopling the beyond might not be incompatible with the way things are, there is no way for mortal man to know. Summarizing with keen approval Frederick Woodbridge's major assumption in An Essay on Nature, Nabokov declares that "man being within nature, there cannot be any independent explanation of what we do and of the world in which we do it."³⁹ Yet because he knows how limited and frail human explanations are, he delights in imagining the sudden shift that will topple all our notions, that will disclose a very non-human view.

Delving throughout the actual and the possible, Nabokov's thought and art unearth both a wealth of sensation and thought in the here and now and exhilarating possibilities of transcendent bliss, transcendent sense. As he says, "To be a good visionary you must be a good observer. The better you see the earth the finer your perception of heaven will

³⁹ "Prof. Woodbridge . . . Postulates the Reality of the World,"

be."⁴⁰ Yet actual and potential bliss is undercut in Nabokov by the most disturbing unease. Everything is so fragile, being surrounded by our finiteness, our mortality and ignorance. Everything might disintegrate "at one furtive touch--words, conventions of everyday life, systems, persons" ("Ultima Thule," RB 154). What we are within is infinitely rich, but we soon cease to be within it. And what are we within? We could see only from outside. Can we ever see from outside?

⁴⁰ "The Lermontov Mirage," p. 34.

III

PROLOGUE

Let us now begin to advance through Ada, leaving aside the subject of Nabokov's philosophy until we reach the later parts of the novel.

Since the action of the opening three chapters of Ada largely antecedes the births of the novel's hero and heroine, these chapters are quite distinct from the rest of the work, forming a prologue that introduces two essential preconditions, incest and Antiterra, of Ada's unique story. But while the chapters taken together constitute a prologue, each of the three has a spirited plot of its own that also foreshadows in complex ways the events that loom ahead.

It may be of use to place in chronological sequence the developments of the complicated amorous intrigue of which Van and Ada are the unexpected offspring, for while the plot moves with astounding speed it is related with extreme indirectness, not at all in order and only a few details at a time. Nabokov challenges the reader to make his own way to enjoying this vivacious plot: one has to work hard to elicit and connect the information that Van conceals and scatters.

On New Year's Eve, 1867, Demon Veen dances with and wins the heart of his second cousin Marina Durmanov. Five days later Demon watches Marina play the part of Tatiana ("Lara"?) in Eugene and Lara (Eugene Onegin). He is so entranced by her beauty that he vows to make

her his mistress, which he does during the first intermezzo.

Their torrid affair, an alternation of quarrels and révels, continues for over a year. In February 1869 Demon begins to suspect Marina is unfaithful to him; by mid-March he has identified his rival; by the end of the month he has caught the infiltrator and has engaged him in a duel. Marina rushes to Demon, slightly wounded in the duel, "and in the ecstasy of reconciliation neither remembered to dupe procreation" (15): Van is conceived. The harmony is destroyed by a vehement row a few days later, and by mid-April Demon writes to Marina that he could never marry her: his mental image of her on the phone turning aside from his own distant voice to speak to her other lover would always haunt him too bitterly. On April 23, before Marina is known to be pregnant, he marries Marina's mentally unstable sister Aqua "out of spite and pity" (19).

Aqua becomes pregnant in mid-July. At about this time Demon and Marina resume their affair, and the distress this causes Aqua leads to her first full bout with insanity and her admission to a sanatorium in Ex, in the Valais, Switzerland, in August 1869. Marina, unmarried and becoming visibly more pregnant, stays close by her sister in the seclusion of a rented chalet in Ex. On January 1, 1870, during a blizzard, Marina gives birth to the future Van Veen. Only two weeks later, reckless Marina is bobsleighing and even more reckless Aqua tries skiing, only to dash her pregnant self against a larch stump. The six-months-old fetus is aborted, but Marina substitutes Van for the dead son. Aqua is a little surprised but not mentally confident enough to realize how "her" child has been saved.

Demon's affair with Marina continues until the middle of 1871, when there is a four-month break, during which Marina spends most of her time with G. A. Vronsky, the movie director. At the beginning of this break Demon's cousin Dan Veen (also Marina's second cousin) proposes to Marina, who turns down the poor dullard. In partial compensation Dan sets off "on a triple trip round the globe" (5).

In September 1871 Demon and Marina réumite and spend a blissful month together. Marina is delighted to discover she has conceived another child--the future Ada--and suggests to Demon he divorce Aqua and marry her. Instead, he throws her out of the house, whereupon she cables Dan, telling him he can marry her as soon as he gets back to America. They marry on December 16, 1871, though for decency's sake Marina records the date as August 16. Ada is born on July 21, 1872.

Demon's repeated unfaithfulness (not with Marina, for the two have a quite final row the day before Marina marries Dan) continues to ravage Aqua's sanity and to make her doubts about Van's birth more tormenting. She spends "a broken series of steadily increasing sojourns in sanatoriums" (19). Her last happiness is pitiful: Van, now at school in 1883, writes to his "dear mother," which proves, does it not, that she must be his mother? Unwilling "to suffer another relapse after this blessed state of perfect mental repose, but knowing it could not last" (27) she commits suicide in the last of her sanatoriums.

Nabokov has thus solved the problem he has set himself: for the brother and sister in his tale to appear to have different parents (without one of them needing to be whisked away by gypsies or left as a foundling) and yet for there to be a plausible basis for their later

meeting (Van, after his "mother" has died, spends his next summer vacation at the home of his "aunt").

Nabokov has also ensured that the details surrounding Van's and Ada's births--passionate love, fiery jealousy, a duel, child-changing--form a bright compendium of romance. But for all the wild glamour there is extraordinary control: by his superbly adroit plotting Nabokov has made Van and Ada not only brother and sister but putative first cousins (Marina and Aqua are sisters), putative second cousins (Dan and Demon are first cousins), putative third cousins along both the maternal and paternal lines, and real third cousins.

Let us now examine each of the chapters in turn.

1. Pt.1 Ch.1: The Discovery in the Attic

The opening chapter of Ada is delightful but exceptionally difficult. Full of colour and whimsy, it conceals the deftest of structuring in deceptive aimlessness. Its complexity and evasiveness might best be appreciated through a paragraph-by-paragraph commentary upon the core of the chapter, where most of the facts about the births of our passionate siblings are recorded. The commentary will provide us with an opportunity to note the intimate links between texture and structure in Nabokov's work and to observe the variety of ways in which independence and pattern, resistance and solution can operate. After the section-by-section analysis we shall reflect upon the attic scene as a whole.

On Ada's first page Nabokov parodies the "generational" mode of

beginning a novel. The next page continues the theme: in the best Jane Austen manner, it enlists the marriages within the generation prior to that of our story's protagonists to serve as the novel's introduction:

On April 23, 1869, in drizzly and warm, gauzy and green Kaluga, Aqua, aged twenty-five and afflicted with her usual vernal migraine, married Walter D. Veen, a Manhattan banker of ancient Anglo-Irish ancestry who had long conducted, and was soon to resume intermittently, a passionate affair with Marina. The latter, some time in 1871, married her first lover's first cousin, also Walter D. Veen, a quite as opulent, but much duller, chap. (4)

"April 23, 1869" is the first of Ada's many precise dates. Anyone who has read even the foreword of Nabokov's autobiography can see the reason for the precision of this particular date, for it commemorates Nabokov's birthday:

we lagged twelve days behind the rest of the civilized world in the nineteenth century, and thirteen in the beginning of the twentieth. By the Old Style I was born on April 10, at daybreak, in the last year of the last century, and that was (if I could have been whisked across the border at once) April 22 in, say, Germany; but since all my birthdays were celebrated . . . in the twentieth century, everybody, including myself, upon being shifted by revolution and expatriation from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian, used to add thirteen, instead of twelve days to the 10th of April. . . . What is to be done? I find "April 23" under "birth date" in my most recent passport. . . . (SM 13)

This, at least, is the reason that immediately suggests itself. April 23 is also Shakespeare's birthday (see Ada 26) and St. George's Day (see Ada 19) but a far older anniversary, much more significant in terms of this novel, is also implied. In ancient Rome April 23 was the dies meretricium, "prostitutes' day," the anniversary of the founding of Rome's second temple to Venus Erycina, outside the Colline gate,

which "developed in a way reminiscent of the temple at Eryx with its harlots, becoming the place of worship of Roman courtesans."¹ That Nabokov has this also in mind would be most unlikely were it not that the Veen surname, first introduced in the paragraph quoted above, derives largely from "Venus"; that Eric Veen and his Villa Venus scheme, central to the meaning of Ada, are patently descendants of the religious prostitution to Venus at Eryx (see Chapter 5 below); that Nabokov has long been interested in the cult: "any good Freudian, with a German name and some interest in religious prostitution, should recognize at a glance the implication of 'Dr. Kitzler, Eryx, Miss.'" (Lolita 252).

The excessive patterning in the previous paragraph (Aqua, Marina; two Walter D. Veens) becomes even more insistent:

The "D" in the name of Aqua's husband stood for Demon (a form of Demian or Dementius), and thus was he called by his kin. In society he was generally known as Raven Veen or simply Dark Walter to distinguish him from Marina's husband, Durak Walter or simply Red Veen. Demon's twofold hobby was collecting old masters and young mistresses. He also liked middle-aged puns. (4)

This is at once comic and strategically essential: we are encouraged immediately to take nothing very seriously in the novel, to accept things simply for their colour and humour and imaginative verve. It is only much later, as we shall see, that we are made to recognize the consequences of our being easily induced to relax our moral attention in this and many other ways.

Even on the level of the patterning itself things are not as

¹ H[erbert] J. R[ose], "Venus," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1962.

they seem. There is probably more pattern than one notices at first: the two "Walters" are almost "water," and hence Aqua and Marina over again. There may also be a little less pattern--and a little more point--than one thinks: the two men are Walter D. Veen and Walter D. Veen, Demon and Dan, Raven and Red, Dark and Durak, but the last pair contains a plum, in that "Durak" is Russian for "fool." And what seems to be here only for the pattern actually has precise meaning behind the illusion of empty design. The ridiculous pairing of Demon and Dan is a parody of all character contrast (more of this shortly). Or take the remark "Demon's twofold hobby was collecting old masters and young mistresses. He also liked middle-aged puns": as we shall see later in this chapter Demon does collect old masters (Van would not have been born if Demon were not a connoisseur); his mistresses do become progressively younger, so that by the time he is sixty-seven he is courting eight-year-olds; and he does like "middle-aged puns," puns he has coined himself but now in far from mint condition, like his "'prebrandial' brandy (an ancient quip)" (238).

If the two paragraphs above are good examples of Nabokov's love of pattern, the next demonstrates how his love of independence shapes his prose:

Daniel Veen's mother was a Trumbell, and he was prone to explain at great length--unless sidetracked by a bore-baiter--how in the course of American history an English "bull" had become a New England "bell." Somehow or other he had "gone into business" in his twenties and had rather rankly grown into a Manhattan art dealer. He did not have--initially at least--any particular liking for paintings, had no aptitude for any kind of salesmanship, and no need whatever to jolt with the ups and down of a "job" the solid fortune inherited from a series of far more proficient and venturesome Veens. Confessing that he did not

much care for the countryside, he spent only a few carefully shaded summer weekends at Ardis, his magnificent manor near Ladore. He had revisited only a few times since his boyhood another estate he had, up north on Lake Kitez, near Luga, comprising, and practically consisting of, that large, oddly rectangular though quite natural body of water which a perch he had once clocked took half an hour to cross diagonally and which he owned jointly with his cousin, a great fisherman in his youth. (4-5)

The remark on Dan's mother's name (apart from her place in the Family Tree, Mary Trumbell appears nowhere else in the novel) bears no direct relation to anything else in the book. But the comment does produce a shiver of suspicion: something perhaps not quite definable is happening just under the surface of the prose in that "unless sidetracked by a bore-baiter." In fact the little fillip of darting independence here is a play on the etymology of the name Turnbull (Trumbull, Trumble) and on the sports of bull-running and bear-baiting: "The Turnbolls . . . obtained the surname in the fourteenth century upon one of their ancestors turning an unruly bull which threatened to be disrespectful to King Robert I. Doubtless, like many other similar tales, the story is made to fit the name rather than the reverse. If the surname was acquired through any achievement, it is much more probable to have resulted from a daring act in the brutal sport of bull-running."² The naming motif referred to in Chapter 1 appears in exuberant form not only in the patterning of names in the first two paragraphs quoted above but in this subversion of fictional solidity: an arcane joke is seen

² C. L'Estrange-Ewen, A History of Surnames of the British Isles (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1931), p. 226.

suddenly to engender, rather than merely accompany, narrative fact.

In the last sentence of the paragraph quoted above Nabokov's creative fancy suddenly twirls off in an equally unforeseeable direction, describing something with no apparent connection to what precedes or follows (check the paragraph that follows the text above--quoted below, p. 201--to make sure). But why this absurd detail about Dan's clocking a perch, and the reference to Demon as "a great fisherman in his youth"? Though charmingly whimsical, both comments spring up from no context at all; Lake Kitezh gets only one more brief mention, and there are no other details about the youth of Demon or Dan.

Behind this strange flicker of fancy there lurks the most peculiar pun. The "perch" whose speed Dan measures has a homonym, "perch," the unit of length. A synonym of this "perch" is "rod," a homonym of which in turn is the fisherman's tool. Dan and Demon are once more bizarrely paralleled, but the implication that becomes obvious once the puns are seen is that Dan's perch is caught by fisherman Demon's rod.

Neither Dan's timing the perch nor Demon's being a fisherman is to be taken too seriously as literal narrative. The details, which continue the absurd parallelism of Dan's and Demon's formal and social names and nicknames, parody the novelistic device of character contrast. We can compare Dan and Demon and perch and rod with the continual contrast in Anna Karenin between Lyovin and his half-brother Sergey Ivanovich. Lyovin's intellectual diffidence does not prevent him from being a penetrating analyst of rural economics, while Sergey Ivanovich's assured mind ignores the realities of country life; Lyovin's energy is

always put to good use, while his brother's physical effort is pointedly idle:

After the doctor's departure Sergey Ivanovich felt like going to the river with his fishing rod. He liked to fish and seemed proud that he could like such a stupid occupation.

Konstantin Lyovin, who was needed at ploughing and in the meadows. . . . (Anna Karenin Bk.III Ch.ii)

But of course the rod-perch pun also refers to Marina: Dan can only stand by and observe what Demon's rod can catch. Note that Dan owned the estate largely consisting of Lake Kitezh, that "oddly rectangular though quite natural body of water . . . jointly with his cousin." Marina is by name a "body of water" and in the next chapter drunk Demon thinks of the likeness of Marina to an old master sketch as the similarity "of young bodies of water" (13).


Suddenly, now, the reader can recognize that despite the amusing lack of apparent connection this sentence leads on very carefully to the paragraph to come. For this next paragraph records Marina's rejection of Dan's marriage proposal and her subsequent hurried acceptance some months later: the careful rereader will know that Marina's change of tactic has been prompted by her having been made pregnant by the already-married Demon. The even more careful reader will note the significance of the one other reference to Kitezh, that it is at the Kitezh estate that Marina has spent a cosy and fertile month with Demon (26). And the reader with both care and imagination will also sense the pathos of Dan's timing the perch: Dan has only to time the development of Marina's pregnancy to realize how calculatingly he has been used.

Poor Dan's erotic life was neither complicated nor beautiful, but somehow or other (he soon forgot the exact circumstances as one forgets the measurements and price of a fondly made topcoat worn on and off for at least a couple of seasons) he fell comfortably in love with Marina, whose family he had known when they still had their Raduga place (later sold to Mr. Eliot, a Jewish businessman). One afternoon in the spring of 1871, he proposed to Marina in the Up elevator of Manhattan's first ten-floor building, was indignantly rejected at the seventh stop (Toys), came down alone and, to air his feelings, set off in a counter-Fogg direction on a triple trip round the globe, adopting, like an animated parallel, the same itinerary every time. In November 1871, as he was in the act of making his evening plans with the same smelly but nice cicerone in a café-au-lait suit whom he had hired already twice at the same Genoese hotel, an aerocable from Marina (forwarded with a whole week's delay via his Manhattan office which had filed it away through a new girl's oversight in a dove hole marked RE AMOR) arrived on a silver salver telling him she would marry him upon his return to America. (5)

"Independence" continues its wild careering in these rapid and whimsical lines, in unexpected flashes of detail like "at the seventh stop (Toys)," the absurd "triple trip round the globe," the strange "smelly but nice cicerone," the inspiredly unnecessary "new girl's oversight...". All this flapping of (very attractive) irrelevance is here to distract us from the structural point of the passage, which is to establish that Dan could certainly not have been Ada's father, since he was travelling the world at the time of conception.

The next paragraph provides a few more details about the ensuing marriage of Marina and Dan:

According to the Sunday supplement of a newspaper that had just begun to feature on its funnies page the now long defunct Goodnight Kids, Nicky and Pimpernella (sweet siblings who shared a narrow bed), and that had survived with other old papers in the cockloft of Ardis Hall, the Veen-Durmanov wedding took place on St. Adelaida's Day, 1871. Twelve years and some eight months later, two naked children, one dark-haired and tanned, the other dark-haired and milk-white, bending in a shaft of hot sunlight that slanted through the dormer window under which the dusty



cartons stood, happened to collate that date (December 16, 1871) with another (August 16, same year) anachronistically scrawled in Marina's hand across the corner of a professional photograph (in a raspberry-plush frame on her husband's kneehole library table) identical in every detail--including the commonplace sweep of a bride's ectoplasmic veil, partly blown by a parvis breeze athwart the groom's trousers--to the newspaper reproduction. A girl was born on July 21, 1872, at Ardis, her putative father's seat in Ladore County, and for some obscure mnemonic reason was registered as Adelaida. Another daughter, this time Dan's very own, followed on January 3, 1876: (5-6)

According to Darkbloom (p. 463) the names of the "Goodnight Kids, Nicky and Pimpernella," are "borrowed, with distortions, from a comic strip for French-speaking children" which, unfortunately, I have not been able to identify. But we can at least note how this detail too distracts us from following the continuity between paragraph and paragraph: we are thrown off the scent of the trail of deception leading to Ada's birth by the colourful "irrelevance" of the comic strip (of course by means of the presumably unwarranted incestuous construction Van implies should be put upon it, it becomes overapt) and by the shifting in time ("now long defunct") which creates a double remove (time of comic strip's demise and much later "now" of writing) from the 1871 of the previous paragraph.

By "St. Adelaida's Day" Nabokov intends December 16: "that date (December 16, 1871)." St. Adelaida's Day is in fact December 12, though the saint (931-999) died on December 16. Adelhaid "was aged sixteen when she married the son of the man who had wedded her mother. The marriage was incestuous, but no prelate of the time ventured to remonstrate."³ However if St. Adelaida's Day is not quite the date

³ S. Baring-Gould, The Lives of the Saints, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1914), XV, 163.

Nabokov has in mind, St. Ado's Day is on December 16. Baring-Gould devotes most of his comments on St. Ado (d. 874) to an incest case in which Ado was (peripherally) involved. Lothair, anxious to marry his concubine Waldrada, accused his wife "Theutberga, before his lords' and great vassals in court assembled, of having been guilty of incest with her brother, Hubert, abbot of S. Maurice, a churchman of profligate character, who lived in oriental luxury, surrounded by a bevy of beautiful dancing-girls. This most revolting charge was made more loathsome by minute circumstances, contradictory and impossible" (XV, 200). The paragraph quoted above, then, which introduces "two naked children, one dark-haired and tanned, the other dark-haired and milk-white," the very paragraph that introduces Van and Ada (and as lovers, too) obscurely emphasizes the incestuousness of their relationship.

The passage that follows contains a vivid narrative within what appears to be the most static accumulation of details:

The two kids' best find, however, came from another carton in a lower layer of the past. This was a small green album with neatly glued flowers that Marina had picked or otherwise obtained at Ex, a mountain resort, not far from Brig, Switzerland, where she had sojourned before her marriage, mostly in a rented chalet. The first twenty pages were adorned with a number of little plants collected at random, in August, 1869, on the grassy slopes above the chalet, or in the park of the Hotel Florey, or in the garden of the sanatorium near it ("my nusshaus," as poor Aqua dubbed it, or "the Home," as Marina more demurely identified it in her locality notes). Those introductory pages did not present much botanical or psychological interest; and the fifty last pages or so remained blank; but the middle part, with a conspicuous decrease in number of specimens, proved to be a regular little melodrama acted out by the ghosts of dead flowers. The specimens were on one side of the folio, with Marina Dourmanoff (sic)'s notes en regard.

Ancolie Bleue des Alpes, Ex en Valais, 1.IX.69. From Englishman in hotel. "Alpine Columbine, color of your eyes."
Epervière auricule. 25.X.69, Ex, ex Dr. Lapiner's walled

alpine garden.

Golden [ginkgo] leaf: fallen out of a book "The Truth about Terra" which Aqua gave me before going back to her Home. 14.XII.69.

Artificial edelweiss brought by my new nurse with a note from Aqua saying it came from a "mizernoë and bizarre" Christmas Tree at the Home. 25.XII.69.

Petal of orchid, one of 99 orchids, if you please, mailed to me yesterday, Special Delivery, c'est bien le cas de le dire, from Villa Armina, Alpes Maritimes. Have laid aside ten for Aqua to be taken to her at her Home. Ex en Valais, Switzerland. "Snowing in Fate's crystal ball," as he used to say. (Date erased.)

Gentiane de Koch, rare, brought by lapochka [darling] Lapiner from his "mute gentiarium" 5.I.1870.

[blue-ink blot shaped accidentally like a flower, or improved felt-pen deletion] Compliquaria compliquata var. aquamarina. Ex, 15.I.70.

Fancy flower of paper, found in Aqua's purse. Ex, 16.II.1870, made by a fellow patient, at the Home, which is no longer hers.

Gentiana verna (printanière). Ex, 28.III.1870, on the lawn of my nurse's cottage. Last day here. (7-8)

Nabokov here disregards the ordinary continuities of narrative: it is not just that he has supplied a list within a narrated scene but that he has indicated that the list will be the means of unfolding "a regular little melodrama."

The scene of the melodrama is "Ex, a mountain resort." The place name is invented, though less improbable than it seems: names in "-ex" (Bex, Vex) are common in Switzerland and alpine France. Nabokov has in mind Château-d'Oex, a resort twenty miles from Montreux, noted for its rich flora, and with "many attractive chalets scattered on the hillside. . . . The village is much frequented both in summer and in winter, and sports of both seasons are well developed."⁴

The "conspicuous decrease in number of specimens" in the herbarium is not just a reflection of the changing seasons: it reveals

⁴ "Château-d'Oex," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1962.

that Marina cannot hide the fact of her pregnancy and withdraws from the social life around the Hotel Florey. The alpine columbine "From Englishman in hotel" marks the last time Marina ventures out in public: not obviously pregnant, she can still be flirted with. But the next item, from "Dr. Lapiner's walled alpine garden," records Marina's last chance of the year to indulge her flower-picking hobby. We infer that it is only for a visit to the doctor who will attend at delivery that she will leave seclusion; his walled garden presents Marina with a precious opportunity to remain outside unseen. The ginkgo leaf from the book Aqua has brought her marks another stage in Marina's pregnancy: she "receives a visit from Aqua on 14 December 1869, implying that she is not going visiting any longer."⁵

Because it records Van's birth, the "Petal of orchid" entry is especially evasive. Marina's "c'est bien le cas de le dire" shows Van and Ada that Marina thinks there is a pun on "delivery." It is from this vital clue the children can deduce that the orchids have been sent on Marina's being delivered of a child. As Villa Armina is one of his father's homes, Van easily recognizes Demon as the sender of the orchids--and hence as the father of Marina's child, since her pregnancy would have been kept secret. Marina's "Snowing in Fate's crystal ball" is a reference to the "exhausting, yet highly romantic blizzard" outside (25-26) and to the fact that Marina does not know what her fate and that of her new son will be. (The image of "snowing" in the "crystal ball"

⁵ Golden, "A Study of Games Played in Ada," p. 54.

in a herbarium in an attic recalls the "sad stylized toy, a bauble found in the attic, a crystal globe which you shake to make a soft luminous snowstorm inside over a miniscule fir tree and a log cabin of papier maché" [Pnin 45].) The "erased" date must be "2.I.1870," for Van's birthday is January 1, 1870.⁶ Since Marina has secretly substituted Van for another boy, a not irreproachable deed, it is understandable that she has taken the precaution of erasing the evidence of his date of birth.

The "blue-ink blot shaped accidentally like a flower Complicuaria complicata var. aquamarina" reveals that like her mother Marina has "inherited . . . an . . . ancestral strain of whimsical, and not seldom deplorable, taste" (4): this item is a grotesque record of the consequences of Aqua's skiing accident, the birth of the "stillborn double," and the substitution of Marina's live son for Aqua's dead one.

The impenetrable exchange that follows reveals--though certainly not on a first reading--that Van and Ada at least can interpret at once the significance of the herbarium:

The two young discoverers of that strange and sickening treasure commented upon it as follows:

"I deduce," said the boy, "three main facts: that not yet married Marina and her married sister hibernated in my lieu de naissance; that Marina had her own Dr. Krolik, pour ainsi dire; and that the orchids came from Demon who preferred to stay by

⁶ The date is deduced as follows: on p. 551 Van declares that "Today is Monday, July 14, 1922." On p. 536 he says, the same day, that he is "quite exactly fifty-two" in terms of his conscious life, which began "195 days" after his birth. One hundred and ninety-five days before July 14 in a non-leap year is January 1. The computation is indirectly confirmed on p. 547.

the sea, his dark-blue great-grandmother."⁷

"I can add," said the girl, "that the petal belongs to the common Butterfly Orchis; that my mother was even crazier than her sister; and that the paper flower so cavalierly dismissed is a perfectly recognizable reproduction of an early-spring sanicle that I saw in profusion on hills in coastal California last February. Dr. Krolik, our local naturalist, to whom you, Van, have referred, as Jane Austen might have phrased it, for the sake of rapid narrative information (you recall Brown, don't you, Smith?), has determined the example I brought back from Sacramento to Ardis, as the Bear-Foot, B,E,A,R, my love, not my foot or yours, or the Stabian flower girl's--an allusion, which your father, who, according to Blanche, is also mine, would understand like this"⁸ (American finger-snap). "You will be grateful" she continued, embracing him, "for my not mentioning its scientific name. Incidentally the other foot--the Pied de Lion from that poor little Christmas larch, is by the same hand--possibly belonging to a very sick Chinese boy who came all the way from Barkley College."

"Good for you, Pompeianella (whom you saw scattering her flowers in one of Uncle Dan's picture books, but whom I admired last summer in a Naples museum). Now don't you think we should resume our shorts and shirts and go down, and bury or burn this album at once, girl. Right?"

"Right," answered Ada. "Destroy and forget. But we still have an hour before tea." (8-9)

When Van says that "Marina had her own Dr. Krolik, pour ainsi dire," he refers to the fact that Dr Lapiner's name (evocative of the French "lapin," "rabbit") links him with Dr Krolik (from the Russian for "rabbit"); just as Lapiner brings Marina a flower of a rare species from his gentiarium, moreover, Krolik brings Ada rare lepidopterological specimens for her larvarium. Darkbloom comments on Van's remark: "for some obscure but not unattractive reason, most of the physicians in the book turn out to bear names connected with rabbits. The French 'lapin'

⁷ The quotation mark after "grandmother" is omitted in the first edition.

⁸ The quotation mark after "this" is omitted in the first edition.

in Lapiner is matched by the Russian 'Krolik', the name of Ada's beloved lepidopterist . . . and a Greek 'lagos' in 'Lagosse' (the doctor who attends Van in his old age)" (Darkbloom 463). Nabokov's note is very helpful, for it might have been difficult for any one reader to identify the French, Russian, Italian, pseudo-German Russian (Seitz, from "zayats"), pseudo-Russian Latin (Nikulin, from "cuniculus") and pseudo-French Greek rabbit names given to the novel's physicians. But what is the "obscure but not unattractive reason" for these names? A first reason (we shall see others later) is that the "rabbits" keep turning up throughout the novel in imitation of the bunny emblem that continually recurs in new guises on the cover of Playboy magazine (Nabokov fiction appeared in eleven issues--none without a bunny cover--up to and during the time Ada was written, and in one of these there is a feature article on the Playboy cover).⁹ Lapiner, the third most important of Ada's rabbit-doctors, seems to be buried next to Eric Veen (see below, pp. 670-71), the boy whose dream is the establishment of an international chain of houses of stylized sexual fantasy not unlike the Playboy clubs. The second most important of the doctors is Lagosse, who frequently supplies Van with ribald lore, a Playboy specialty. Krolik, "Dr. 'Rabbit'" (230), the most important of Ada's physicians, breeds butterflies. In the January 1972 issue of Playboy appears a letter (p. 18) from Nabokov, reproduced below:

⁹ "The Playboy Cover Story," Playboy, April 1966, pp. 128-37.

Have you ever noticed how the head
and ears of your Rabbit resemble a



butterfly in shape, with an eyespot on
one hind wing?

Vladimir Nabokov
Montreux, Switzerland

Ada's reply to the deductions Van makes from the herbarium notes opens up the subgenus "botanical nomenclature" of the naming motif (Butterfly Orchis, early-spring sanicle, Bear-Foot, Pied de Lion) in her first speech in the novel. If Ada's mastery of taxonomy is impressive, her arch asides--"to whom you, Van, have referred, as Jane Austen might have phrased it, for the sake of rapid narrative information (you recall Brown, don't you, Smith?)"--are even more daunting. Darkbloom glosses this as an "allusion to rapid narrative information imparted through a dialogue, in Mansfield Park" (Darkbloom 463). Nabokov seems to have in mind an unexpectedly apt passage (Miss Austen would question the tastefulness of the allusion) from the opening chapter of Mansfield Park (1814). Just as Van's words introduce an undefined Dr Krolik into the novel and Ada adds specific information, so Sir Thomas Bertram's reference to his sons merely establishes their existence while Mrs. Norris's reply names the young gentlemen and indicates their ages. Mrs. Norris is trying to suggest that the Bertrams could much more easily accommodate their poor niece Fanny Price than could Mrs. Norris herself:

You are thinking of your sons--but do not you know that of all things upon earth that is the least likely to happen; brought

up, as they would be, always together like brothers and sisters? It is morally impossible. I never knew an instance of it. It is, in fact, the only sure way of providing against the connection. Suppose her a pretty girl, and seen by Tom or Edmund for the first time seven years hence, and I dare say there would be mischief. The very idea of her having been suffered to grow up at a distance from us all in poverty and neglect, would be enough to make either of the dear sweet-tempered boys in love with her. But breed her up with them from this time, . . . and she will never be more to either than a sister.¹⁰

Ada's "Bear-Foot, B,E,A,R, my love, not my foot or yours, or the Stabian flower girl's" continues to confirm that Van is not exaggerating in calling her "impossibly pretentious" (43). "Bear-Foot, B,E,A,R, my love, not my foot or yours": the bearfoot is the Christmas rose, Helleborus niger, with "white or purplish flowers, like single roses, produced in winter" (W2). Ada spells out "bear" because it is not to be confused with "'bare foot': both children are naked," as Darkbloom reminds us (p. 464). "Stabian flower girl's" is an "allusion to the celebrated mural painting (the so-called 'Spring') from Stabiae in the National Museum of Naples: a maiden scattering blossoms" (Darkbloom 464). (The maiden is in fact gathering blossoms rather than scattering them.) Ada adds that this is an "allusion, which your father, who, according to Blanche, is also mine, would understand like this." Demon's knowledge of art is indeed excellent; Van writes later of his father's musing upon a detail in "a certain picture reproduced in the copiously illustrated catalogue of his immediate mind" (435). Note the fact that Ada is Demon's daughter, not Dan's, is suspected among the servants at Ardis.

¹⁰ The Novels of Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), III, 6-7.

The faithful retainers needed only to count the months to work out that globetrotting Dan could not be Ada's father, while Bouteillan, Demon's former butler and now the butler at Ardis, could attest that Marina was with Demon during the crucial month. Of course none of the servants could know of the other part of the story, the substitution of Van for Aqua's still-born child.

When Ada ends her disquisition by identifying the "Pied de Lion," she also identifies the "'mizernoe and bizarre' Christmas Tree at the Home" (7) as a larch. Much more bizarre is the role of the stump from which the tree has been severed: pregnant Aqua two weeks later goes "skiing at full pulver into a larch stump" nearby (25).

Van suggests to Ada that they should "bury or burn this album at once," and she concurs: "Right. . . . Destroy and forget." The phrase, which shows that Ada realizes her and Van's consanguinity could prove embarrassing if a blackmailer knew of their affair, foreshadows the photographic album that Kim Beauharnais will bring against Van and Ada: Kim recommends that the "best procedure . . . might be for her to keep (or destroy and forget, so as not to hurt anybody) the illustrated document now in her pretty hands" (397).

Let us now consider the whole extract quoted above, or at least its last two thirds, as a scene rather than as a text to be commented upon piece by piece. For it is a scene, the first fully constituted one in the novel.

The scene of the herbarium's being discovered in the attic has been transformed from a fondly-remembered moment in Nabokov's own past: as an eight-year-old he happened upon "herbariums full of alpine colum-

bines" (SM 122) while rummaging in an attic for books on butterflies. The memory is reworked in The Defense when chess-mad young Luzhin finds his mother's herbarium while ransacking another dusty cupboard for chess magazines. In both cases the child's reigning obsession has prompted the search which incidentally uncovers the album. It is entirely appropriate to the odd enchantment of Ada that the scene should be based on the magic childhood of Nabokov's own past--but that at the same time what leads these children to attic and herbarium should be not an innocent pursuit but a search for a place to make love. The reigning obsession of these children is anything but childish.

Van, as the celebrant of his past, seeks to reveal the uniqueness of young Van and Ada: their brilliance; their uncommon and even uncanny affinity; the carefree quality of their incestuous love. The capacity of this fourteen-year-old boy and his twelve-year-old sister to deduce as much as they do from the very spare, very oblique evidence in the herbarium is awesome. (This deductive skill, ironically, confirms the very conclusion they have reached, that they are both the children of Demon and Marina, for as we shall see several times, Demon has quite a flair for deduction. This, by the way, is an instance of Ada's heredity motif: it is fascinating to watch the way a delicately-sketched feature, a special propensity, a habitual gesture, hops down from generation to generation or jumps, say, from uncle to nephew.) It is amusing and exactly right that there should be this contest of mutual oneupmanship between two bright young "cousins" who not long ago were strangers and are still eager to command each other's admiration, and the similarity of their speeches (heightened by Van's narration: "said

the boy," "said the girl") is an eerily impressive index of the children's rare rapport.

Yet there is something decidedly distasteful in Van and Ada's cryptic exchange in the attic. Certain reviewers and critics¹¹ have been perturbed by the disparity between the strong approval and the expectation of admiration implicit in the writing of this exchange and their own disapproval as they read it. Is Nabokov too indulgent, too fond of prodigious talent to detect an unsavoriness in his characters? Far from it: far from being mandarin, far from admiring privilege, Nabokov allows two of the most gifted characters in fiction to reveal a moral distastefulness that intellectual excellence cannot exonerate.

Since Ada is consciously trying to outdo her brother, it is perfectly plausible that her "I can add . . . that . . . ; that . . . ; and that . . ." should echo so exactly Van's "I deduce . . . that . . . ; that . . . ; and that. . . ." To Van the similarity of the children's remarks is evidence of the singularity of their mental kinship. But to us as readers the similarity can only be unpleasant: we cannot but think that it must be the basis for the children's love. Van and Ada feel so attracted to each other precisely because they are so unnaturally alike: each has found himself or herself in another and worships this duplicate self. Passionate love for someone else is also ardent self-love: it is

¹¹ Updike, for instance, begins his review by declaring that "When a book fails to agree with a reader, it is either because the author has failed to realize his intentions or because his intentions are disagreeable" and proceeds to quote Ada's first speech in the attic. "Van Loves Ada, Ada Loves Van," p. 67.

as if Narcissus were to find that the adoring Echo and the reflection he yearns for are one.

Not only are Van and Ada unnaturally like each other, but by virtue of their exceptional giftedness they are also unnaturally unlike other people. That Van and Ada sense this difference and relish it and augment it is evident in every detail of the conversation. The children are proud that they can deduce what others could not and proud of their ability to respond to and take even further each other's cryptic concision. They elaborate their sentences as if deliberately for an audience that is being shown it cannot comprehend, as if to stress and savour their vast superiority to any imaginable listener. Their union keeps the rest of the world at bay, and their love is intensified by the fact that their giftedness can so emphatically exclude others.

For all its impenetrability, then, the attic scene is a rich revelation of character--and, as we shall see, it is no less remarkable for its structural artistry and the many levels of its parody.

The attic scene is especially attractive in that it almost denies its own existence. Though the discovery in Ardis's cockloft is quite crucial to the whole novel, Nabokov very deliberately dispels its scenic quality. His narrative slides into the setting almost unnoticed (see the first two sentences of the "Nicky and Pimperella" paragraph above, p. 201); it eschews description and evokes more vividly places and events outside the scene itself; it emphasizes the written nature of the herbarium notes; it robs the exchange between Van and Ada of every dramatic quality, even of the natural rhythms of speech.

Despite its being presented in a way that hardly allows us to

register it as a scene at all, the discovery in the attic is an absurdly efficient means of dramatic disclosure. The very setting is comic in being so apt an index of character: the two eager children have come to the attic in search of a secluded nook for their love-making. The costuming is no less appropriate and amusing: caught in the interval between two courses of copulation our physically precocious protagonists are naked throughout this introductory scene--a situation ludicrously unthinkable in the grand nineteenth-century novel that Ada feigns to imitate. But of course as in the drama proper it is principally the dialogue that discloses character: the genius and the awesome affinity of these energetic youngsters; the stifling similarity and the self-admiring exclusiveness they unknowingly display.

In structural terms too the scene is astonishingly well-proportioned. The novel's first scene shows Van and Ada already as lovers; their very first words constitute their discovery that their relationship is incestuous. The scene establishes at the outset of the novel not only that Van and Ada are full brother and sister but also that they are aware of the fact. At the same time it demonstrates that the children's discovery makes no difference to their love affair: Ada's "we still have an hour before tea" is an invitation to renewed love-making, not an inconsequential observation. The scene makes clear, too, that if their discovery is no great setback to our ardent couple it is not because they are too young to understand the implications of their newly-recognized relationship: the intelligence and education their deductions, their speech and their allusions display neatly rule out that possible misconception. Finally, the scene establishes that the

children appreciate that their affair must proceed on the basis of secrecy and the continued concealment of the facts of their relationship: hence they resolve to destroy, after one last little flourish in the attic, all the information they have found.

The direct, straightforward structural tasks this scene accomplishes show masterly novelistic organization; equally admirable are the scene's multiple parodic values.

The first object of parody is the expository scene itself. The very idea of exposition, the notion that all the details needed to understand the ensuing complications of a narrative should be set out in assimilable form, is at once spurned and over-fulfilled.

Van as well as Nabokov must get credit for the parodic intent. When he records that Marina and Ada have both acted in Four Sisters (Antiterranean title), Van notes that Chekhov "crammed into the two pages of a ludicrous expository scene all the information he wished to get rid of, great lumps of recollections and calendar dates--an impossible burden to place on the fragile shoulders of three unhappy Estotiwomen" (429). The first two pages of Three Sisters (1901) are indeed a little eager. Olga opens the dialogue thus: "Father died exactly a year ago, this very day, the fifth of May, your name day, Irina." The sisters quickly stockpile information: that their father had been a general; that eleven years earlier he had been given a brigade to command; that he had then left Moscow with his daughters, who now want to return; that the girls' mother is long dead; that their brother might soon get a professorship; that Olga, now twenty-eight, has been teaching at school for four years. . . .

Chehov's characters are made to unload information upon one another as if it were perfectly natural to do so. Of course they do not know that they are fulfilling the structural needs of their author's narrative. But Ada, oddly, seems to know just this. When she mentions "Dr. Krolik, our local naturalist, to whom you, Van, have referred, as Jane Austen might have phrased it, for the sake of rapid narrative information (you recall Brown, don't you, Smith?)" she appears to have advance knowledge that she is speaking in the exposition scene of a memoir that Van will not think of writing for another seventy-three years. As she playfully compares the dialogue between herself and Van with Jane Austen's use of conversation as exposition, it is as if little Ada, standing naked before her big brother, is already watching for the reader who has just picked up their story and is peering into the dusty attic, trying to make sense of this girl's brilliant babble.

Ada's exposition is the opposite of Chehov's. Unlike Chehov, who overloads his too eagerly informative speeches and has to strain to make them appear natural, Van overloads the exchange between his young self and his young lover to the point where its unnaturalness is all too apparent and the facts far too many to assimilate on a first reading. The necessary information is all present and is thrust insistently before us, but at this stage it might as well be coded for all we can make of it. Not only is our comprehension taxed by a plethora of precise but apparently meaningless dates, by labels in taxonomic Latin and technical French, but we are also unable to understand the circumstances surrounding Van's birth without a careful reading of Pt.1 Ch.2 and Ch.3 and a slow reddecipherment of the herbarium notes.

Ada's first full scene is difficult indeed, but not arbitrarily so. Looked at from the point of its immediate impact, as we have already seen, the complexity of this opening (especially the dialogue) is a sign of Van and Ada's exclusiveness: as readers we feel we are being left out of consideration. From another angle we see that Van is deliberately parodying the expository scene by providing all the requisite information at once but requiring us to find the facts elsewhere (as we shall see shortly we do find them) before we have easy access to the exposition.

And the real delight of the scene is that it does contain all the rich plot of Ada's prologue. It is a joy to tease out gradually all the oblique details, to learn to follow the rapid fluctuations of Marina's and Demon's affairs and to see the herbarium spring to narrative life. If the exposition scene is initially so difficult, in other words, it is precisely because it is ultimately so generous, because there is so much information here—which takes us to our next point.

The discovery of the newspaper and the herbarium in the attic is also a parody of the recognition scene. Normally in a tale or play where there is a decisive recognition scene there is a long period of developing action before the climactic disclosure that suddenly releases the comic resolution or the tragic denouement. But here we have the development (Van and Ada as lovers) and the recognition scene (Van and Ada's discovery that they are brother and sister) both, preposterously, within the space of the exposition. A recognition scene, too, is often unusually well shaped as a scene, because of its rhythm of disclosure and reaction. But here as we have already shown Nabokov first carefully

breaks up the scenic quality so that the recognition scene passes by almost without our sensing that it is a scene and then couches the disclosure itself in such obliquity that we can hardly recognize it.

Perhaps the greatest affront of all to narrative and dramatic convention is the absence of reaction. The reaction within a recognition scene in which incest is discovered is traditionally one of searing intensity, but here the discovery makes no difference to the continuing action, to Van and Ada's love--which brings us to our third level of parody.

Our scene and the information found within it make light of one of the great narrative staples, the mysterious birth¹² whose consequences are somehow an obstacle to the course of the action.

In comedy or tragicomedy or romance the obstacle created by the veiling of the circumstances of birth is known beforehand and removed in the recognition scene. The commonest case of course is the humble maiden prevented from marrying her noble lover until suddenly she proves to be of gentle birth. A familiar example is the thirteenth-century Aucassin et Nicolette, whose title perhaps forms part of the "Nicky and Pimpernella . . . Pimpernel and Nicolette" comic strip Van and Ada find

¹² Conventionally, the characters of unknown birth tend to have suffered reduced circumstances: a child may have been left exposed and have been rescued and reared by a kindly but lowly shepherd, or in a less distant age the infant may have been stolen by gypsies or have been brought up as someone's ward. But in Ada there can be nothing of this. It is essential to the novel's atmosphere, to its opulence, its Edenic and idyllic quality, that there be no hint of early disadvantage, and it is equally essential that the similarity of Van and Ada includes their being raised in similar backgrounds. This is another reason for the particular configuration of romantic intrigues that results in both children's being brought up under different parents, yet both as Veens, both too as the descendants of Durmanovs.

in the attic. Much rarer is the type represented by Beaumont and Fletcher's A King and No King (1611). Here potential lovers are constrained by the supposition that they are brother and sister, but the happy end comes, the couple at last can marry, when the recognition scene proves they are not related.

In tragedy the obstacle is not known until the recognition scene, by which time the action is irreversible, irredeemable. Best-known, of course, is the marriage or affair that is discovered to be incestuous. An amusing example is Horace Walpole's The Mysterious Mother (1768), in which the young hero unwittingly marries a girl--named Adeliza (Ada's full name is Adelaida)--who is already both his sister and his daughter (thanks to his having done the deed of darkness with his unrecognized mother).

In regular comic fashion a recognition scene disproves reputed incest.¹³ However it has also been possible to use for comic purposes a recognition scene of the tragic sort, in which incest is discovered, not disproved, and yet still to operate within traditional values. Indeed the comedy arises from the very fact that the traditionally horrific and absolute reaction to incest can be so automatically counted upon. After a comic recognition scene of this sort the characters are aghast--that Fanny should be the sister of Joseph Andrews, that Mrs

¹³ Examples involving supposed sibling incest: John Lyly's Mother Bombie (1594), Beaumont and Fletcher's A King and No King. Like these, Dryden's Love Triumphant (1694) depicts passion between reputed brother and sister, but in this case the recognition scene is insufficient in itself to bring about the eventual happy end, the "comic" resolution.

Waters should be the mother of Tom Jones--but the readers are assured by the comic tone of the work that the relationship will prove somehow not to be incestuous. The reader is doubly caught, by plot fascination (how will a new recognition scene be able now to dispel the reputed incest?) and by his amusement at watching the lamentations of the stricken characters when he knows their grief is unfounded.

Nabokov parodies the tradition of the mysterious birth, the recognition scene, the discovered incest in much more radical fashion than was possible for Fielding. In the herbarium scene he carefully evokes all the parts of the tradition. In the best romantic manner the circumstances of both lovers' births have been hidden and are both discovered together. Since the couple who have just found out they are brother and sister have already become lovers, all the ingredients are ready for a tragic denouement. Yet far from being a cataclysmic horror or the toyed-with shadow of that horror, the disclosure which would be a dramatic peak in a traditional tale passes almost unnoticed and is quietly dismissed. To Van and Ada it is simply mildly intriguing, additional proof of the specialness of their case and of the naturalness of their being so close to each other. The children will continue to be the passionate and fortunate lovers at the centre of the tale: not only is their relationship not shattered, but it will endure for more than eighty years to come. And just at that point where in a traditional narrative the characters would be overwhelmed with revulsion, stunned by the horrifying disclosure, Ada turns to naked Van and tells him there's still time for another round of lovemaking before tea.

2. Pt.1 Ch.2: A Stage of Love, A Sketch of Jealousy

While Ada's first chapter is made exceptionally difficult to read not only by the inherent complexity of the information but also by Van and Ada's exclusiveness, the second chapter hurtles along at a reckless speed. Its events are a vigorous and colourful encapsulation of what Nabokov has characterized as "the traditional tale of romantic adventure (amorous intrigue, jealousy, revenge, etc.)" (HT x).

The chapter falls into two parts, the first of which depicts the beginning of the Marina-Demon affair. All is dashing enchantment: it is midwinter, and snow is falling outside the theatre where Marina is "so dreamy, so lovely, so stirring" (10) in the part of Tatiana that Demon swoops impetuously on the girl--who is already fired by the "pulses of the imagined maiden" (11)--and makes her his mistress. The scene closes in the purest glamour: snow-flakes have star-spangled Demon's top hat "when Marina in a black cloak slipped into [his] arms and swan-sleigh" (12).

The second part depicts the romance of jealousy and revenge. Demon's jealousy flares up in the most delightfully mock-melodramatic hues. He finds out who his probable rival is, and upon "being questioned in Demon's dungeon, Marina, laughing trillingly, wove a picturesque tissue of lies; then broke down, and confessed" (14). The wild chase across the Atlantic--in a petroloplane!--after the Baron and the ensuing duel are superbly zestful. Despite being so patently parodic, the grand swordfight still has all the swashbuckling verve of "Douglas d'Artagnan" (14-15) (Douglas Fairbanks in Fred Niblo's The Three Musketeers [1921]).

This zany and energetic scene is Nabokov's liveliest variation on what he calls "the romantic theme" (RB 82) of the duel.¹⁴

This chapter sets forth the earliest sequence of events in the novel. Its structural function, within the prologue formed by Ada's first three chapters, is to explain why it is that not only Demon's wife Aqua but also her twin sister Marina should be pregnant to Demon late in 1869. After the duel Marina and Demon are reunited and in their joy forget to "dupe procreation" (15). But a few days later Demon denounces the mediocrity of Marina's gift as an actress, and the two angrily separate. Demon writes to her that he can never forget his image of her answering a certain phone call from Texas (more of this soon), that it would have haunted "whatever bliss might have attended our married life" (16). Within four weeks of leaving Marina the perpetually speedy Demon has married Aqua "out of spite and pity" (19).

But this chapter also has a much more delicate architectonic role. Its sharply-divided two-part structure (part one: the characters falling in love; part two, a year later: unfaithfulness, jealousy, a duel) is an exact and pleasing preview of the relationship between Ardis the First and Ardis the Second.

Ardis the First and the opening half of Pt.1 Ch.2 are opposed in almost every way, too precisely for the opposition to be accidental. Demon moves with flamboyant celerity while Van must operate with slow

¹⁴ The other chief direct portrayals of duels in Nabokov's fiction are the repulsively anti-romantic "An Affair of Honor" (c. 1927) and Van's coldly farcical encounter in Pt.1 Ch.42 of Ada.

stealth to seduce his eleven-year-old cousin. When Demon and Marina fall in love, it is in the city (a fusion of St. Petersburg and New York), at night, in midwinter, and amid the darkly glittering artificiality of the theatrical setting. When Van and Ada fall in love, it is in the country, under the "gem-like sun" (140) of high summer, in the buoyant naturalness of Ardis's long grass. Yet the beginning of the parents' affair and the beginning of their children's romance are identical in the intensity of their enchantment.

After the night of January 5, 1868, as after the summer of 1884, there is an emphatic break, and the two sets of lovers reappear to the accompaniment of betrayal, suspicion, jealousy and fiery revenge. In each case the man suspects his mistress of having been unfaithful before he finds proof and dashes off in pursuit of his rival (or, for Van, rivals) and in quest of a duel.¹⁵ After the separation, too, each of the men is haunted by an only imagined but unforgettable picture of his unfaithful beloved. Demon writes to Marina that he "shall not forget and will not forgive" (16) his image of Marina sitting naked, muffling the receiver of the phone after telling Demon to hold the line and speaking, "I suppose, to the man with whom you had spent the night" (16). Van too retains a "definite picture that he knew he had never

¹⁵ Van's duel is a result of his jealous rage, but it is with a mere "incidental clown" (307) who wounds our momentarily distracted hero. By the time Van recovers, fate has already disposed of his rivals. It is essential, in terms of the reader's attitudes, that Van should wish to blot out his foes but that he does not alienate the reader's sympathy by actually killing these rivals, for as Pegeen Mike says "there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed."

seen in reality" (298) of Ada standing against a tree exactly where he left her, an image which "could never be lived down, never" (297).

It should be noted that it is Van's deliberate decision to present his parents' love affair as the exact forerunner of their children's. He chooses to isolate their falling in love, to stress the bipartite structure of the chapter, to cut short the account of his parents' affair (which in fact continues for over two years more) immediately after the duel and the "unforgettable image" so that the chapter's second part will match Ardis the Second.

The self-contained narrative of this brief chapter is not only dashing and vividly romantic on its own but is also necessary exposition within the novel as a whole and at the same time a superbly crafted structural anticipation.

But despite the energetic directness of plot and the subtle limpidity of structure in Pt.1 Ch.2 the chapter becomes complicated in the extreme as Nabokov considers a variety of esthetic problems, problems such as the relationship of art to life, the relationship of one work of art to another or to its genre, the relationship of one artistic medium to another. While the stage version of Eugene Onegin and the Parmigianino sketch (which we will look at shortly) contribute to the straightforwardness and the rapidity of the narrative, they also have much more difficult work to do.

Nabokov toys with the relationship between art and life by allowing Pushkin's imaginary world to spill over into what within the terms of Ada we accept as the real world. As we have already noted (p. 47), Demon, while watching Marina play the part of Pushkin's

Tatiana, makes a bet with his orchestra-seat neighbour--who is none other than Pushkin's character Prince N., Tatiana's husband--that he can seduce Marina/Tatiana. With great ease Demon passes beyond the curtain and as if into Pushkin's world, and he returns triumphant to the front of the house where there still sits (now "cuckolded") a character strayed from Pushkin. Demon is decidedly in control here, but the comic interpenetration of art and life also works in the opposite direction, to Demon's disadvantage. In the letter-writing scene in Pushkin, Tatiana hesitates to name Onegin to her nurse: "Well, send your grandson quietly/with this note to O. . . to that . . . /to the neighbor" (III.xxxiv.6-8; EO.1.169). Taking his cue from this, Nabokov displays Marina in the role of Tatiana "discussing a local squire, Baron d'O., with an old nurse" (11) (this is also a play upon the genuine "d'O," the name of a noble family in Normandy). Over a year later Demon finds he has a rival for Marina's love, the art expert Baron d'Onsky. Marina has started a second affair with none other than a metamorphosis of Pushkin's hero: d'Onsky even surfaces for a moment as "d'O." (13). As Tatiana, Marina revised Pushkin by being "unfaithful" to Demon's orchestra-seat neighbour "Prince N.," so it is natural that she should now revise Pushkin again by not resisting the entreaties of the "d'O." or Onegin figure d'Onsky. Or it can be put another way. "D'Onsky" is a combination of Onegin and Lensky, Pushkin's two heroes,¹⁶ while since the play Marina acts in is Eugene and Lara (13) she seems

¹⁶ As suggested by D. Barton Johnson, "Nabokov's Ada and Pushkin's Eugene Onegin," Slavic and East European Journal, 15:3 (1971), p. 317.

to be both of Pushkin's heroines, Tatiana and Olga Larina. It is natural then that she should leave Demon for someone who combines Onegin (whom Tatiana loves) and Lensky, Olga's lover.

Nabokov uses the stage version of Pushkin's poem to depict another kind of relationship between art and life: the effect on "real" characters of the romantic passions of a "make-believe" world. In the scene from Eugene Onegin that we watch with Demon, Tatiana writes ardently to Onegin (when she has met the young fop only once) because she is inspired to such ardour by the influence of her romantic reading. She is in the midst of one of what Nabokov calls "the rather morbid and definitely sensuous reveries that romances had . . . developed in her" (EO.3.236). Marina, portraying this girl inflamed to passion by the romantic moods of imagined worlds, is, delightfully, set emotionally aquiver in her turn by the imagined world she evokes on stage: "the tropical [stage] moonlight she had just bathed in . . . [and] the ardent pulses of the imagined maiden . . . : made her especially vulnerable to the tickle of Demon's moustache" (11).

The theme of the relationship of art to life spirals into another subject, the relation of a work of art to its heritage. For this scene in the theatre quite pointedly conjures up two distinguished novelistic traditions. One is that which we see exemplified in Tatiana, of the character who, like Don Quixote or Catherine Morland, lives under the spell of romantic conceptions derived from fictive worlds. Another is the nineteenth-century tradition of the theatre scene. The theatre may be merely described, as it is so brilliantly in Eugene Onegin, or it may be the scene of a tense drama among the novel's characters, as in

Anna Karenin. The convention approaches its essence if ardent glances flash across the auditorium, as when Mr Guppy gazes hopelessly at Bleak House's strange heroine, and becomes even purer if the grand passion is actually conceived during this theatre scene, as when Rastignac is inspired to devote himself to Mme de Nucingen in Père Goriot. At its best and amplest this novelistic set piece will also involve the stage action in the manner of another distinguished tradition, that of the play within the play. Within the older convention the inner play might somehow parallel the outer action, or it might produce some effect upon that action, or it might be the occasion for theatrical criticism (in Hamlet all three possibilities are tapped). The same opportunities are open to the novelist. A perfect example of the type occurs in War and Peace, where Natasha, at the opera, becomes suddenly infatuated with Anatole Kuragin. At first Natasha's incomprehension of the opera's ridiculous artificiality is a damning Tolstoyan criticism of empty sophistication. Under her growing susceptibility to the contrived attention of Kuragin she starts to enjoy the stage action and see it as natural--a dire warning that she has fallen into sham values and fake emotions.

All the ingredients of the tradition--theatre, beginning of an affair, correspondence between performance and "real-life" amour--are together too in the first sentence of Nabokov's "Lips to Lips" (written c. 1931; pub. 1956): "The violins were still weeping, performing, it seemed, a hymn of passion and love, but already Irina and the deeply moved Dolinin were rapidly walking toward the exit" (RB 47). The quotation is an extract from a lamentable novel, the work and pride of the

story's protagonist, Ilya Borisovich Tal. When another character writes to him that "Some of the descriptions, such as for example that of the theater, in the very beginning, compete with analogous images in the works of our classical writers and in a certain sense gain the ascendancy" (RB 56) Ilya Borisovich does not realize that he is being twitted for employing such a ready-made situation, a dreadfully outworn convention by the 1920's in which he is writing.

The two traditions Nabokov evokes, the influence of the world of romance and the theatre as the start of an amour, are already richly combined in Pt.II Ch.XV of Madame Bovary (1857). As Nabokov stressed in his "Masterpieces of European Fiction" course at Cornell, Emma's expectations are too much shaped by the romantic reading of her youth,¹⁷ and at the opera, where "[e]lle se retrouvait dans les lectures de sa jeunesse, en plein Walter Scott," she is sighing and ready for passion even before Léon appears. The relation between Emma's emotions and the stage action is splendidly subtle and mobile. Even while looking through Emma's eyes, Flaubert coldly criticizes the falsity of the stage scenes, contrasts them to the unelevating reality of Emma's experience, and yet shows the performance renewing Emma's ardour. At first Emma

¹⁷ Alfred Appel, Jr., recalls the year he took Nabokov's course: "Lecturing on Madame Bovary at Cornell in 1953 . . . Nabokov emphasized Emma's reading material and dwelt on each cliché. 'Stale romanticism! Memorize these titles,' he would warn in mock-donnish tones, 'for they describe her sense of "reality" (quotes, please, around that word).' ('Describe and evaluate the importance of Emma's reading preferences in Madame Bovary. Be specific,' read one of the exam questions.)" Nabokov's Dark Cinema (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 108-09.

can oppose the real dissatisfactions of her affair with Rodolphe to the overblown emotions portrayed on stage and can recognize "la petitesse des passions que l'art exagèrait." But she cannot help being invaded by "la poésie du rôle"; she thinks, even, that the dashing Edgar Lagardy is looking at her; she feels like crying out "Enlève-moi, emmène-moi, partons! À toi, à toi! toutes mes ardeurs et tous mes rêves!" She is on the point of combustion when LÉON appears--and suddenly the closer promise of romance robs the distant stage of all its charm.

In "On a Book Entitled Lolita" Nabokov writes of "the implied associations and traditions--which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way" (Lolita 319). How does he transcend here the heritage he evokes?

In the first place he has great fun with the very idea of "the heritage." Nabokov's implicit acknowledgement here that he is playing deliberate variations on established themes breaks radically with the very traditions he calls upon, which ("traditionally") have not acknowledged themselves as traditions.¹⁸ Indeed the whole genre of the novel has no respect for established forms and themes and allows new observation and individual vision to determine manner and matter. Hence it is

¹⁸ Even in Henry James's The Princess Casamassima (1886), where Hyacinth Robinson is "whistled for by a princess" one night at a theatre, an event which "presented itself to Hyacinth as an indignity endured gracefully enough by the heroes of several French novels in which he had found a thrilling interest" (The Princess Casamassima [New York: Scribner's, 1908], p. 203), the theatre scene is conceived not as part of novelistic tradition but as part of the observation of contemporary London from which, as James insisted in his preface, "this fiction proceeded quite directly" (p. v).

positively indecent for a novel to admit that it is part of the novelistic tradition.¹⁹ Nabokov hugely enjoys the indecency and invokes or evokes or implies traditions again and again in *Ada*. The book's first paragraph asks to be compared to two Tolstoy novels (names, dates and publishers--all spurious--helpfully provided). We first see Ardis Hall as we turn a lane in the ancestral park: "the romantic mansion appeared on the gentle eminence of old novels" (35). Nabokov shows the delights of being sensitive to the possibilities past novelists have favoured, reveals the thrill of deliberate variation on a theme and pokes fun at the solemn tradition of the non-traditional nature of the novel.

In the second place Nabokov modifies his particular models. He transforms the tradition of the character absorbed in a world of romance by the difficult task of doubling the effect, as we have already described: Marina is amorously aglow through playing the imagined Tatiana who is herself aglow through identifying with the extravagantly passionate heroines of sentimental romance. The nineteenth-century theatre scene, on the other hand, is easy to parody: simply allowing it to appear in a twentieth-century work is enough. But Nabokov also affectionately parodies the relationship Flaubert and Tolstoy establish between the amour in the audience and the passions represented on stage. Where the older authors contrive to make one circle tangent to the other, Nabokov makes them boldly intersect; where Emma imagines loving Lagardy,

¹⁹ F. W. Bateson puts it thus: "the convention that the novel uses is different . . . from any other literary convention: it is the convention of doing without conventions." ("The Novel's Original Sin," in *Directions in Literary Criticism*, ed. Stanley Weintraub and Philip Young [University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1973], p. 115.)

Demon makes love to la Durmńska. Nabokov's disregard for the possibilities and proprieties of nineteenth-century society is especially amusing. While an aristocrat might flirt with a woman of his class in the opposite box and conduct a backstage affair with an actress (as Vronsky has) or a dancer (as Oblonsky does), Baron Demon Veen's backstage affair is with his second cousin Marina Durmanova, at once an actress and an aristocrat who could grace the boxes in a theatre scene in Tolstoy.

We noted before that both Flaubert and Tolstoy used the theatre scene as an occasion for esthetic criticism. This, indeed, is a natural part of the immediate tradition and its ancestor: Shakespeare's critical pronouncements (to take the most famous case) are sprinkled throughout Act III Scene ii of Hamlet. Nabokov transcends the heritage nowhere more than in the concentration of implicit criticism and artistic satire he has packed into his theatre scene (and without disrupting its romantic aura). If by the situation itself Nabokov explores the relationship of life to art and of a work to its heritage, in his travesty of Eugene Onegin he also explores different kinds of relationship: the relationship of a work to its medium (and of one artistic medium to another), and of one work to another which purports to represent it (by adaptation to another medium, by translation into another language). The problems he deals with here occupied him throughout the 1950's and 1960's, in his work on the translation of Eugene Onegin and in his adaptation of Lolita for the screen.

Let us look at the two scenes from Eugene Onegin described at most length in Pt. 1 Ch. 2. Demon's desire is quite understandably

stirred by a scene in which Marina

had undressed in graceful silhouette behind a semitransparent screen, reappeared in a flimsy and fetching nightgown, and spent the rest of the wretched scene discussing a local squire, Baron d'O., with an old nurse in Eskimo boots. Upon the infinitely wise countrywoman's suggestion, she goosepenned, from the edge of her bed, on a side table with cabriole legs, a love letter and took five minutes to reread it in a languorous but loud voice for nobody's benefit in particular since the nurse sat dozing on a kind of sea chest, and the spectators were mainly concerned with the artificial moonlight's blaze upon the love-lorn young lady's bare arms and heaving breasts. (11).

As soon as the scene is over Demon rushes backstage and makes love to Marina during

a longish intermezzo staged by a ballet company whose services Scotty had engaged, bringing the Russians all the way in two sleeping cars from Belokonsk, Western Estoty. In a splendid orchard several merry young gardeners wearing for some reason the garb of Georgian tribesmen were popping raspberries into their mouths, while several equally implausible servant girls in sharovars (somebody had goofed--the word "samovars" may have got garbled in the agent's aerocable) were busy plucking marshmallows and peanuts from the branches of fruit trees. At an invisible sign of Dionysian origin, they all plunged into the violent dance called kurva or "ribbon boule." . . . (11)

In the first of these scenes the producer has shamelessly exploited the stage medium by having Marina undress and dress "behind a semitransparent screen," an action comically unthinkable in the 1868 in which the play is performed. Even without the exploitation, though, even when the play does only what Pushkin's text requires ("her light chemise has slid / down from her charming shoulder," III.xxxii.6-7), the change of medium quite perverts the poem's effect: what is a sign of Tatiana's abstraction in that solitary pre-auroral reverie becomes an inappropriate erotic allure.

But if the mood is wrong at least the scene is conceived with precision and close attention to the original (apart from such quietly absurd departures as "the infinitely wise countrywoman's suggestion" that Tatiana write a letter).²⁰ Marina's writing a letter "from the edge of her bed, on a side table with cabriole legs" and even her allurements are infinitely closer to Pushkin than is a ridiculously bad illustration of this scene, drawn in 1829 by one Aleksandr Notbek,²¹ which Pushkin responded to in a scurrilous poem and which Nabokov describes and derides in his Commentary (EO.2.178). Where Nabokov imagines Tatiana sitting, as she must be, on her bed, Notbek wrongly places her on a chair; where Nabokov imagines a table with cabriole legs (such as the nurse could easily shift when Tatiana bids her "move up the table." III.xxi.6), Notbek depicts "a very formal-looking table" (EO.2.178) that looks too heavy for an ancient nurse to budge. If, finally, Marina's voluptuousness is wrong, it is far nearer the "charming shoulder" of Pushkin's Tatiana than is the bare breast that Notbek's torpid miss points straight at the viewer in utterly anaphrodisiac fashion.²²

²⁰ A burlesque of the traditions that Pushkin's own nurse's tales prompted him to write some of his narrative verse. See EO.2.361-62, 452-54.

²¹ "Tat'yana pishet pis'mo ('Tat'yana to vzdohnyot, to ohnet . . .')," drawn by A. Notbek, engraved by Zbruev, Nevski Al'manah, January 1829, reproduced in *A. S. Pushkin v izobrazitel'nom iskusstve*, ed. A. L. Slonimski (Leningrad: Ogiz-Izogiz, 1937), p. 65. (See Plate 1a, following p. 241).

²² Proffer (p. 254) remarks that "the parodic violence and heaving breasts and quill pen are taken from Nabokov's contrasting description of a comical illustration of the same scene by Alexander

The break at the end of the letter-writing scene corresponds not to the gap between Chapters Three and Four in Pushkin but rather to the scene division in Chaikovsky's opera Eugene Onegin (1879), the libretto of which (by Chaikovsky and K. Shilovsky) Nabokov considered "hideous and insulting" (SO 266). In Chapter Three of Pushkin's poem Tatiana's writing the letter and her sending it and her waiting for Onegin's reply form an unbroken stretch of narrative. When Onegin does arrive, Tatiana runs away in charming panic, and just as Onegin catches up Pushkin teases the reader by breaking off:

But the effects of the unlooked-for meeting
today, dear friends,
I have not the strength to detail;
after this long discourse I need
a little jaunt, a little rest;
some other time I'll tell the rest.
(III.xli.9-14; EO.1.173)

When Pushkin begins again in Chapter Four it is still some stanzas before he returns to the scene. Such an effect is obviously impossible on the stage unless the adaptor is readier to invent new techniques than Chaikovsky was. The change of medium then requires that another of the delights of Pushkin's narrative be jettisoned, that Tatiana's meeting with Onegin form a separate and uninterrupted scene.

Notbek." I think it likely that Nabokov is here enjoying the challenge of creating a visual impression sharper and much more thoughtfully imagined than Notbék's picture: his scene is perhaps a contrast to but certainly not a borrowing from Notbek's illustration, and the "heaving breasts" are reminiscent of EO.III.xvi.5 (Nabokov translates "her bosom has risen" but comments "I am not sure that the paraphrase 'her bosom heaves' would not have been enough" [EO.2.360]) rather than the rigidity and lifelessness of the picture.

So it is with Ada's Eugene and Lara, too, though the opening of Chaikovsky's new scene, the "Song of the Girls," is broken off to form an intermezzo in order that Demon can have time to seduce Marina. This intermezzo is hopelessly haywire, a parody of the cheap, incongruous and irrelevant effects producers often, as here ("bringing the Russians all the way in two sleeping cars from Belokonsk"), take such pains to arrange. Ironically, it impresses no one: a "sitting ovation" greets the "dispersal of the imbecile but colorful transfigurants" (12).

But the intermezzo also contains much less obvious specific thrusts against adaptors and translators. It takes the place of the "Song of the Girls" in Pushkin's poem, a sort of background chorus to Tatiana's nervous flight through the park and away from Onegin. The "popping raspberries . . . plucking marshmallows and peanuts from the branches of fruit trees" recalls Pushkin's servant girls, who are picking berries and sing of pelting any masculine intruder with their cherries and berries and currants. This grotesquely unfaithful intermezzo, though, has lost all the song, leaves the berry-picking in a preposterous state ("plucking marshmallows and peanuts") and adds a ludicrous dance.

The dance, too, comes from Chaikovsky's opera. Although Chaikovsky treats the "Song of the Girls" quite faithfully he uses the example of the song as permission to introduce into his first scene a gratuitous and jarringly out of place peasant song and dance. If there are no men present in Pushkin's "Song," there are in Chaikovsky's dance: hence the "several merry young gardeners" in Nabokov's intermezzo. The gardeners are "popping raspberries into their mouths," too, in "honour"

of Chaikovsky's peasant song:

Tut i shol proshol detina,
Slovno yagoda-malina.
(Act I Sc. i)²³

("Along came a hefty fellow / like a raspberry.")

At the same time, though, the clause "gardeners wearing for some reason the garb of Georgian tribesmen were popping raspberries into their mouths" alludes to what Nabokov calls "ludicrous blunders" (Darkbloom 464) in Robert Lowell's translation of Osip Mandelshtam's "Stalin 1934":

After each death, he is like a Georgian tribesman,
putting a raspberry into his mouth.²⁴

(The translation should read [I quote Proffer's version]: "Every execution is a raspberry for him / And he has the broad chest of an Ossetian" [Proffer 254].) The "branches of fruit trees," moreover, alludes to Walter Arndt's mistranslation of three lines in the "Song of the Girls." In reviewing Arndt's version of Eugene Onegin shortly before his own translation appeared, Nabokov pointed out that "Vishen'e is simply 'cherries' (with which the girls pelt the eavesdropper in their song in Chapter Three) and not 'cherry twigs' and 'branches' with which Arndt

²³ Evgeniy Onegin: Liricheskie Stseni v 3 deistviyah, 7 kartinah, libretto by P. Chaikovsky and K. Shilovsky (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Muzika, 1970), p. 30.

²⁴ "Nine Poems by Ossip Manderstamm [sic]," translated by Robert Lowell and Olga Carlisle, New York Review of Books, December 23, 1965, p. 6.

makes them beat away the intruder."²⁵ Nabokov translates the lines accurately as "pelter him with cherries,/ with cherries, with raspberries,/ with red currants" while Arndt pads the language and rewrites the action into "Fend him off with cherry twigs,/ Cherry branches, berry vines,/ Ruby-clustered currant sprigs."²⁶

Nabokov's imagined stage version of Eugene Onegin, then, has many purposes as an esthetic statement. Nabokov considers the question of artistic media, showing the exploitation of a medium (Marina's on-stage undressing), the inevitable loss of effect in changing from one medium to another, the absurdity of a hodgepodge of media such as that in the intermezzo. But at the same time he reveals the possibilities of incorporating--or at least suggesting--many media within a single work: he evokes the theatre quite perfectly (while also invoking a tradition of nineteenth-century novelistics), he recalls Pushkin's poem, outdoes Notbek's picture, lampoons Chaikovsky's opera, echoes bad translations and captures the very feel and clutter of a corny ballet.

Simultaneously Nabokov insists that though one may treat another's work with any degree of freedom, one is responsible for the utmost exactness if one aims to represent that work, whether by adaptation to a different medium or by translation. But while he demands precision and a depth of specific knowledge if there is the responsibility of repre-

²⁵ "Pounding the Clavichord," New York Review of Books, April 30, 1964, p. 15; rpt. SO 237-38.

²⁶ Walter Arndt, trans., Eugene Onegin, by Alexander Pushkin (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963), p. 83.

sentation, he demonstrates at the same time the imaginative and comic possibilities of deliberate distortion and adaptation when no claim to representation is implied. Lowell calls his translations of Mandelstam "adaptations,"²⁷ and in an attack on a later translation by Lowell from Mandelstam, Nabokov notes that all the English translations of Russian poems in the book in which Lowell's version appears "are branded 'Adaptations.'" He asks:

What, then, is there especially adaptive or adaptational in an obvious travesty? This I wish to be told, this I wish to comprehend. "Adapted" to what? To the needs of an idiot audience? To the demands of good taste? To the level of one's own genius? But one's audience is the most varied and gifted in the world; no arbiter of genteel arts tells us what we can or can't say; and as to genius, nowhere in those paraphrases is the height of fancy made to fuse with the depth of erudition, like a mountain orbed by its reflection in a lake--which at least would be some consolation. (SO 283)

Nabokov himself fuses fancy and erudition in his travesty of Eugene Onegin, paying meticulous attention to Pushkin's text even as he wildly perverts it. He insists that the relation between one work and another that purports to represent it while it cannot be one of identity should at least be bound by fidelity; he shows that if the responsibility of representation is not required precise knowledge can be a spur to imaginative freedom. He also indicates the enormous difficulties that arise from the differences between one medium and another--and the possibilities these differences open to tact and talent.

In the second half of Pt.1 Ch.2 Nabokov continues to explore the

²⁷ "Nine Poems by Ossip Manderstamm," p. 5.

relationships between life and art, between one medium and another, between one work and another.

Demon first suspects Marina is being unfaithful to him in February 1869 when he rings her up long distance (he is in Texas, she in Boston) and she tells him she is "in Eve's state, hold the line, let me put on a penyuar" (16). In a later letter to Marina he recalls this moment, speculating that "Instead, blocking my ear, you spoke, I suppose, to the man with whom you had spent the night" (16). Demon's deductive skill will be proved right again. Some weeks after the phone call Demon discovers a previously unknown sketch of Eve, "a naked girl with a peach-like apple cupped in her half-raised hand sitting sideways on a convolvulus-garlanded support" (12). He is delighted to be able to identify the sketch--which has for him "the additional appeal of recalling Marina when, rung out of a hotel bathroom by the phone, and perched on the arm of a chair, she muffled the receiver while asking her lover something" (13)--as the work of Parmigianino. To verify his attribution of the drawing Demon takes it to an art expert, Baron d'Onsky, who "had only to cast one glance at that raised shoulder and at certain vermiculated effects of delicate vegetation to confirm Demon's guess" (13). The next day Demon finds out from a friend of d'Onsky (he deduces she knows the Baron and intimidates her into admitting it) that the expert must have remarked on the similarity of the sketch to naked Marina: "Curious how that appalling actress resembles 'Eve on the Clepsydrophone' in Parmigianino's famous picture" (14). Demon retorts that "It is anything but famous." Since no one else could have seen the picture or known that it was by Parmigianino, it must have been d'Onsky

himself who noticed the resemblance of the Eve to undressed Marina.

D'Onsky, therefore, concludes Demon, must be his rival.

The "small pen-and-wash" (12) that Demon has found is in fact a fusion of at least three Parmigianino works. The most important of the three is a small (9 x 3.3 cm.) sketch in pen and brown ink and brown wash, a preparatory study for the figure of Adam--not Eve--at the base of one of the sottarchi in the church of S. Maria della Steccata in Parma, which Parmigianino worked on between 1531 and 1539. The sketch (see Plate 1b, following p. 241), now in the Uffizi (inventory no. 1982^F), corresponds exactly to the posture Nabokov describes: someone sitting sideways on a support, with a peach-like apple cupped in his or her hand, and with a strikingly raised shoulder, a posture congruent with that of a person "perched on the arm of a chair," muffling the mouthpiece of a telephone and talking to someone else. There are no sketches for the Eve in the S. Maria della Steccata (or for any other Eve or female) which are similar to this position.

Why has Nabokov described the sketch as one of Eve, and why does he describe a "convolvulus-garlanded support" and "vermiculated effects of delicate vegetation" when there is no sign of these in the Uffizi drawing?²⁸ The convolvulus-garlanded support appears to come from the actual fresco of Adam in the Steccata, in which a twining vine is quite distinctly visible around the "support" on which Adam sits,

²⁸ There is a hint of twining vegetation in another sketch for the Adam (British Museum 1895-9-15, 755), but in this version the hand is not cupping the apple, nor is it in a position to muffle a telephone receiver. See A. E. Popham, Catalogue of the Drawings of Parmigianino (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971), III, pl. 327, 231 recto.

PLATE 1.

- a) Aleksandr Notbek, "Tatiana* pishet pis'mo" ("Tatiana writes her letter"), 1829
- b) Parmigianino, sketch for fresco of Adam, S. Maria della Steccata, Parma (Uffizi)
- c) Parmigianino, fresco of Adam, S. Maria della Steccata
- d) Parmigianino, fresco of Eve, S. Maria della Steccata



and in which the vegetation is nevertheless "delicate." The "convolvulus" in this fresco on the north wall elegantly matches the convolute serpent beside the support on which Eve rests in her south wall fresco. Nabokov's "vermiculate," I suggest, is a sly tribute to Parmigianino's artful echoing of Eve's serpent in Adam's vine.²⁹

Besides the delightfulness of Nabokov's attributing to an old master a sketch of a girl muffling a telephone, the composite "sketch" is appropriate in several ways. It foreshadows the explicit Edenic nuances of Ardis (close to "paradise"), the explicit links between Van and Ada and Adam and Eve. As has already been mentioned, Ada is particularly associated with Adam both by virtue of her name and by virtue of her assigning names to all the plants and animals she sees. If Ada can be a blend of Eve and Adam, why cannot her mother be the same?

By means of the sketch, too, Nabokov continues to explore the theme of the relationship of life to art: art and "life" interpenetrate in Marina's so closely resembling the Parmigianino and in this resemblance having such an effect on Marina's life and loves. Once again, moreover, Nabokov shows his interest in the relation of one medium to another. He respects the special requirements of a different medium--

²⁹ Nabokov could have seen the Uffizi sketch of Adam and the Steccata frescoes of Adam and Eve together in Sydney J. Freedberg, Parmigianino: His Works in Painting (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950), figures 108c, 100 and 101 respectively. Freedberg mentions (p. 195) but does not reproduce the British Museum Adams. Since Nabokov presents the sketch as previously unknown, this comment by Freedberg is of interest: "It is obviously impossible to present a list of preparatory drawings which could pretend to any degree of finality until after the whole problem of the drawings has been studied. The listing of preparatory drawings in the catalogue section of this book is thus necessarily and perhaps seriously incomplete. . . ." (P. xii.)

the materials and processes involved ("pen-and-wash," "the sketch made . . . for the fresco"), the precise delineation of physical posture, the balancing of composition he refers to in "vermiculate" and "convoluted"--and enjoys the challenge of rendering the pictorial image with exactitude in his own verbal medium, a challenge he takes up, as we shall see, in more complex forms later in Ada.

Nabokov's handling of the sketch, his linking the pose of "Eve" to that of Marina muffling the telephone receiver, also involves another type of relationship, that between one work of art and another, in quite an unexpected way. For there is a charmingly new kind of allusion here, a peculiarly active engagement with Proust's À la recherche du temps perdu (1913-1927). In "La Prisonnière," Marcel tries to ring Andrée, but the line is busy:

En attendant qu'elle eût achevé sa communication, je me demandais comment, puisque tant de peintres cherchent à renouveler les portraits féminins du XVIII^e siècle où l'ingénieuse mise en scène est un prétexte aux expressions de l'attente, de la bouderie, de l'intérêt, de la rêverie, comment aucun de nos modernes Boucher . . . ne peignit, au lieu de "la Lettre", du "Clavecin" etc., cette scène qui pourrait s'appeler: "Devant le téléphone", et où naîtrait si spontanément sur les lèvres de l'écouteuse un sourire d'autant plus vrai qu'il sait n'être pas vu.³⁰

Nabokov has gleefully appropriated Marcel's (or Proust's) suggestion. He does not allude merely by echoing a phrase or a situation but he actually executes the proposal made by a character in someone else's novel. He also adds a delightful twist of comic incongruity. Where

30 À la recherche du temps perdu, ed. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), III, 99-100.

Marcel recommends that in future artists might use the telephone as a pretext for the study of a woman's attitude, Nabokov makes it a "recommendation" for a past--and impeccably pre-telephonic--composition.

But the link between one of the novel's women and an old master work is also an echo of Proust. Like Demon, Swann (referred to in Ada, p. 55) is a considerable connoisseur of the visual arts. Like Marina, Odette is an actress. (though much more a simple cocotte),³¹ and the two are explicitly tied. Ada's entomological diary describes what Van calls "the Odettian Sphinx" (56), the hilariously obscene Cattleya Hawkmoth:

"I think Marina would stop scolding me for my hobby ('There's something indecent about a little girl's keeping such revolting pets . . . , 'Normal young ladies should loathe snakes and worms,' et cetera) if I could persuade her to overcome her old-fashioned squeamishness and place simultaneously on palm and pulse (the hand alone would not be roomy enough!) the noble larva of the Cattleya Hawkmoth (mauve shades of Monsieur Proust), a seven-inch-long colossus, flesh colored, with turquoise arabesques, rearing its hyacinth head in a stiff 'Sphinxian' attitude." (56)

"Cattleya" is in fact the name of a genus of orchids, not of a hawkmoth. The word alludes to Swann's amusingly slow "seduction" of Odette, during which a cattleya becomes a catalyst. Subsequently "la métaphore 'faire catleya' [devint] un simple vocable qu'ils employaient sans y penser quand ils voulaient signifier l'acte de la possession physique" (I.234).

³¹ Odette's acting never amounts to a career. Her "limelife" (Nabokov's word, Ada 427) "must have been brief, and a makeshift. The focus is kept on Odette as theatrical cocotte" (John Gaywood Linn, The Theater in the Fiction of Marcel Proust [n.p.: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1966], p. 190). Odette meets Charlus when she is acting; some time later Charlus, to get rid of her, brings Swann along to the theatre: it is not made clear whether on this night Odette is a performer or a spectator.

The "Cattleya Hawkmoth" or "Odettian Sphinx" caterpillar turns in time into a chrysalis, "into an elephantoid mummy with a comically encased trunk of the guermantoid type" (57). The words describing this instar show how remarkably exactly Nabokov remembers Proust. Commenting on Odette's having become the mistress of the duc de Guermantes³² very late in life, Marcel observes: "Et puis il y a des femmes qu'à chaque décade on retrouve en une nouvelle incarnation" (III.1015n). Thousands of pages earlier, Marcel had also remarked about the much younger Odette: "Physiquement, elle traversait une mauvaise phase: elle épaississait. . . . Mais savoir que sous cette chrysalide nouvelle, c'était toujours Odette qui vivait . . ." (I.291-92). If Odette turns into "an elephantoid mummy," so is Van's and Ada's "mummy" transformed, but in the opposite direction, as she shrinks before she dies into "mummy-wizened Marina" (452).

Let us return to Marina's resemblance to Parmigianino's "Eve." As Demon sees his Marina in terms of a Parmigianino sketch, so Swann sees his Odette in terms of a Botticelli painting: "elle frappa Swann par sa ressemblance avec cette figure de Zéphora, la fille de Jéthro, qu'on voit dans une fresque [de Botticelli] de la chapelle Sixtine" (I.222).

Through the Demon-Marina-Parmigianino parallel to Swann-Odette-Botticelli, Nabokov acknowledges a significant debt: the structural role of Demon and Marina in Pt.1 Ch.2, a foreshadowing of Van and Ada's

³² Nabokov's "guermantoid type" is also of course a play on the "geometrid" moths.

love affair in Ardis the First and Ardis the Second, is the same as that of Swann and Odette in "Un Amour de Swann," a foreshadowing of Marcel's affair with Albertine. In Proust the lingering love and morbid jealousy of an affair in one generation recurs in the next-- "mon amour pour Albertine avait répété, avec de grandes variations, l'amour de Swann pour Odette" (III.1015)--and in Ada, as we have shown, Ardis the First and Ardis the Second repeat a generation later the falling in love and the fiery jealousy of Pt.1 Ch.2. There are of course enormous differences between the two cases of foreshadowing: "Un Amour de Swann" is the length of an ordinary novel, while the break-neck narrative of Ada's second chapter takes only six pages, and the older/younger generation link in Ada is between parents and children as well as between matching pairs of lovers.

Nabokov plays with Proust to show the complex possibilities of allusion: he takes up, as Proust would never have expected, Marcel's suggestion that an artist depict a figure with telephone in hand; he borrows the structural relationship of a love affair in one generation that foreshadows the novel's principal passion in the next generation; he then pays off the debt, paradoxically, by another borrowing, by having his lover-connoisseur notice the similarity between his mistress and an old master's work, thus dovetailing back to his first use of Proust.

Proust is fascinated by the relationship between life and art, and often shows their interpenetration, in the resemblance between Odette and Botticelli's Zephora, for instance, or the "petite phrase" of Vinteuil's music which becomes "l'air national" of Swann and

Odette's love. These interpenetrations contribute to the Proustian rhythm of associations and retrospective revelations, but not to pure plot.

Nabokov is also fascinated by the relationship between life and art, and here he makes the Parmigianino drawing (as he has done too with Pushkin's "play") an essential instrument in his swift plot of romantic adventure. At the same time as he does this he also sets up a complex involvement with Proust, touching upon the possibilities of allusion, of the relationship between one work and another, while he simultaneously emphasizes the structural role of Demon and Marina's affair. In this chapter the structure (foreshadowing), the plot and the theme of artistic relationships interlace and intergrade in dazzlingly complex ways.

3. Pt.1 Ch.3: A Whirl of Worlds !

Ada's third chapter is perhaps the most moving and magnificent, the most attractive and horrific in the novel. In sentence after sentence there are intonations unprecedented in English prose.

The chapter has two subjects, the history of Antiterra's belief in a twin planet, "Terra," and the madness and eventual suicide of Aqua Veen, Marina's twin sister. These themes interlock in that it is Aqua's mental instability which causes her to believe so ardently in Terra and in that her belief in rosy Terra intensifies her irrationality.

It is implied throughout Ada's first two chapters that the novel is written and to be read by people on a world virtually identical to

our own yet comically different from it. This comedy of relationships begins on Ada's opening page when it is absurdly assumed to be quite natural that one of the forebears of our protagonists, obviously a Russian, "General Ivan Durmanov," should be so thoroughly at home in North America as to be "Commander of Yukon Fortress and peaceful country gentleman" (3). The world appears to be the same--there is a Russian language, there is a North America--yet its history is blatantly awry.

The immediate incongruity between the history of the novel's world and that of our poor planet is delightfully peculiar. But as often happens in Ada, there lurks behind the obvious difference an even more amusing level of unsuspected similarity that is the very basis of the observed difference. For on our world there is a Fort Yukon in Alaska, and the Alaskan region was a Russian territory until 1867, and in the family tree of a distinguished American novelist there does appear one Ivan Nabokov, commander of the Peter-and-Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg.³³ Such games of relationship, of comic disparities and surprising congruities, continue throughout the novel.

What is implied in passing in the novel's first two chapters becomes explicit in the third. Yet it would be inept and false to have a first-person narrator announce to his readers (à propos of nothing but his author's need) that he and they happen to live on "another" planet or even merely that they all happen to inhabit a planet called

³³ See SM 53: Ivan Aleksandrovich Nabokov (1787-1852) was the brother of Nikolay Aleksandrovich, Nabokov's great-grandfather.

Antiterra. Hence Nabokov adds another twist to the Antiterra theme: the denizens of the novel's world have believed in another world that seems almost identical to their own, a "Terra" which to us sounds like our solid and well-known earth but from the Antiterranean viewpoint is of very doubtful status and perhaps does not exist at all outside the delusions of the insane and the beliefs of the credulous. As Van says, he mentions the Terra notion not because he needs to explain to his fellow Antiterrans this familiar part of their common history but because it is a necessary prelude to his account of Aqua's insanity: "The modest narrator has to remind the rereader of all this, because in April . . . 1869 . . . on St. George's Day . . . Demon Veen married Aqua Veen--out of spite and pity, a not unusual blend" (19).

Because of its almost magical recombinations of what we see as the fixed and familiar forms of our planet, Antiterra seems to us a romance world, and as we shall see in the Ardis sections it is indeed opulently enchanted. Yet Terra, which to us appears likely to be our mundane sphere, strikes Antiterrans as a world of romance, shrouded in mystery, bewitchingly strange, possibly a terrestrial paradise, perhaps even a life after death.

Pt.1 Ch.3 begins by adding the notion of Terra to what at the same time becomes more clearly defined as Antiterra:

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. For, indeed, none can deny the presence of something highly ludicrous in the very configurations that were solemnly purported to represent a varicolored map of Terra. Ved' ("it is, isn't it") sidesplitting to imagine that "Russia," instead of being a quaint synonym of Estoty, the American province extending from the Arctic no longer vicious Circle to the United States proper, was on Terra the name of a country, transferred as if by some sleight of land across the ha-ha of a doubled ocean to the opposite hemisphere where it sprawled over all of today's Tartary, from Kurland to the Kuriles! (17-18)

The initial comedy of resemblance and difference remains, augmented by the verbal pairing and punning (the pairs match the twin planets, the puns the tension between sameness and difference). But with the addition of Terra there are two new kinds of comedy: a comedy of identity, in the unrecognized identity of Terra and Earth, unrecognized by Van and unrecognizable not only for him but for every one of his implied readers, for his whole world; and a comedy of direction, in Van's expectation that we readers will share his assumptions and see the Antiterrans as natural, the Terrans as grotesque.

Though Antiterrans know nothing of Earth the very name of Terra encourages us to identify the planet (whose existence is itself merely speculative) with our own. The beginning of Pt.1 Ch.3 supports the identification by describing the purported Terra in terms that exactly fit our world and by accounting for the differences between Terra and Antiterra in a way that neatly describes the differences we have already seen between Antiterra and Earth. Van calls "ludicrous" the notion that Terra's Russia might be not a part of North America but a land

sprawling from Kurland (part of Latvia) to the Kuriles (the Russian island chain above Japan), thus reversing our sense of the ludicrousness of General Ivan Durmanov's being so at home in North America and making it seem very likely indeed that Terra is in fact our Earth.

The identification of Terra and Earth will persist throughout Ada, as will the strange matching and mismatching of the Terra planet and Antiterra. Nabokov treats the latter as a fascinating problem in pure relationship, a challenge to the very notions of "same" and "different":

There were those who maintained that the discrepancies and "false overlappings" between the two worlds were too numerous, and too deeply woven into the skein of successive events, not to taint with trite fancy the theory of essential sameness; and there were those who retorted that the dissimilarities only confirmed the live organic reality pertaining to the other world; that a perfect likeness would rather suggest a specular, and hence speculative, phenomenon. . . . (18-19)

The disparity between Antiterra and our earth, too, adds a tinge of fantasy, a whiff of romance to everything that happens in the novel's world of magic rearrangement. The strange conditions of the relationship of Terra to Antiterra, which account for all the differences we have seen between Antiterran and Earth history, also serve to introduce the topic of time which will become so important in Van's philosophical work:

a more complicated and even more preposterous discrepancy arose in regard to time--not only because the history of each part of the amalgam did not quite match the history of each counterpart in its discrete condition, but because a gap of up to a hundred years one way or another existed between the two earths; a gap marked by a bizarre confusion of directional signs at the cross-

roads of passing time with not all the no-longers of one world corresponding to the not-yets of the other. (18)

But the planetary theme in Pt.1 Ch.3 is much more elusive than the initial easy identification of Terra and Earth and their easy contrast to Antiterra would seem to suggest. If at first we identify Terra and Earth in opposition to Antiterra, we soon have to restructure the alliances and reverse directions, uniting Earth and Antiterra in opposition to Terra, the unknown, a world whose existence is uncertain and whose nature as conceived by Antiterrans is very far from the terrestrial.

Nabokov deliberately avoids specifying too explicitly the sources of the notion of Terra: the "L disaster," whatever that was, has both caused and cursed the notion of Terra, in a manner that Van says it would be both needless and obscene to repeat. But what does become clear is that there is no physical evidence of the hypothetical other world, nor any contact with it. Abstract speculation, religious belief and individual fantasy have somehow caused a congealing of the unknown into the notion of a matching world. The learned debates on the existence of Terra are amusingly confused speculations on pure possibility: the great authority on the subject, Rattner (an anagram of N.T. Terra or Antiterra) "halfheartedly denied any objective existence to the sibling planet in his text, but grudgingly accepted it in obscure notes (inconveniently placed between chapters)" (231). The belief in Terra starts somehow with "the Great Revelation," a wave of quasi-religious enthusiasm perhaps set off by the "L disaster." Because the supposed confusion of time on the two worlds would create a "scientifically

ungraspable' concourse of divergences," many "deranged" minds (ready to plunge into any abyss) accepted it in support and token of their own irrationality" (18), and Van notes that the Great Revelation has "caused more insanity in the world than even an over-preoccupation with religion had in medieval times" (20). Rather absurdly the only empirically-based approach to the study of Terra appears to be that of correlating the visions of the insane.

In these visions and in the hopes of the New Believers, Terra becomes "Terra the Fair" (20), an idyllic world, a mortal paradise: "the strain of sweet happiness could always be distinguished as an all-pervading note" (341). Terra also becomes the world of the afterlife, of timeless existence:

Sick minds identified the notion of a Terra planet with that of another world and this "Other World" got confused not only with the "Next World" but with the Real World in us and beyond us. Our enchanters, our demons, are noble iridescent creatures with translucent talons and mightily beating wings; but in the eighteen-sixties the New Believers urged one to imagine a sphere where our splendid friends had been utterly degraded, had become nothing but vicious monsters, disgusting devils, with the black scrota of carnivora and the fangs of serpents, revilers and tormentors of female souls; while on the opposite side of the cosmic lane a rainbow mist of angelic spirits, inhabitants of sweet Terra, restored all the stalest but still potent myths of old creeds, with rearrangement for melodeon of all the cacophonies of all the divinities and divines ever spawned in the marshes of this our sufficient world. (20-21)

The reversal of relationships is quite complete: by now Terra seems to have become a world of romance, where existence is ideally happy, where "eternity" is "terrarity" (584). The idealized quality, the "rosy remoteness" (22) of Terra persists throughout Ada, in constant contrast to the known, the imperfect, the time-bound worlds of Antiterra

and Earth, and despite the parallel persistence of the identification of Terra with matter-of-fact Earth in opposition to fantastic Antiterra. At the same time, this reversal of the value of Terra allows Nabokov to introduce new topics that will prove of central importance to the novel: consciousness (the disordered consciousnesses of those who envisage Terra), timelessness, the possibilities of earthly and unearthly happiness.

It is because Antiterra's methods of finding out about Terra are of such doubtful validity that Terra comes to appear so fantastic, so far from the Earth with which it is at first allied. Yet there is another sudden near-reversal of relationships ahead: the dubious method is proved mysteriously accurate, and though Terra still seems fantastic, we must recognize the nineteenth-century vision of mad Aqua as an uncanny insight into twentieth-century Earth. Van intends his readers to see Aqua's image of Terra as pitifully ridiculous; we agree it is a vision of a fabulous world, yet it is our own:

Poor Aqua, whose fancies were apt to fall for all the fangles of cranks and Christians, envisaged vividly a minor hymnist's paradise, a future America of alabaster buildings one hundred stories high, resembling a beautiful furniture store crammed with tall white-washed wardrobes and shorter fridges; she saw giant flying sharks with lateral eyes taking barely one night to carry pilgrims through black ether across an entire continent from dark to shining sea, before booming back to Seattle or Wark. She heard magic-music boxes talking and singing, drowning the terror of thought, uplifting the lift girl, riding down with the miner, praising beauty and godliness, the Virgin and Venus, in the dwellings of the lonely and the poor. (21)

Once again Terra is allied to Earth and in opposition to Antiterra. But Terra is no longer our mundane Earth; our world of skyscrapers, jets and

radios seems to have become the world of romance and incredible vision.

Our familiar sphere is now as romantic by its strangeness as Antiterra seemed at first to us. By the force of his imagery Nabokov weans us from our acceptance of our present and makes us see it through the eyes of incomprehension. When seen as the future the commonplaces of today appear quite miraculous--yet as we shall find in the Ardis-sections Antiterra too seems fabulously romantic because of an exactly opposite glance through time, because it is a precise evocation of earth's real past, a past inaccessible and hence magically alluring.

The manifold effect of time upon human happiness is one of Ada's most important themes; here we see how Nabokov treats what is one of the commonest literary subjects with startling originality. He often stresses that what we stolidly accept as everyday life contains "extraordinary visions" (SM 20): the details of commonplace existence are in fact strange and unrepeatable, as we would realize if we shifted in time:

toutes ces choses mises ensemble me donnent la sensation d'une certaine réalité actuelle, d'une combinaison qui sera possible encore demain, mais qui ne le sera plus dans une vingtaine d'années. J'essaie de me figurer tout ceci comme un passé resuscitée. . . .³⁴

The narrator of "A Guide to Berlin" writes in a similar vein:

I think that here lies the sense of literary creation: to portray ordinary objects as they will be reflected in the kindly mirrors of future times; to find in the objects around us the fragrant tenderness that only posterity will

³⁴ "Les écrivains et l'époque," Le Mois, 6 (June-July 1931), 138.

discern and appreciate in the far-off times when every trifle of our plain everyday life will become exquisite and festive in its own right; the times when a man who might put on the most ordinary jacket of today will be dressed up for an elegant masquerade. (DS 94)

The combination Nabokov suggests here, of precision and an imagined distance in time, a combination which stresses the surprise and charm of the ordinary, is essential to his whole presentation of Antiterra and Terra.

In all the distortions of events and time sequences on Antiterra, Nabokov emphasizes that all of man's relationships to everything in his world are conditioned by time. Because temporality is everywhere in man's life, timelessness is a mysterious and inaccessible possibility, and that mystery and remoteness would make a timeless world, as Terra may be, the greatest romance of all. Yet our time-bound mundanity is itself a world of romance, if we forbid our familiar relations with things of our own time and place to blind us to the strangeness of existence and the endless distinctiveness and fascination of things as they are.

Let us turn now to the structural functions of Pt.1 Ch.3.

While as we saw Pt.1 Ch.2 foreshadows the novel's main plot (the Van-Ada theme), the next chapter foreshadows the main sub-plot (the Lucette theme) and simultaneously foreshadows that part of the narrative (the theme of Van's career) which forms a continual counterpoint to the main plot of the book. At the same time this chapter rounds off the expository function of Ada's prologue and very deftly slides the novel from the time of the prologue's chief events to the beginning of the

book's main action. The structural elegance that Nabokov hides behind the illusion of tangled and colourful caprice is quite remarkable.

As we have seen Van introduces the topic of Terra--from Nabokov's point of view a necessary part of the novel's exposition--as a prelude to an account of Aqua's madness: "Aqua was not quite twenty when the exaltation of her nature had begun to reveal a morbid trend. Chronologically, the initial stage of her mental illness coincided with the first decade of the Great Revelation, and although she might have found just as easily another theme for her delusion" (20) the Great Revelation did cause numerous insanities and it is Terra that Aqua seizes upon. But there are more immediate causes of Aqua's loss of mental control and in setting them forth in this third and last part of the novel's introduction Van divulges the final details of his and Ada's births. Though the details are disclosed as factors in Aqua's madness and in terms of her own thoughts, they appear in the most lucid and least oblique manner we have seen.

It is not until shortly after her marriage that Aqua enters the sanatorium at Ex for "her first battle with insanity" (20). We recall that "On April 23, 1869 . . . Aqua . . . married Walter D. Veen . . . who had long conducted, and was soon to resume intermittently, a passionate affair with Marina" (4). The reason that Aqua begins "a broken series of steadily increasing sojourns in sanatoriums" during "her fourteen years of miserable marriage" (19), then, is that Demon's continual unfaithfulness has upset her frail mental balance and made her utterly uncertain of her position in life. But there is a problem even more disturbing than Demon's infidelity: is Van her child or not?

The belief that he is her own offspring is the only thing that makes Aqua feel she has some place in the world. But it is a belief she can have only at moments:

At one time Aqua believed that a stillborn male infant half a year old, a surprised little fetus, a fish of rubber that she had produced in her bath, in a lieu de naissance plainly marked X in her dreams, after skiing at full pulver into a larch stump, had somehow been saved and brought to her at the Nusshaus, with her sister's compliments, wrapped up in blood-soaked cotton wool, but perfectly alive and healthy, to be registered as her son Ivan Veen. At other moments she felt convinced that the child was her sister's, born out of wedlock, during an exhausting, yet highly romantic blizzard, in a mountain refuge on Sex Rouge, where a Dr. Alpiner, general practitioner and gentian lover, sat providentially waiting near a rude red stove for his boots to dry. (25-26)

Ada's conception too is described in terms of the pathetic pride and illusory relief that Aqua is allowed to feel:

Some confusion ensued less than two years later (September, 1871 --her proud brain still retained dozens of dates) when upon escaping from her next refuge and somehow reaching her husband's unforgettable country house . . . she took advantage of his being massaged in the solarium, tiptoed into their former bedroom--and experienced a delicious shock: her talc powder in a half-full glass container marked colorfully Quelques Fleurs still stood on her bedside table; . . . to her it meant that only a brief black nightmare had obliterated the radiant fact of her having slept with her husband all along--ever since Shakespeare's birthday on a green rainy day, but for most other people, alas, it meant that Marina . . . had conceived, c'est bien le cas de le dire, the brilliant idea of having Demon divorce mad Aqua and marry Marina who thought (happily and correctly) she was pregnant again. Marina had spent a rukuliruyushchiy month with him at Kitezh but when she smugly divulged her intentions (just before Aqua's arrival) he threw her out of the house. (26)

These details are enough to complete the expository role of the three prologue chapters--or to send someone on a first reading back to the scene in the attic to assemble the exposition for himself.

That Nabokov intends this passage to be used as a key to the attic scene even on a first reading of the novel--that he strives to entice every reader to broach the parodically inaccessible exposition--is made clear by the quite insistently obtrusive recurrence of "lieu de naissance" (8; see above, p. 206) and "c'est bien le cas de le dire" (8; see above, p. 204). None of us could fail to notice this double recurrence, and with only twenty-four pages to flick back through we should all have enough curiosity to begin the search. Once we do connect the two passages we not only note the grace of particular links--Aqua's jumbled mind recalls Ex as a "plainly marked X," Dr. Lapiner's alpine garden becomes Dr. Alpiner--but we can delight in the decipherment of the herbarium and see implicit in it the whole of Pt.1 Ch.2's wild plot as well as the strange scenes--surprised fetus, skiing into a larch stump, birth in a blizzard--that Aqua calls to mind. The thrill of finding the solutions to the fiercely resistant exposition guarantees to the reader that behind whatever Nabokov has made difficult there lies the deepest consideration: the possibility of the bracing excitement of discovery, a discovery one can reach independently and simply by following one's curiosity. The prologue contains the key, then, to its own parodically difficult exposition, and the key to the treasure of reading Ada.³⁵

³⁵ In Pale Fire the delights of curiosity are dispensed and prescribed in the same way. In the third page of his Foreword mad Kinbote writes: "(See my note to line 991)" (PF 15). This note sends one on to the note to lines 47-48 which in turn directs one to the note to line 691. The note to line 991 mentions a secret that appears to be the very key to the book; the note to line 691 lets the curious and attentive reader into the secret. Before returning to the Foreword the inquisitive

Another of Pt.1 Ch.3's structural functions, besides that of so delightfully completing the exposition, is to move the story in time from the period of the prologue (1868-1872) to the beginning of the novel's main action, in 1884. This too is done by means of Aqua's madness. Her final interval of relief from torturing uncertainty is what kills her, for she knows that "this blessed state of perfect mental repose . . . could not last" (27). Van writes to her at her latest sanatorium, "calling her petite maman" (26), telling her of the school he will be attending in 1883, after his thirteenth birthday. The fact that Van calls her "mummy, or mama" (26) proves to Aqua's pitifully devastated mind that "Van was her, her, Aqua's, beloved son" (27). On one level, that of the novelist's structural calculation, the mention of Van's school prepares the way for Pt. 1 Ch.4, which describes Van at school in 1884, thus quickly providing him with some reality before in the beginning of the next chapter he arrives at Ardis to spend summer holidays with his "aunt" Marina and his "cousins" Adelaida (Ada) and Lucinda (Lucette). On another, more immediate and more moving level, of course, Van's letters from school to "mother" foster that mental "repose" which Aqua so desperately fears to lose that she takes her own life.

Aqua's suicide is the poignant conclusion of a marvelously sensitive and compassionate account of a mind stripped of security, proud of its remaining astuteness but so cowed by the "power of pain"

reader feels he knows the plot's secret three hundred pages before he ought to--and has learnt that he should never let curiosity settle into inertia.

(30), mental pain, that it can use its final perspicacity only to devise a means of release from life. While immediately harrowing and touching, Aqua's suicide also has a special position in Nabokov's architectonics, for her death prefigures the suicide of her niece, the tragic climax of Ada's main sub-plot. Both Aqua and Lucette are sensitive and even frail creatures who cannot withstand Demon's almost satanic energies and those of his son. Van is to a large degree the immediate cause of both deaths: Aqua's doubts that he really is her son end every interval of her precarious mental peace, while Lucette's longing for Van and for his love becomes more and more desperately the condition of her continuing to endure. Van indeed makes the connection between Aqua and her niece, and his own fatal role in both their ends, quite unequivocal:

After her first battle with insanity at Ex en Valais she returned to America, and suffered a bad defeat, in the days when Van was still being suckled . . . : for no sooner did all the fond, all the frail, come into close contact with him (as later Lucette did, to give another example) than they were bound to know anguish and calamity, unless strengthened by a strain of his father's demon blood. (20)

If Aqua's suicide prefigures that of Lucette, and hence the whole of Ada's main sub-plot, the madness that leads to her death serves to foreshadow the theme of Van's career, the half-excited, half-dismal counterpart of the Van-Ada theme, a sort of understudy that comes out onto centre stage to represent Van's interest in life only when Ada has left Van there all alone.

Van's career is double: he is both a psychiatrist and a philosopher. His two roles often merge--when, for instance, he examines a

chronophobiatic in order to learn more of the nature of time. They unite most significantly when he studies the knowledge the insane have of Terra, for it is recognized that insanity may be caused by a belief in Terra and that derangement does perhaps lead to some garbled insight into this parallel world whose existence would open up fascinating metaphysical possibilities. In Aqua's madness and in the account of Terra, then, the double specialization of Van's career is quite explicitly foreshadowed:

As Van Veen himself was to find out, at the time of his passionate research in terrology (then a branch of psychiatry) even the deepest thinkers, the purest philosophers, Paar of Chose and Kapater of Aardvark, were emotionally divided in their attitude toward the possibility that there existed "a distortive glass of our distorted glebe" as a scholar who desires to remain unnamed has put it with such euphonic wit. (Hm! Kveree-kveree, as poor Mlle L. used to say to Gavronsky. In Ada's hand.) (18)

There is of course much more than an artistic foreshadowing in this: Van is acknowledging that his psychiatric career, his fascination with insanity, is a natural result of his boyhood observation of the mental anguish of his "mother" (he does not find out until a year after her suicide that she was in fact only his aunt), while his career as a philosopher, his fascination with problems of space and time, began partly by way of the reputed distortions of space and time in Terra, the focus of many of Aqua's fantasies, and partly by way of mad Aqua's pathetic inability to cope with time:

The effort to comprehend the information conveyed somehow to people of genius by the hands of a timepiece, or piece of time, became as hopeless as trying to make out the sign language of a secret society or the Chinese chant of that young student with a non-Chinese guitar whom she had known at the time she or her

sister had given birth to a mauve baby. But her madness, the majesty of her madness, still retained a mad queen's pathetic coquetry: "You know, Doctor, I think I'll need glasses soon, I don't know" (lofty laugh), "I just can't make out what my wrist watch says . . . For heaven's sake, tell me what it says! Ah! Half-past for--for what? Never mind; never mind, 'never' and 'mind' are twins, I have a twin sister and a twin son. (24-25)

The topic of time reappears as the chapter closes in the suicide note Aqua leaves for Van and Demon. Somehow--the "somehow" of madness--Aqua's disordered sense of time is linked with her doubts about being Van's mother, her doubts that she has a position in life:

I . . . have earned the psykitsch right to enjoy a landparty with Herr Doktor Sig, Nurse Joan the Terrible, and several "patients," in the neighboring bor (piney wood) where I noticed exactly the same skunk-like squirrels, Van, that your Darkblue ancestor imported to Ardis Park, where you will ramble one day, no doubt. The hands of a clock, even when out of order, must know and let the dumbest little watch know where they stand, otherwise neither is a dial but only a white face with a trick mustache. Similarly, chelovek (human being) must know where he stands and let others know, otherwise he is not even a klok (piece) of a chelovek. . . . I . . . do not know where I stand. Hence I must fall. . . .

[Signed] My sister's sister who teper'
iz ada ("now is out of hell") (29)

The "Ardis Park" and Aqua's painful metaphor of the clock-face provide a transition to Van elaborating upon the image to Ada:

"If we want life's sundial to show its hand," commented Van, developing the metaphor in the rose garden of Ardis Manor at the end of August, 1884, "we must always remember that the strength, the dignity, the delight of man is to spite and despise the shadows and stars that hide their secrets from us. Only the ridiculous power of pain made her surrender. And I often think it would have been so much more plausible, esthetically, ecstatically . . . speaking--if she were really my mother." (29-30)

Aqua's letter and Van's elaboration, the final page of the

novel's prologue, bring together anticipations of the novel's three chief plot themes. The signature of Aqua's letter stresses how closely her suicide foreshadows Lucette's: her tragedy is that she is "My sister's sister"--that Marina had been Demon's real love and Van's real mother, and that Demon has married her, Aqua, Marina's twin, out of spite and pity--just as it is Lucette's tragedy that Ada is Van's real love and that Van refuses to complicate matters even further by making love to his own and Ada's half-sister. Van's elaboration upon the image in Aqua's letter of the clock's hands that do not "know where they stand" emphasizes how much his career has received its impetus from his mother and foreshadows his exploration of man's uncertainty in time and his insistence that man must not be daunted by what Nabokov calls "the unknowledgeable beyond the unknown" (SM 296). Aqua's mention of Ardis in the letter, finally, provides a natural bridge to Van and Ada together in the rose-garden of Ardis, already lovers, already aware of their secret bond.

The prologue ends, then, by looking forward not only to immediate developments but through the whole length of the novel. But at the same time it glances back over the rest of the prologue. We recall that in each of the prologue's chapters there is a document from one of that chapter's protagonists, a document upon which Van can base his reconstruction of events he could not witness. Nabokov makes the third of these documents echo each of its predecessors. Aqua's letter and Van's comment upon it hark back to Marina's herbarium notes and the children's observations upon them in the attic at Ardis. At the end of Pt.1 Ch.2 Van quotes in full Demon's letter to Marina in which he tells her he

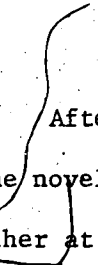
cannot marry her, haunted as he would always be by the image of her naked by the phone talking, aside, to another lover. Aqua's farewell note to Demon and Van ("So adieu, my dear, dear, son and farewell, poor Demon") balances Demon's farewell letter to Marina ("Adieu. Perhaps it is better thus") which he writes just before marrying Aqua and inflicting on her the misery that will lead to her suicide and her "last note."

Van's comments upon that note ("And I often think it would have been so much more plausible, esthetically . . . speaking--if she were really my mother"), the last words of the prologue, seal up the exposition by impressing upon us once again that Van and Ada are quite aware that Marina, not Aqua, is Van's mother. The prologue is over: Van and Ada's past is disclosed, their future foreshadowed, and Ardis, their eternal present, is about to begin.



IV

ARDIS



After the first three chapters, the prologue to Ada, the rest of the novel's Part 1. concentrates on Van and Ada's two sojourns together at Ardis, the country estate of Van's Uncle Dan, in the summers of 1884 and 1888. Throughout this portion of the novel, over half its total length, Nabokov tells his story by means of highly original combinations of anticipation and recapitulation. Some of these anticipatory and recapitulatory devices cannot even be discerned until after several rereadings; others affect us immediately, so quickly we do not have time to analyze the reasons for the exceptional eagerness with which we are reading about Van and Ada at Ardis; all of these imaginative structural ploys give Nabokov remarkable control over the novel's climate of happiness.

1. The Charm of Ardis

Largely because of its structures--which here are not recognized only later but are everywhere in the texture of the story--the charm of Ardis is immediate. Let us look at once, therefore, at a single brief chapter which typifies the charm of Ardis, which reveals how much this charm owes to the structural devices of the narrative, which demonstrates how intricately linked are the atmosphere, structure and themes.

Pt.1 Ch.12 describes an early stage of Ardis the First, in June and early July 1884, when Van's love and desire for Ada are already intense but when Van still supposes there is an enormous gap between himself and the cousin he thinks too young to woo.

The chapter begins: "Hammock and honey: eighty years later he could still recall with the young pang of the original joy his falling in love with Ada" (70). The bold lyricism of the first three words elevates "hammock" and "honey" to the status of prized relics even before we know the scenes to which they refer. This eager anticipation of the ensuing scenes leads at once into a much more far-ranging anticipation, a foreglimpse of the distant future, for suddenly in the next words we see Van at ninety-four recollecting "the original joy" of "his falling in love": we see in advance that after eighty years of fond recollection, Van still cherishes his initial delight. But this joy that he recalls is itself another anticipation, for it heralds something that within the narrative present is by no means certain, that young Van's love will be requited before he leaves Ardis.

The passage continues:

Memory met imagination halfway in the hammock of his boyhood's dawns. At ninety-four he liked retracing that first amorous summer not as a dream he had just had but as a recapitulation of consciousness to sustain him in the small gray hours between shallow sleep and the first pill of the day. Take over, dear, for a little while. Pill, pillow, billow, billions. Go on from here, Ada, please!

(She). Billions of boys. Take one fairly decent decade. A billion of Bills, good, gifted, tender and passionate, not only spiritually but physically well-meaning Billions, have bared the jillions of their no less tender and brilliant Jills during that decade, at stations and under conditions that have to be controlled and specified by the worker, lest the entire report be choked up by the weeds of statistics and waist-high generalizations. (70)

In the treatment of Van's age there is a keen sense of the implacable advance of time: time is still solidly present and to be endured through "the small gray hours" of an ~~ashen~~ insomnia; time is decay, as we see in the pills Van needs to hold at bay the pains age has imposed. Yet time is doubly overcome: Van can retrace the past, feeling again its sharp excitement, and his and Ada's love has firmly resisted the force of decline.¹ For there they are, lying together in bed, Van at ninety-four, Ada at ninety-two, he sliding into shallow sleep as he sinks back into the pillow, she being able to take up his tender request: their minds are still attuned, still in loving harmony.

The transition from Van to Ada is an excellent example of Nabokov's defying ordinary fictional continuity. Impersonal retrospective becomes in a flash a direct address from the retrospector to another character; with a slick toss and catch of sound from voice to voice Ada is now narrator; her playful, seemingly nonsensical billions and jillions suddenly, somewhere, assume the earnest air of a social scientist concocting an earnest report. And while jangling sound seems to have been all that determined Ada's early choice of words, sense becomes visible and reveals that it had always been there: Ada has knocked askew the squareness of common sense by the irrational shifts in her sentence and has insisted on the uniqueness of the particular,¹ of her

¹ "Commonsense is square. . . . I am triumphantly mixing my metaphors because that is exactly what they are intended for when they follow the course of their secret connections--which from a writer's point of view is the first positive result of the defeat of commonsense. . . . What exactly do those irrational standards mean? They mean the supremacy of the detail over the general. . . ." ("The Creative Writer," p. 22.)

and Van's love, of each moment of that love.

It is in this vein that Ada continues:

No point would there be, if we left out, for example, the little matter of prodigious individual awareness and young genius, which makes, in some cases, of this or that particular gasp an unprecedented and unrepeatable event in the continuum of life or at least a thematic anemia of such events in a work of art, or a denouncer's article. The details that shine through or shade through: the local leaf through the hyaline skin, the green sun in the brown humid eye, tout ceci, vsyo eto, 'in, tit and toto, must be taken into account, now prepare to take over (no, Ada, go on, ya zaslushalsya: I'm all enchantment and ears) . . . the detail is all And the most difficult: beauty itself as perceived through the there and then. The males of the firefly (now it's really your turn, Van).

The males of the firefly, a small luminous beetle, more like a wandering star than a winged insect, appeared on the first warm black nights of Ardis. . . . (70-71)

Van and Ada remain wonderfully aligned as they recapitulate their distant past.

Van continues the narrative, shifting from fireflies to the night outdoors, from the night outdoors to the hammock in which he slept, from the hammock to the dawn in which he would awake:

As the first flame of day reached his hammock, he woke up another man--and very much of a man indeed. "Ada, our ardors and arbors"--a dactylic trimeter that was to remain Van Veen's only contribution to Anglo-American poetry--sang through his brain. Bless the starling and damn the stardust! He was fourteen and a half; he was burning and bold; he would have her fiercely some day! (74)

Anticipation is sharpened by the freshness of dawn, by the dedication and youthful energy of Van's desire (and the erotic edge in that auroral erection), and above all by the contrast between Van's sense at the time of the difficulty of attaining Ada, of the infinite distance separating him from her, and his and our knowledge now of how soon he was rewarded.

The freshness and the singular construction of the scenes are as vital to the charm of Ardis as the anticipation and recapitulation of the joint narrative. Carrying on from the passage above, Van declares that "One such green resurrection he could particularize when replaying the past" (74). The scene that follows conveys what Ada called "the most difficult: beauty itself as perceived through the there and then."

Having drawn on his swimming trunks, having worked in and crammed in all that intricate, reluctant multiple machinery, he had toppled out of his nest and forthwith endeavored to determine whether her part of the house had come alive. It had. He saw a flash of crystal, a fleck of color. She was having sa petite collation du matin alone on a private balcony. Van found his sandals--with a beetle in one and a petal in the other--and, through the toolroom, entered the cool house. (74)

Note Nabokov's love of pattern in "a flash of crystal, a fleck of color" and in "with a beetle in one and a petal in the other." But are the details invented only for their sound? The petal fallen from the tulip tree above, the beetle crawling across the rich earth floor below make instantly alive the reality of waking outside. Nothing could put us so much within Van, and in such a trice, as our experiencing the tickle of the petal and the crunch of the beetle as Van slips his coldish feet into his sandals. Nabokov loves the independent fact that suddenly catches a person's attention--not something predictably part of a scene but a detail that, precisely because it is not prepared for, surprises by the intense shock of its presentness. The moment becomes invigoratingly alive--and yet timeless, because it will always be acutely present as we read.

But if Nabokov has a genius for placing us within the bright reality of an imagined scene he can also easily move outside it. The passage continues:

Children of her type contrive the purest philosophies. Ada had worked out her own little system. Hardly a week had elapsed since Van's arrival when he was found worthy of being initiated in her web of wisdom. An individual's life consisted of certain classified things: "real things" which were unfrequent and priceless, simply "things" which formed the routine stuff of life; and "ghost things," also called "fogs," such as fever, toothache, dreadful disappointments, and death. Three or more things occurring at the same time formed a "tower," or, if they came in immediate succession, they made a "bridge." "Real towers" and "real bridges" were the joys of life, and when the towers came in a series, one experienced supreme rapture; it almost never happened, though. In some circumstances, in a certain light, a neutral "thing" might look or even actually become "real" or else, conversely, it might coagulate into a fetid "fog." When the joy and the joyless happened to be intermixed, simultaneously or along the ramp of duration, one was confronted with "ruined towers" and "broken bridges." (74-75)

Little Miss Ada's beguilingly original philosophy--as original as the sun-and-shade games she invents--expresses Nabokov's own concern with the nature of happiness in an enchantingly different key while at the same time showing the special intimacy that has arisen between the children ("Hardly a week had elapsed . . . when he was found worthy of being initiated in her web of wisdom").

The narrative makes a deft transition back to the scene:

The pictorial and architectural details of her metaphysics made her nights easier than Van's, and that morning--as on most mornings--he had the sensation of returning from a much more remote and grim country than she and her sunlight had come from.

Her plump, stickily glistening lips smiled.

(When I kiss you here, he said to her years later, I always remember that blue morning on the balcony when you were eating a tartine au miel; so much better in French.)

The classical beauty of clover honey, smooth, pale, trans-

lucent, freely flowing from the spoon and soaking my love's bread and butter in liquid brass. The crumb steeped in nectar.

"Real thing?" he asked.

"Tower," she answered.

And the wasp.

The wasp was investigating her plate. Its body was throbbing.

(75)

Note the combined anticipation and recapitulation that follows "Her plump, stickily glistening lips smiled." At the time of this scene, of course, Van has only dreamed of kissing Ada, and the aside whets our eagerness to see Van's dream become reality in the near future. But it also anticipates Van and Ada's being lovingly together in a more distant future, and forecasts already--when the scene has just begun--their future recollection of these precious moments, their deliberate replaying of "that blue morning."

The next sentence, with its wave of celebratory lyrical description, contains another delicate anticipation: "soaking my love's bread and butter" allows the impersonal narrative to reflect Van's tenderness both later, at the moment of writing, and within the narrative present, as he thinks of "my love" even before he dares avow to Ada the tenderness he feels. The odd change of cadence in the sudden precise perception that follows--"The crumb steeped in nectar"--is a superb Nabokovian swerve in continuity.

Van's description of Ada veers toward a torrid subjectivity and bumps strangely back to a cool objectivity:

Her hair was well brushed that day and sheened darkly in contrast with the lusterless pallor of her neck and arms. She wore the striped tee shirt which in his lone fantasies he especially liked to peel off her twisting torso. The oilcloth was divided into

blue and white squares. A smear of honey stained what remained of the butter in its cool crock. (75)

The change from the erotic tension of Van's fantasies to the abrupt flatness and pointlessness--in terms of character--of "The oilcloth was divided into blue and white squares" jostles one's visual imagination into life, while the last of these descriptions that shift in focus and value, the honey-smeared butter, is a gem of observation that like the beetle and petal "revive[s] the part while vivifying the whole" (31).

The scene and chapter conclude:

"All right. And the third Real Thing?"

She considered him. A fiery droplet in the wick of her mouth considered him. A three-colored velvet violet, of which she had done an aquarelle on the eve, considered him from its fluted crystal. She said nothing. She licked her spread fingers, still looking at him.

Van, getting no answer, left the balcony. Softly her tower crumbled in the sweet silent sun. (75-76)

Stylistically, the passage is a pure joy: the incremental repetition which even as the pattern builds up can flash with Vermeer-like detail; the delicate echoing back to the beginning of the scene, the belated identification of the "flash of crystal . . . fleck of color" in the "fluted crystal" that holds the "three-colored velvet violet"; the impeccable rhythm of the last sentence.

But even more attractive than the lavish phrasing and coloration is the plot they surround: what doesn't happen--Ada doesn't tell Van that his presence makes the moment "priceless," that he is her third "Real Thing"--and what it is anticipated will happen, that Van will find out that Ada, far from being too young for love, already adores and

desires him. Young Van doesn't know this; young Ada can't simply volunteer it; but we and the older Van and Ada all know it--and we all look forward to seeing the moment when young Van and Ada can frankly declare their love and recall this moment and savour it as they remember and describe the emotions they dared not voice.

Pt.1 Ch.12, the hammock and honey chapter, is typical of the Ardis sections in the anticipations of later recapitulations that we glimpse through the medium of the joint narrative, in the anticipations of impending fulfilment that flash through the charm of the chapter's single full scene. By its vividness this scene seems to exist in a timeless present--time is happily halted--but by the excitement it arouses, by making us eager to see Van and Ada together, it makes time's hurrying on equally a source of delight. Time is both thrilling in its promised advance and a threat overcome in that its lengthy lapse brings no decline into Van and Ada's love, in that the past seems eternalized, in that recollection keeps everything brightly alive.

2. Ardis the First

Let us now examine in detail the structure of the whole of Ardis the First (Pt.1 Ch.5-Ch.25).

This section of the novel is characterized throughout by two opposite tendencies, two different relationships towards time. The first is a rapid, relentless advance towards an overwhelming fulfilment, Van's falling in love with Ada, his dreams of having her one day, his approach to and attainment of the ecstasy of fully shared love. Time

in this respect is seen as ongoing growth, irreversible direction. Though even within Ardis the First it is not forgotten that time's onward drive will ultimately lead to age, decay, loss, the emphasis is on the fulfilment which time's forward impulse will bring.

The other tendency is the triumph over time's direction. Within the first Ardis section, this takes several very powerful forms: memory's recollecting and preserving the past; the possibility of repeating, replaying, reliving the past; the continuance of fulfilled love that knows no decline.

The contrast between these two aspects of Ardis the First, the restless advance of time and the triumph over the loss consequent upon that advance, is central to the whole philosophy of the novel. In Part 4, his essay on "The Texture of Time," Van writes thus:

The direction of Time, the ardis of Time, one-way Time, here is something that looks useful to me one moment, but dwindles the next to the level of an illusion obscurely related to the mysteries of growth and gravitation. The irreversibility of Time (which is not heading anywhere in the first place) is a very parochial affair: had our organs and orgitrons not been asymmetrical, our view of Time might have been amphitheatric and altogether grand, like ragged night and jagged mountains around a small, twinkling, satisfied hamlet. (538-39)

("Ardis" is Greek for "the point of an arrow.") Throughout Ardis the First there is a powerfully real sense of the direction of time as well as a timelessness as exhilarating and soothing as that which Van envisages.

The impetuosity of time's advance and the convincing defeat of the decline and loss implicit in this advance are both built up through anticipation and recapitulation, devices at once necessary for Nabokov's

purposes and a very natural result of the fact that Van and Ada are still together as Van records his past--with occasional asides from Ada --in a spirit of fond enthusiasm.

Anticipation and recapitulation are everywhere in Ardis the First. This is the first time Van sees Ada at Ardis (he has seen her once before in Radugalet, the "other Ardis" [149], when he was eight and she was six):

A victoria had stopped at the porch. A lady, who resembled Van's mother, and a dark-haired girl of eleven or twelve, preceded by a fluid dackel, were getting out. Ada carried an untidy bunch of wild flowers. She wore a white frock with a black jacket and there was a white bow in her long hair. He never saw that dress again and when he mentioned it in retrospective evocation she invariably retorted that he must have dreamt it, she never had one like that, never could have put on a dark blazer on such a hot day, but he stuck to his initial image of her to the last. (37)

Van's very first glimpse of Ada at Ardis is at once an encounter with a virtual stranger--when young Van has no inkling of what this girl in a white dress will come to mean to him--and an anticipation of Van and Ada together, a fore-image of the much later and repeated recollection of this present moment.

Marina, Van and Ada go to have tea and from an open casement Ada points out the Tarn to Van:

"You can catch a glint of it from here too," said Ada, turning her head and . . . introducing the view to Van who put his cup down, wiped his mouth with a tiny embroidered napkin, and stuffing it into his trouser pocket, went up to the dark-haired, pale-armed girl. As he bent toward her (he was three inches taller and the double of that when she married a Greek Catholic, and his shadow held the bridal crown over her from behind), she moved her head to make him move his to the required angle and her hair touched his neck. In his first dreams of her this re-enacted contact, so light,

so brief, invariably proved to be beyond the dreamer's endurance and like a lifted sword signaled fire and violent release. (39)

Again there is a rapid anticipation of a kind of recapitulation--"this re-enacted contact"--that sketches in advance the growth of Van's desire. But if the erotic overtones inject an eagerness into our expectations of what time may bring, the image of Ada's future marriage to another man warns us too of the loss time will entail.

Anticipation and recapitulation each contribute to both the power of time's onward impetus and to the triumph over that power. In *Ardis the First* we have a very strong sense of the force of time's forward drive not only because anticipation makes us eager to catch up with what has been hurriedly foreglimpsed but also because Van and Ada's harmonious recollections convince us that their singularly unabated love is particularly deserving, and make us all the more eager to see such desert find its first fulfilment. We feel the onward drive of time weakened, even defeated, on the other hand, because anticipation removes the unknownness of "future" events--Van as narrator knows exactly how his love developed even as he describes its earliest stages--and because all the tender recapitulation indicates that the past is not forgotten and that time's advance has not been able to make the Veens' feelings atrophy with age.

The advance of time in *Ardis the First* is felt in terms of the development of Van and Ada's love. Nabokov renders the children's ages and conditions and the growth of their young love with meticulous imaginative accuracy. Van at fourteen is very conscious of being much older than eleven-year-old Ada, whom he thinks of vaguely before meeting

her as "'Ardelia,' the eldest of the two little cousins he was supposed to get acquainted with" (36). At first he is irritated by her priggery and pretentiousness and disconcerting self-confidence, but when he vents his irritation--"personally I think these are the most boring and stupid games anybody has ever invented, anywhere, any time, A.M. or P.M." (52)--he is flooded with a shy internal generosity eager to atone for such rudeness, and in this propitious spirit he recognizes the interest Ada's beauty and brilliance, and charm have aroused:

"... We can squirm from here into the front hall by a secret passage, but I think we are supposed to go and look at the grand chène which is really an elm." Did he like elms? Did he know Joyce's poem about the two washerwomen? He did, indeed. In fact he was beginning to like very much arbors and ardors and Adas. They rhymed. Should he mention it? (53-54)

Van's love grows quickly, quickly ripens into desire. With the advent of desire he becomes eager for his relationship with his "cousin" to progress towards the possibility of eventual consummation. But being sharply aware of the gap in age and experience that separates him from Ada, Van dares not be open with her: he knows he might well be met by incomprehension or alarmed disgust.

Yet at the same time as young Van feels the way to Ada is blocked, we know that it is clear, that the two will soon be together, and we look forward to seeing the joy that Van as narrator so often anticipates. The intensity of Van's passion at the time, the lyric celebration in recollection, the recognition that Van and Ada's love endures so magnificently--all these, revealed by the reminiscences, the shared composition, the keen expectation, generate a sense of excitement

whenever accident or necessarily oblique endeavour allow Van and Ada to approach each other a little more closely. As Herbert Golden remarks, "a series of firsts"² marks the children's ripening amity and stealthy wooing with stabs of erotic delight: chance glimpses, chance contacts, a sly kiss on the back of the neck, an innocent response, a "fortnight of long messy embraces" (103).

The entire episode of the Night of the Burning Barn, the fulfilment towards which Ardis the First so irresistibly moves, demonstrates how the excitement of time's advance at Ardis is whetted by anticipation and recapitulation--and, simultaneously, how anticipation and recapitulation help to reveal an uncommon triumph over advancing time.

The chapter preceding the Burning Barn begins with a summary of Van and Ada's recollections:

Not only in ear-trumpet age--in what Van called their dot-dot-dotage--but even more so in their adolescence (summer, 1888), did they seek a scholarly excitement in establishing the past evolution (summer, 1884) of their love, the initial stages of its revelations, the freak discrepancies in gappy chronographies. . . . "And do you remember, a ti pommish', et te souviens-tu" (invariably with that implied codetta of "and," introducing the bead to be threaded in the torn necklace) became with them, in their intense talks, the standard device for beginning every other sentence. Calendar dates were debated, sequences sifted and shifted, sentimental notes compared, hesitations and resolutions passionately analyzed. (109)

Even before Van and Ada's love has frankly avowed itself in 1884, it is anticipated that they will be lovers still in 1888 and again much later in life and that their memories will always continue to caress their past.

² Golden, "A Study of Games Played in Ada," p. 81.

This chapter recalls Van and Ada's oblique touchings, their unacknowledged erotic play. Ada, for instance, would kneel on a chair, bending over the table to build a house of cards, while Van, sitting on the chair arm, would "casually" arrange his hand for Ada's "chance" contact:

"... You see I was hoping that when your castle toppled you would make a Russian splash gesture of surrender and sit down on my hand."

"... Did I sit down on your hot hard hand?"

"On my open palm, darling. A pucker of paradise." (113)

The question-and-answer exploration of the past and its erotic tension build up into a tribute to and a very keen anticipation of the night of the burning barn:

"... You remained still for a moment, fitting my cup. Then you rearranged your limbs and rekneilt."

"Quick, quick, quick, collecting the flat shining cards again to build again, again slowly? We were abominably depraved, weren't we?"

"All bright kids are depraved. I see you do recollect--"

"Not that particular occasion, but the apple tree, and when you kissed my neck, et tout le reste. And then--zdravstvuyte: apofeos, the Night of the Burning Barn!" (113)

The next chapter (Pt.1 Ch.19) is a paradigm of Nabokov's narrative artistry: soaring lyricism and an amazing technical inventiveness enhance each other's power; a centrifugal whimsy of imagination complements a rare delicacy of internal arrangement.

The chapter begins:

A sort of hoary riddle . . . : did the Burning Barn come before the Cockloft or the Cockloft come first. Oh, first! We had long been kissing cousins when the fire started. . . . And we both were roused in our separate rooms by her crying au feu!

July 28? August 4?

Who cried? Stopchin cried? Larivière cried? Larivière?
Answer! Crying that the barn flambait?

No, she was fast ablaze--I mean, asleep. I know, said Van, it was she, the hand-painted handmaid, who used your water-colors to touch up her eyes, or so Larivière said, who accused her and Blanche of fantastic sins.

Oh, of course! But not Marina's poor French--it was our little goose Blanche. Yes, she rushed down the corridor and lost a miniver-trimmed slipper on the grand staircase, like Ashette in the English version.

"And do you remember, Van, how warm the night was?"

"Eshcho bī! (as if I did not!) That night because of the blink--"

That night because of the bothersome blink of remote sheet lightning through the black hearts of his sleeping-arbor, Van had abandoned his two tulip trees and gone to bed in his room.

(114-15)

The passage enacts with electric urgency what had been merely summarized at the beginning of the preceding chapter: "Calendar dates were debated, sequences sifted and shifted," "'And do you remember . . .' became . . . the standard device for beginning every other sentence. . . ."

As they recollect, the narrative voices eagerly look forward to the coming delight. The interplay of the narrators is so alive, mixing as it does keen curiosity, an excited sense of the importance of the night's events, and the panic and flurry caused by the fire itself, that words tumble out wrongly and voices blur, and the fancifulness of the matter (the watercolours that French is supposed to use as makeup, the Cinderella moment when Blanche loses her slipper on the staircase) is no less entertaining than the fluster of the manner.

The scrambling recollection fades elegantly into narrative that for a moment becomes ordered and sedate. During this moment, Van takes his candle down to the library and watches everybody leaving for the fire--and already the unparalleled imaginative zaniness has resurfaced:

The entire domestic staff seemed to be taking off to enjoy the fire (an infrequent event in our damp windless region), using every contraption available or imaginable: telegas, teleseats, roadboats, tandem bicycles and even the clockwork luggage carts with which the stationmaster supplied the family in memory of Erasmus Veen, their inventor. (115)

Nor does the resumption of the joint narrative impair the bizarrerie, for Van and Ada's breathless eagerness to tell the story coexists with wild fits of comic irrelevance (pantry boy on water skis). or strange verbal fits and flourishes:

little Lucette lay for a minute awake before running after her dream and jumping into the last furniture van.

Van, kneeling at the picture window, watched the inflamed eye of the cigar recede and vanish. That multiple departure . . . Take over.

That multiple departure really presented a marvelous sight against the pale star-dusted firmament of practically subtropical Ardis, tinted between the black trees with a distant flamingo flush at the spot where the Barn was Burning. To reach it one had to drive round a large reservoir which I could make out breaking into scaly light here and there every time some adventurous hostler or pantry boy crossed it on water skis or in a Rob Roy or by means of a raft--typical raft ripples like fire snakes in Japan. . . . (116)

Now that almost everybody has left the manor, Ada appears in her nightgown next to Van in his tartan laprobe:

Van was delighted and shocked to distinguish, right there in the inky shrubbery, Ada in her long nightgown passing by with a lighted candle in one hand and a shoe in the other as if stealing after the belated ignicolists. It was only her reflection in the glass. She dropped the found shoe in a wastepaper basket and joined Van on the divan.

"Can one see anything, oh, can one see?" the dark-haired child kept repeating, and a hundred barns blazed in her amber-black eyes, as she beamed and peered in blissful curiosity. He relieved her of her candlestick, placing it near his own longer one on the window ledge. "You are naked, you are dreadfully indecent," she observed without looking and without any emphasis or reproof, whereupon he cloaked himself tighter, Ramses the

Scotsman, as she knelt beside him. For a moment they both contemplated the romantic night piece framed in the window. He had started to stroke her, shivering, staring ahead, following with a blind man's hand the dip of her spine through the batiste.

"Look, gipsies," she whispered, pointing at three shadowy forms--two men, one with a ladder, and a child or dwarf--circumspectly moving across the gray lawn. They saw the candle-lit window and decamped, the smaller one walking à reculons as if taking pictures.

"I stayed home on purpose, because I hoped you would too--it was a contrived coincidence," she said, or said later she'd said--while he continued to fondle the flow of her hair, and to massage and rumple her nightdress, not daring yet to go under and up, daring, however, to mold her nates until, with a little hiss, she sat down on his hand and her heels, as the burning castle of cards collapsed. (116-17)

The scene is pure magic, from the momentary illusion to the rush of Ada's avid curiosity, from the presence of an unnamed Kim Beauharnais ("a child or dwarf . . . walking à reculons as if taking pictures") to the attractive echo, as the burning barn collapses, of Ada's castle of cards. A more distant echo can be noticed in the two candlesticks on the window ledge--which recall a moment that seemed a phantomic foreshadowing of the episode of the barn-burning (see above, p. 66). The "contrived coincidence" of Ada and Van's meeting in the library and on the divan conceals another recurrence even more difficult to spot.

During *Ardis the Second* we will learn that on the very evening of the burning barn, a few hours before lightning set off the fire, Van, Ada and Lucette had been playing Scrabble together in the library. Since Van and Ada had been sitting close beside each other on the divan (with, no doubt, more tense "chance" contacts), it is natural that each should think of making his or her way back there when roused from sleep a few hours later by a cry of "au feu!"

The amatory tension of the moment--note that Van still dare not look at her ("started to stroke her . . . staring ahead"), still feels a need for gradualness ("not daring yet") despite what we can see as Ada's enthusiastic if undeclared cooperativeness--mingles with the lyricism of shared recollection:

. . . In that scene of the Burning Barn--
 Yes?
 Nothing. Go on.
 Oh, Van, that night, that moment as we knelt side by side in the candlelight. . . . (117-18)

The eroticism continues to mount and blends now with superb parody and comedy:

"I wannask," she repeated as he greedily reached his hot pale goal.

"I want to ask you," she said quite distinctly, but also quite beside herself because his ramping palm had now worked its way through at the armpit, and his thumb on a nipplet made her palate tingle: ringing for the maid in Georgian novels--inconceivable without the presence of *elettricit *--

(I protest. You cannot. It is banned even in Lithuanian and Latin. Ada's note.)

"--to ask you . . ."

"Ask," cried Van, "but don't spoil everything" (such as feeding upon you, writhing against you).

"Well, why," she asked (demanded, challenged, one flame crepitated, one cushion was on the floor), "why do you get so fat and hard there when you--"

"Get where? When I what?"

In order to explain, tactfully, tactually, she belly-danced against him, still more or less kneeling, her long hair getting in the way, one eye staring into his ear (their reciprocal positions had become rather muddled by then).

"Repeat!" he cried as if she were far away, a reflection in a dark window. (118-19)

The last lines exquisitely echo Van's earlier confused vision of Ada reflected in the library window; the "ramping" palm recalls Ada's much

earlier remark, ostensibly à propos of her fascination with caterpillars but decidedly sexual in its overtones: "Je raffole de tout ce qui rampe (I'm crazy about everything that crawls)" (54). But observe particularly how Nabokov repeatedly and touchingly stresses Ada's youth, her ignorance of male sexuality. Time's advance is coming fast and irreversibly for this barely pubescent girl:

"Oh, dear," she said as one child to another. "It's all skinned and raw. Does it hurt? Does it hurt horribly?"
 "Touch it quick," he implored. (119)

Nabokov expresses the rapid and irrevocable ending of Ada's innocence in terms of the uniqueness of her response to sexual facts, in terms of the particular bent of her individual imagination:

"Relief map," said the primrose prig, "the rivers of Africa." Her index traced the blue Nile down into its jungle and traveled up again. "Now what's this? The cap of the Red Bolete is not half as plushy. In fact" (positively chattering), "I'm reminded of geranium or rather pelargonium bloom."

"God, we all are," said Van.

"Oh, I like this texture, Van, I like it! Really I do!"

"Squeeze, you goose, can't you see I'm dying."

But our young botanist had not the faintest idea how to handle the thing properly--and Van, now in extremis, driving it roughly against the hem of her nightdress, could not help groaning as he dissolved in a puddle of pleasure.

She looked down in dismay.

"Not what you think," remarked Van calmly. "This is not number one. Actually it's as clean as grass sap. Well, now the Nile is settled stop Speke." (119-20).

Suddenly a much later time breaks through the film of the narrative present:

(I wonder, Van, why you are doing your best to transform our poetical and unique past into a dirty farce? Honestly, Van! Oh, I am honest, that's how it went. I wasn't sure of my ground,

hence the sauciness and the simper. Ah, parlez pour vous: I, dear, can affirm that those famous fingertrips up your Africa and to the edge of the world came considerably later when I knew the itinerary by heart. Sorry, no--if people remembered the same they would not be different people. That's-how-it-went. But we are not "different"! Think and dream are the same in French. Think of the douceur, Van! Oh, I am thinking of it, of course, I am--it was all douceur, my child, my rhyme. That's better, said Ada.) (120)

Even before we are sure of the first event we see the whole series:

"I, dear, can affirm that those famous fingertrips up your Africa . . . came considerably later when I knew the itinerary by heart." For a moment Ada's complaint and Van's disagreement introduce a surprising discord. But the very fact that they are confident enough of their love to report their bickering outweighs the unpleasantness, even before the tender sweetness of the closing. (The "douceur" is from Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au Voyage" [1855], the opening lines of which are: "Mon enfant, ma sœur, / Songe à la douceur / D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!" Hence Van's "my child, my rhyme.") The fact of their continued togetherness, their continued love, their continued delight in their common past (even if not perfectly recollected) represents a resounding victory over time's forward motion--which, back on the divan, is pressing on so impetuously.

Van takes off Ada's soaked nightie:

But the shag of the couch was as tickly as the star-dusted sky. Before anything new happened, Ada went on all fours to rearrange the lap robe and cushions. Native girl imitating rabbit. He groped for and cupped her hot little slew from behind, then frantically scrambled into a boy's sandcastle-molding position; but she turned over, naively ready to embrace him the way Juliet is recommended to receive her Romeo. She was right. For the first time in their love story, the blessing, the genius of lyrical speech descended upon the rough lad, he murmured and

moaned, kissing her face with voluble tenderness, crying out in three languages--the three greatest in all the world--pet words upon which a dictionary of secret diminutives was to be based and go through many revisions till the definitive edition of 1967. When he grew too loud, she shushed, shushingly breathing into his mouth, and now her four limbs were frankly around him as if she had been love-making for years in all our dreams--but impatient young passion (brimming like Van's overflowing bath while he is reworking this, a crotchety gray old wordman on the edge of a hotel bed) did not survive the first few blind thrusts; it burst at the lip of the orchid, and a bluebird uttered a warning warble, and the lights were now stealing back under a rugged dawn, the firefly signals were circumscribing the reservoir, the dots of the carriage lamps became stars, wheels rasped on the gravel, all the dogs returned well pleased with the night treat, the cook's niece Blanche jumped out of a pumpkin-hued police van in her stockinged feet (long, long after midnight, alas)--and our two naked children, grabbing lap robe and night-dress, and giving the couch a parting pat, pattered back with their candlesticks to their innocent bedrooms. (121-22)

The narrative retains its freshness, its enchanting sense of novelty, from beginning ("Native girl imitating rabbit") to end (the cheeky obviousness of the Cinderella signals). But simultaneously it records how constantly Van and Ada have made or uttered love since that night. Since, moreover, the "dictionary of secret diminutives" that was to "go through many revisions till the definitive edition of 1967" is partly Ada itself (Van and Ada die "into the book" in 1967), Van is suggesting that the whole of Ada is a repetition of the pet words spoken on the night of the burning barn, the night he first dared to declare his love openly to Ada.

The terrible constraint has gone at last, time's advance has brought a delighted fulfilment. But in another superb shift, leaving "impatient young passion" at the melting peak, the narrative looks forward to old Van, "a crotchety gray old wordman" reworking his manuscript. Time's onward impetus leads to age and decline--yet back where

"a bluebird uttered a warning warble" and "the firefly signals were circumscribing the reservoir," the moment seems as fresh and as timeless as ever.

Throughout the chapter of the Burning Barn we feel a deep delight in the wild whimsy of invention and in the subtle harmony of internal recurrence, a keen excitement in anticipation and vivid pleasure in recollection. We exult in time's advance within the summer of 1884 and in the fact that even in the 1960's Van and Ada can withstand the destructive power of advancing time. Time's pressure has pushed aside the last obstacles separating young Van from young Ada, but it has been successfully resisted by Van and Ada eighty years later, still recalling with clarity and eagerness their young excitement at Ardis.

The happiness of both advancing time and time regained are confirmed in the next chapter. Even before he wakes the next morning Van is aware of the new radiance that fills his life, of the wonderful and irreversible change:

his nose still in the dreambag of a deep pillow . . . the boy was at once aware of the happiness knocking to be let in. He deliberately endeavored to prolong the glow of its incognito by dwelling on the last vestiges of jasmine and tears in a silly dream; but the tiger of happiness fairly leaped into being.

That exhilaration of a newly acquired franchise! (123)

The ecstasy is tempered for a moment when Uncle Dan makes Van and Ada awkward at the breakfast table--

Van shook his head disapprovingly at Ada. She showed him the sharp petal of her tongue, and with a shock of self-indignation

her lover felt himself flushing in his turn. So much for the franchise. (127)

--but it is more than recaptured when they are next alone. And this new tryst, like precious moments before it, lets in a gleam of anticipated recapitulation even before it is depicted itself. Van is waiting for Ada in the Baguenaudier Bower ("baguenaudier" is French for "bladder senna"):

Blue butterflies nearly the size of Small Whites, and likewise of European origin, were flitting swiftly around the shrubs and settling on the drooping clusters of yellow flowers. In less complex circumstances, forty years hence, our lovers were to see again, with wonder and joy, the same insect and the same bladder-senna along a forest trail near Susten in the Valais. At the present moment he was looking forward to collecting what he would recollect later, and watched the big bold Blues as he sprawled on the turf, burning with the evoked vision of Ada's pale limbs in the variegated light of the bower. . . . (128-29)

Van and Ada are still "our lovers" in 1922, still instinct "with wonder and joy" as they recollect the first day of their fulfilled love.

Bad time is routed, then, because throughout the 1884 sojourn there are indications that Van and Ada's fresh young love will remain fresh and joyful, in 1888, in 1922, in the middle of the twentieth century. For Van and Ada time seems neither to encompass decay nor to plunge their past into oblivion.

But time in Ardis the First is foiled not only by later love and later memories: it seems to be overcome even within the present of 1884. The repetition of lovemaking seems an endless round of happiness. The Burning Barn marks the divide between the rushing advance of time and the energetic repetition of pleasure implicit, for instance, in Van

and Ada's wondering when exactly Ada was "deflowered":

Was it that night on the lap robe? Or that day in the larchwood?
Or later in the shooting gallery, or in the bathroom, or (not
very comfortably) on the Magic Carpet? . . .

(You kissed and nibbled, and poked, and prodded, and worried
me there so much and so often that my virginity was lost in the
shuffle. . . .) (129)

Future recollection is another kind of victory over time, for if at a present moment one can see oneself later recollecting this moment one feels outside the order of time, where one need neither await the future nor leave the past behind. In the lines quoted above, "At the present moment he was looking forward to collecting what he would recollect later," it is the narrative that sees the recollection "in advance." But as they go about their frenetic lovemaking in the days after the Burning Barn our young lovers themselves seem to enjoy this intense present partly with an eye to recollecting it in the future.

Thus in Pt.1 Ch.22 we see Van and Ada's repeated lovemaking as an almost boundless flow of happiness:

They went boating and swimming in Ladore, they followed the bends of its adored river, they tried to find more rhymes to it, they walked up the hill to the black ruins of Bryant's Castle. . . .

They made love--mostly in glens and gullies.

To the average physiologist, the energy of those two youngsters might have seemed abnormal. Their craving for each other grew unbearable if within a few hours it was not satisfied several times, in sun or shade, on roof or in cellar, anywhere.

(139)

The first lines of the passage quoted follow upon and echo the poem which begins the chapter:

My sister, do you still recall
The blue Ladore and Ardis Hall?

Don't you remember any more
That castle bathed by the Ladore?

Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore
Du château que baignait la Dore?

My sister, do you still recall
The Ladore-washed old castle wall?

Sestra moya, ti pomnish' goru,
I dub visokiy, i Ladoru?

My sister, you remember still
The spreading oak tree and my hill?

Oh! qui me rendra mon Aline
Et le grand chêne et ma colline?

Oh, who will give me back my Jill
And the big tree and my hill?

Oh! qui me rendra, mon Adèle,
Et ma montagne et l'hirondelle?

Oh! qui me rendra ma Lucile,
La Dore et l'hirondelle agile?

Oh, who will render in our tongue
The tender things he loved and sung?
(138-39)

The poem vividly suggests the joyful repetitions--during which time seems suspended--of the ardours of 1884. The lines appear to have become a theme song for young Van and Ada; it is as if they are already supplying an imagined distance over which memory must stretch.³ If retrospective evocation, the sharing and reliving together of memory, overcomes the direction of time, making past happiness available once

³ In this young Van is like the seventeen-year-old Nabokov in his first book of poems: "You remember, we awaited / The mistiness of distance?" (in the Russian original: "Ti pomnish', mi zhdali / Tuman-nosti dali?"). ("Stained Glass" ["Tsvetnye Stekla"], Stihi [Petrograd: privately printed, 1916], p. 19.)

more, the accurate prevision of a future recollection even more completely deprives the "ardis," the direction of time, of its force and its power over the mind.

But the poem with which Van begins Pt.1 Ch.22 also sums up the romance theme of Ardis the First. It is of course an elegant reworking of Chateaubriand's famous "Romance à Hélène,"⁴ especially the lines,

Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore
Du château que baignait la Dore . . .

.....

Oh! qui me rendra mon Hélène,
Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne?

Chateaubriand pervades the Ardis sections, partly because Atala and René and Les Aventures du Dernier Abencérage, his most popular works of fiction and the only of his works directly alluded to in Ada, are such idylls of pure passion; partly because Chateaubriand's designedly posthumous Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe, like Van and Ada's designedly posthumous family chronicle, reaches its early climax with romantic recollections of brother and sister in the family château; partly because Chateaubriand's translation of Paradise Lost finds its counterpart in the English and Russian and French Eden of Ardis; but principally because of the sibling incest that tries to get into Atala⁵ and the "subtle perfume

⁴ Nabokov entitles the poem thus (Darkbloom 467) though on its first appearance (1806) it was called "Le montagnard émigré" and on its later inclusion in the novella Les Aventures du Dernier Abencérage (1826) was untitled.

⁵ Chactas is raised by the Spaniard Lopez, who is Atala's

of incest" (EO.3.100) in René. Thus we find Van reading "Ada's copy of Atala" (89) or Ada, echoing the Amélie of René, calling Van "her cher, trop cher René . . . in gentle jest" (131).

In the romance which Van reworks he retains Chateaubriand's "Du château que baignait la Dore." The castle bathed by the Ladore appears on the next page: "They went boating and swimming in Ladore, . . . they walked up the hill to the black ruins of Bryant's Castle" (139). This gothic, romantic castle combines an anglicized Chateaubriand (or Château de Briant) and a vague Byron; it will be matched later by an amusing variation on Byron's Chillon Castle, the "Château de Byron (or 'She Yawns Castle')" (522). Chateaubriand and Byron are naturally paired, both being purveyors, in René and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, of the mal du siècle, both being writers of short exotic tales, "a Chateaubyronic genre" (EO.2.358). But in Ada they serve as earlier avatars of Van himself: both are aristocratic, impassioned, proud; the incestuous affairs each might have had or dreamt of prefigure the great love of Van Veen's life;⁶ their lurid self-projection and their romantic posturing anticipate the romantic images Van paints of himself--as when he transforms the family car into a black steed that carries him away at the end of Ardis the First.

father. When Chactas and Atala find out this surrogate sibling relationship, their passion becomes even more intense: "Serrant Atala sur mon coeur, je m'écriai avec des sanglots: 'O ma soeur! . . . ' . . . déjà j'avais bu toute la magie de l'amour sur ses lèvres." (Atala, René, Les Aventures du Dernier Abencérage, p. 92.)

⁶ In Byron's Cain (1821), perhaps as a reflection of the affair the poet may have had with his half-sister Augusta, Adah is both Cain's sister and his devoted wife.

3. Ardis the Second

As we have seen, Ardis the First evades the ordinary conditions of time not only in memory but in action: the joyful repetition of love-making seems itself to suspend time, to make happiness repeatable at will. But the world of action allows a much stranger and more wonderful triumph over time in the extraordinary, almost magical way in which the whole of Ardis the Second repeats Ardis the First.

The structural devices of anticipation and recapitulation which were so necessary within Ardis the First are equally essential in Ardis the Second and once again express themes of love, happiness and time. But the structures of the two sections are quite dissimilar: in the first place, anticipation and recapitulation play opposite roles in the two different parts; in the second, while Ardis the First has a single dominating plot-theme, the coming together of Van and Ada, Ardis the Second has three discrete themes within its plot.

The first of these could be termed the "replay." The whole of Ardis the Second is a re-enactment of the earlier idyll, a remarkable return to its joy. The two summers are sharply distinct, separated by four years and five chapters whose tone--since they must record years during which Van and Ada's studies keep them apart--is different indeed from the bliss of 1884. Ardis the Second, therefore, cannot be a mere continuance of the initial joy. Yet as if in a fairy-tale Van and Ada can recapture and even relive the early delight.

"Recapitulation" in Ardis the Second does not take the form of joint narrative or mutual recollection it had taken in Ardis the First.

Now, rather, it appears as an ubiquitous texture of enchanting repetition, repetition of event or situation, atmosphere or phrasing. The mere possibility of repeating the past and its happiness is exhilarating, the regaining of paradise, a miraculous and rare routing of time:

"One of these days," he said, "I will ask you for a repeat performance. You will sit as you did four years ago, at the same table, in the same light, drawing the same flower; and I shall go through the same scene with such joy, such pride, such--I don't know--gratitude! (264)

But things are different, time's continuance brings change, past growth cannot be reversed. In a sense--for they are lovers from the very beginning of their second idyll--this adds to Van and Ada's delight, making 1888 even happier than 1884. But the fact that Van and Ada are now trying to make love every day becomes entangled with other changes. Lucette is now twelve and not so easily disposed of as in 1884; her governess, Mlle Larivière, is busy with her ludicrous new literary fame and only sporadically remembers to supervise her little charge. Consequently Lucette has many opportunities to encroach on the ardour of Van and Ada, to become a hindrance to the young lovers' recapturing of their bliss. The Lucette theme therefore constitutes the second of the three themes that run through Ardis regained--but it will receive a chapter all to itself (Ch.6).

The third is the theme of jealousy. From the point of view of Van and Ada's love, the greatest change the years 1884-1888 have wrought is that Ada has had other lovers during those years, a fact which Van does not find out until the end of Ardis the Second. Indeed his discovery not only poisons all their high happiness and dashes their chance

of re-enacting Ardis ~~the First~~ but it also brings this sojourn abruptly to an end.

There are two important consequences of the fact that Ada's unfaithfulness does not become explicit until the end of Ardis the Second but is anticipated throughout. One is that there is a marked contrast between the role of anticipation and recapitulation in Ardis the First and the role of these same structural devices in Ardis the Second; the other is the marked contrast between a first reading of Ardis the Second and any subsequent reading.

In Ardis the First anticipation and recapitulation went hand in hand. The fact that Van and Ada are lovers when in 1888 or 1922 they recollect their first shy and sneaky fumbings anticipates that their young selves of 1884 will soon reach a greater intimacy, while their zeal to record the earliest advances of a love that has since lasted so long makes the reader, too, impatient to see such love rewarded.

But in Ardis the Second anticipation and recapitulation are opposed. If the whole of the later idyll recapitulates the happiness of the earlier one, the disclosure of Ada's unfaithfulness which is foreshadowed throughout the second sojourn will disrupt the re-enactment and shatter its bliss. While anticipation is eager in Ardis the First, Van in Ardis the Second tries to ignore every sign of impending doom, to take no notice of all the ominous facts. He staves off recognizing consciously what at the back of his mind he already realizes will tear apart his happiness.

It is important to note that Van also manages to induce the reader to pay no heed to the accumulating threat. The reader is in any

case predisposed toward seeing in the days of 1888 only Van and Ada's triumphant reliving of 1884, for throughout Ardis the First he has foreglimpsed the lucky couple happily together in 1888 and in later years and happily recalling their early past. Thus it is not impossible for the narrator to defuse even explicit anticipations. We see that Van is ready to be jealous but we know from Ardis the First that he is rightly confident of Ada's love; we discount the real threat in any anticipations of Ada's betrayal by taking them only as signs of Van's jealousy and by taking that jealousy only as a sign of the purity of Van's passion. Although jealousy certainly pervades Ardis the Second, Van himself seems to discount it even within 1888, scoffing at the fieriness of his outbursts and the bitterness of his despair almost as soon as each fit has passed. Thus Van and the reader remain equally unprepared for the dismal revelation.

Though anticipations of the fatal discovery are everywhere in Ardis the Second the vast majority need not even be defused, for they are already too subtle to notice until too late, until one knows with whom Ada has been betraying poor Van. All the forewarnings do not affect one's reading of Ardis the Second, therefore, until one reads this section at least a second time. (In the same way the discovery of the identity--Clare Quilty--of Lolita's liberator is anticipated by hints virtually impossible to notice on a first reading of Lolita and, like the Ardis the Second anticipations, difficult enough to spot even on an alert third or fourth reading.)

That Ardis the Second recapitulates all that happened in Ardis the First is discernible immediately to anyone who has already read

Ada's earliest chapters. The effect of the recapitulation is immediate and exhilarating: Ardis the Second seems a magical recapture of the past. But the effect of the anticipations, on the other hand, is deliberately delayed: because one is too sure of Van and Ada's future happiness, because the anticipations are largely too subtle to catch at once or are discounted even when they are explicit. A later reading of the Ardis of 1888, therefore, can be different indeed from the first: one feels everywhere the pretense and strain on Ada's part (despite the genuineness of her love) and the reality of impending pain. This change of effect from first to later reading is one of several such changes we shall consider at length in subsequent chapters.

Let us turn now to Pt.1 Ch.31, the opening of Ardis the Second and a good example of all that we have been summarizing: the mingled joy and jealousy, the intricate recapitulations and pointed anticipations, the replay and Lucette and jealousy themes.

The chapter begins thus:

Van revisited Ardis Hall in 1888. He arrived on a cloudy June afternoon, unexpected, unbidden, unneeded; with a diamond necklace coiled loose in his pocket. As he approached from a side lawn, he saw a scene out of some new life being rehearsed for an unknown picture, without him, not for him. A big party seemed to be breaking up. Three young ladies in yellow-blue Vass frocks with fashionable rainbow sashes surrounded a stoutish, foppish, baldish young man who stood, a flute of champagne in his hand, glancing down from the drawing-room terrace at a girl in black with bare arms: an old runabout, shivering at every jerk, was being cranked up by a hoary chauffeur in front of the porch, and those bare arms, stretched wide, were holding outspread the white cape of Baroness von Skull, a grand-aunt of hers. Against the white cape Ada's new long figure was profiled in black--the black of her smart silk dress with no sleeves, no ornaments, no memories. The slow old Baroness stood groping for something under one armpit, under the other--for what? a crutch? the dangling end of tangled bangles?--and as she half-turned to

accept the cloak (now taken from her grandniece by a belated new footman) Ada also half-turned, and her yet ungemmed neck showed white as she ran up the porch steps. (187-88)

Van's fiercely apprehensive melancholy juxtaposes the explicit present and an implicit past. Because he remembers so precisely his arrival at Ardis and his first sight of Ada in 1884, Van sees every detail of his second arrival as a bitter contrast to some exact though unstated referent recalled from four years ago. Then he was invited, now he is "unexpected, unbidden, unneeded"; then he was the only guest, greeted with wild enthusiasm even by the butler and governess, now there is "a scene out of some new life . . . without him, not for him." Then Ada was wearing a white frock and a black jacket, now she has "a new long figure . . . profiled in black--the black of her smart silk dress with no sleeves, no ornaments, no memories." Even a detail as small as the fact of Ada's "bare arms" (twice noted) seems to harbour the threat of terrible change. And will he get to put that insistent necklace on the as "yet ungemmed neck" of a still-loving Ada?

Van's hopes and fears are equally powerful:

Excluding each other, private swoons split him in two: the devastating certainty that as soon as he reached, in the labyrinth of a nightmare, a brightly remembered small room with a bed and a child's washstand, she would join him there in her new smooth long beauty; and on the shade side, the pang and panic of finding her changed, hating what he wanted, condemning it as wrong, explaining to him dreadful new circumstances--that they both were dead or existed only as extras in a house rented for a motion picture. (188)

But it is the fears that appear to be justified when he watches Ada on the lawn taking leave of Percy de Prey, who kisses her hand:

That was French, but all right. He held the hand he had kissed while she spoke and then kissed it again, and that was not done, that was dreadful, that could not be endured.

Leaving his post, naked Van went through the clothes he had shed. He found the necklace. In icy fury, he tore it into thirty, forty glittering hailstones, some of which fell at her feet as she burst into the room. (189)

Van's jealousy will always be this furiously fierce.

But all becomes exhilarating return, recapture, repetition when Ada declares "I had and have and shall always have only one beau, only one beast, only one sorrow, only one joy" (190) (note, by the way, the "beauty and the beast" motif). They are about to recommence the hot delights of 1884, "but when he tried to draw up her dress she flinched with a murmur of reluctant denial, because the door had come alive: two small fists could be heard drumming upon it from outside, in a rhythm both knew well" (190). Lucette, appropriately, stops their first love-making of 1888. But the full recapture comes that night when Van and Ada meet in the old toolroom:

They were still fiercely engaged (on the same bench covered with the same tartan lap robe--thoughtfully brought) when the outside door noiselessly opened, and Blanche glided in like an imprudent ghost. She had her own key, was back from a rendezvous with old Sore the Burgundian night watchman, and stopped like a fool gaping at the young couple. "Knock next time," said Van with a grin, not bothering to pause--rather enjoying, in fact, the bewitching apparition: she wore a miniver cloak that Ada had lost in the woods. Oh, she had become wonderfully pretty, and elle le mangeait des yeux--but Ada slammed the lantern shut, and with apologetic groans, the slut groped her way to the inner passage. His true love could not help giggling; and Van resumed his passionate task. (191)

The lovemaking itself, the delicate echo of 1884 (that tartan lap robe was what Van was wearing on the night of the Burning Barn), the comic

delight of Blanche's interruption and the mention of her rendezvous with "old Sore," the fairy-tale atmosphere ("miniver cloak . . . lost in the woods" is Cinderella's slipper as a sort of White Riding Hood with a dash of the Babes in the Woods)--all suggest that the carefree joy of Ardis is intact.

For the good reader there is an especially enchanting echo. Later we will see a photo of "Another girl (Blanche!) stooping and squatting . . . over Van's valise opened on the floor, and 'eating with her eyes' the silhouette of Ivory Révery in a perfume advertisement" (398-99). The photograph casts an amusing light back hundreds of pages, to Van's first arrival when Bouteillan the butler had asked:

Would Van like him or a maid to unpack? Oh, one of the maids, said Van, wondering briefly what item in a schoolboy's luggage might be supposed to shock a housemaid. The picture of naked Ivory Révery (a model)? Who cared, now that he was a man? (36)

At the time we did not know Blanche and we did not find out within Ardis the First that any maid had gaped at the naked "false dream." But the account of the photograph ("eating with her eyes") points out the subtle recapitulation ("elle le mangeait des yeux"): on Van's first night at Ardis in 1884, Blanche had seen Van's photograph of a naked man, and on his first night at Ardis in 1888 she sees naked Van himself. It is such meticulous repetition that confirms for the reader Van's feeling that

"Nothing, nothing has changed! But that's the general impression, it was too dim down there for details, we'll examine them tomorrow on our little island: 'My sister, do you still recall . . .'" (192)

But the anticipations of the disclosure of Ada's unfaithfulness show that things have changed--as, indeed, do the lines that follow the passage above:

"Oh shut up!" said Ada. "I've given up all that stuff--
petits vers, vers de soie . . ."

"Come, come," cried Van, "some of the rhymes were magnificent acrobatics on the part of the child's mind: 'Oh! qui me rendra, ma Lucile, et le grand chêne and zee big hill.' Little Lucile," he added in an effort to dissipate her frowns with a joke, "little Lucile has become so peachy that I think I'll switch over to her if you keep losing your temper like that. I remember the first time you got cross with me was when I chucked a stone at a statue and frightened a finch. That's memory!" (192)

Ada has "given up all that stuff," Van now looks back on himself in 1884 as a child (compare this with his thoughts on the train going to Ardis in June 1884: "one feels very much a man of the world as one surveys the capable landscape capably skimming by" [33]), Lucette "has become so peachy." Even Van's claim to recall the past has a fascinating flaw: what he chucked at the statue was not a stone but a cone--it had been Ada who, not seeing the missile, had called it a stone.

These signs of difference are slight beside the major change they introduce, the tension between Van and Ada that is the consequence of Ada's unfaithfulness. Van asks "Why, suddenly sad?"

Yes, she was sad, she replied, she was in dreadful trouble, her quandary might drive her insane if she did not know that her heart was pure. She could explain it best by a parable. She was like the girl in a film he would see soon, who is in the triple throes of a tragedy which she must conceal lest she lose her only true love, the head of the arrow, the point of the pain. In secret, she is simultaneously struggling with three torments--trying to get rid of a dreary dragging affair with a married man, whom she pities; trying to nip in the bud--in the sticky red bud--a crazy adventure with an attractive young fool, whom she pities even more; and trying to keep intact the love of the only man who is

all her life and who is above pity, above the poverty of her feminine pity, because as the script says, his ego is richer and prouder than anything those two poor worms could imagine. (192)

Ada's confession is quite full, though she calls it only a parable of her own case, and Van, secure in her love, misses the point, asking only "What had she actually done with the poor worms, after Krolik's untimely end?" (193). Ada explains, then carries on, feigning to draw a parallel between the triple torment of "the girl in a film" and her own situation:

"Well, to mop up that parable, because you have the knack of interrupting and diverting my thoughts, I'm in a sense also torn between three private tortures, the main torture being ambition, of course. I know I shall never be a biologist, my passion for creeping creatures is great, but not all-consuming. I know I shall always adore orchids and mushrooms and violets, and you will still see me going out alone, to wander alone in the woods and return alone with a little lone lily; but flowers, no matter how irresistible, must be given up, too, as soon as I have the strength. Remains the great ambition and the greatest terror: the dream of the bluest, remotest, hardest dramatic climbs--probably ending as one of a hundred old spider spinsters teaching drama students, knowing, that, as you insist, sinister insister, we can't marry, and having always before me the awful example of pathetic, second-rate, brave Marina." (193)

Van's optimism seems to ignore what should be plainly visible behind the slight obliquity of Ada's confession. If he is delighted to be back with Ada and confident that they can direct their own destinies, Van is also stalling, not wanting to search too far for dread of finding out:

"Well, that bit about spinsters is rot," said Van, "we'll pull it off somehow, we'll become more and more distant relations in artistically forged papers and finally dwindle to mere namesakes, or at the worst we shall live quietly, you as my housekeeper, I as your epileptic, and then, as in your Chekhov, 'we shall see the whole sky swarm with diamonds.'"

"Did you find them all, Uncle Van?" she inquired, sighing, laying her dolent head on his shoulder. She had told him everything.

"More or less," he replied, not realizing she had. "Anyway, I made the best study of the dustiest floor ever accomplished by a romantic character. One bright little bugger rolled under the bed where there grows a virgin forest of fluff and fungi. . . ." (193)

Though Van at the time will not see the facts, the narrative voice discloses to the reader that the anticipation is exact: "She had told him everything." But in the very next paragraph Van's confidence and his amusement at the jealous rage of the previous afternoon encourage the reader to take Van's jealousy only as a sign of his fiercely romantic nature, as a token of the purity of his passion. The diamond necklace itself too distracts from the threat, providing an occasion for mirthful recollection and amused gossip, for it recalls the story "'The Necklace' (La rivière de diamants)" (194) which had been read to the children on Ada's birthday in 1884 by its authoress, Ada's governess Mlle Larivière—on our planet, de Maupassant—to whom it has since brought a grotesque fame: "Yes! Wasn't that a scream? Larivière blossoming forth, bosoming forth as a great writer!" (194)

But the good rereader will see the necklace Van tore apart in his rage not only as a comic defusing of Van's first suspicions but also as their foreboding confirmation. For at the end of Ardis the Second Van opens a fateful note that tells him he is deceived, and "With a puerile wrench he broke his best black butterfly on the wheel of his exasperation" (287-88): the broken necktie echoes the broken necklace and proves that Van should not have dismissed the suspicion of Percy de Prey that he felt for a moment at the start of Ardis the Second.

Similarly the good rereader will see that the glimpse Blanche

gets of Van in the toolroom is not only a splendid echo of the beginning of Ardis the First but is also a forevision of the end of Ardis the Second, when Blanche will disclose to Van as they stand in the toolroom exactly when and with whom Ada first betrayed Van. In the same way the Cinderella image of Blanche in the toolroom, which seems a restoration of the magic world of Ardis the First, will be revealed as dire forecast as well as fond return. For at the end of Ardis the Second Blanche in the toolroom with "no slippers" will reveal Ada's secret to Van precisely because she is a Cinderella, because she is the poor girl left out, who cannot have the love of charming prince Van.

But if the first chapter of Ardis the Second contains for the rereader traces of the later disastrous disclosure, for a first-time reader the anticipations of Ada's unfaithfulness that are visibly present will appear discounted. Van's jealousy seems simply a sign of the intensity with which his love has endured, and Ardis the Second seems the magical reward of this enduring love, an unqualified return to the happiness of the past.

Perhaps the completest re-enactment of the past, the most spectacular exemption time grants Van and Ada, takes place in the great picnic of 1888, an extraordinarily close yet thoroughly plausible replaying of the picnic of 1884.

Both picnics take place on Ada's birthday, July 21 (which, coincidentally, is also the birthday of the governess, Mlle Larivière).⁷

⁷ This is in fact Nabokov's father's birthday, and in Conclusive Evidence the day is put forward as the anniversary of what Nabokov considers his first awareness of time, his first awakening of reflexive

There is, then, a naturalistic basis for the fantastic repetition; one can see, even, that the birthday picnic has become as established as a ritual: "While the rustic feast was being prepared and distributed among the sun gouts of the traditional pine glade . . ." (266).

Although the replaying of the past and the bliss this brings dominate the picnic chapter, the jealousy theme introduces into the fact of the repetition an occasional note of menace and even tries to challenge the very dominance of the replay theme. During the 1884 picnic Van's coeval and Ada's neighbour, Greg Erminin, had been present; Ada's reaction to him the next day had been the first real sign of her regarding herself as devoted to Van. Greg is present again in the 1888 picnic, but Van is now the confident claimant:

Van did not err in believing that Ada remained unaffected by Greg's devotion. He now met him again with pleasure--the kind of pleasure, immoral in its very purity, which adds its icy tang to the friendly feelings a successful rival bears toward a thoroughly decent fellow. (268)

But there is a genuine rival, Percy de Prey, whose unsolicited presence puts a crackling tension in the air. Ada is dismayed, Van is hostile but still unaware that Ada has yielded to Percy, and Percy himself is openly challenging towards Van's recognized ascendancy:

consciousness: "Indeed, I appear to my present self as jubilantly celebrating, on that twenty-first of July, 1902, the birth of sentient life" (CE 4). By the time he revised his memoirs Nabokov must have noted something about the recollection which made him reassign the memory to his mother's birthday in August (and moreover, to 1903). July 21 is also "celebrated" in Pale Fire as the day of Shade's death--and of the death of Kinbote's mother.

Thrusting his way through their circle, with every sign of wrath and contempt, young Percy de Prey, frilled-shirted and white-trouserred, strode up to Marina's deckchair. He was invited to join the party despite Ada's trying to stop her silly mother with an admonishing stare and a private small shake of the head.

"I dared not hope . . . Oh, I accept with great pleasure," answered Percy, whereupon--very much whereupon--the seemingly forgetful but in reality calculating bland bandit marched back to his car . . . to fetch a bouquet of longstemmed roses stored in the boot.

"What a shame that I should loathe roses," said Ada, accepting them gingerly.

The muscat wine was uncorked, Ada's and Ida's healths drunk.

Count Percy de Prey turned to Ivan Demianovich Veen:

"I'm told you like abnormal positions?"

The half-question was half-mockingly put. Van looked through his raised lunel at the honeyed sun.

"Meaning what?" he enquired.

"Well--that walking-on-your-hands trick. One of your aunt's servants is the sister of one of our servants and two pretty gossips form a dangerous team" (laughing). "The legend has it that you do it all day long, in every corner, congratulations!" (bowing).

Van replied: "The legend makes too much of my specialty. Actually, I practice it for a few minutes every other night, don't I, Ada?" (looking around for her). "May I give you, Count, some more of the mouse-and-cat--a poor pun, but mine."

"Vahn dear," said Marina, who was listening with delight to the handsome young men's vivacious and carefree prattle. . . . (271)

When Van, Percy and Greg wander off, Percy (who is rather drunk) starts a fight with the slighter and younger Van. But the smaller youth, an expert wrestler, easily wins. He is on his way back to the picnic

when a mountain fell upon him from behind. With one violent heave he swung his attacker over his head. Percy crashed and lay supine for a moment or two. Van, his crab claws on the ready, contemplated him, hoping for a pretext to inflict a certain special device of exotic torture that he had not yet had the opportunity to use in a real fight. (275)

The combination of Percy's aggressive remarks on Van's mania-ambulation and the later wrestling is a replaying, but a sinister one, of certain

features of the 1884 picnic. For it is in the account of that earlier picnic that we first see Van walking on his hands, and there too it is explained that the man who taught "the strong lad to walk on his hands by means of a special play of the shoulder muscles" (81) is none other than Van's father's wrestling master. The handwalking that prompts a mere mention of wrestling in 1884 when mentioned itself in 1888 prompts two rounds of vicious grappling.

Generally, however, the recurrence of details from one picnic to another is a source of delight. Thus Marina tells Percy de Prey: "In a birdhouse fixed to that pine trunk . . . there was once a 'telephone'" (273). This recalls a moment from the 1884 picnic:

Marina's contribution was more modest, but it too had its charm. She showed Van and Lucette (the others knew all about it) the exact pine and the exact spot on its rugged red trunk where in old, very old days a magnetic telephone nested. . . . (83)

The repetition makes amusingly obvious that every year Marina corners someone new to whom she can divulge the slightly naughty secret of the telephone. Note, too, that the apparently metaphorical "nested" of 1884 is shown four years later to refer to an actual "birdhouse."

But the main and miraculous replay of the 1884 picnic is the return journey. During the earlier picnic, an entertaining chain of circumstances ensures that there is a shortage of seating space on the only calèche left. This is a parody of the problem of carriage-seating arrangements in nineteenth-century novels. Mr Elton's proposal to Emma, for instance, is prepared for thus:

Isabella stepped in after her father; John Knightley, forgetting that he did not belong to their party, stepped in after his wife

very naturally; so that Emma found, on being escorted and followed into the second carriage by Mr. Elton, that the door was to be lawfully shut on them, and that they were to have a tête-à-tête drive. (Emma, Ch.15)⁸

At Ardis the causal chain is just as careful but comically boisterous.

Marina drives off in a huff at Ada; the charabanc leaves with the hampers and footmen; Ada decides to ride back on the bicycle Van came on:

Being unfamiliar with the itinerary of sun and shade in the clearing, he had left his bicycle to endure the blazing beams for at least three hours. Ada mounted it, uttered a yelp of pain [she has no underwear], almost fell off, googled, recovered--and the rear tire burst with a comic bang. (86)

There are only four places on the calèche for the five people left, so

Ada must sit on Van's lap:

It was the children's first bodily contact and both were embarrassed. She settled down with her back to Van, resettled as the carriage jerked, and wriggled some more, arranging her ample pine-smelling skirt, which seemed to envelop him airily, for all the world like a barber's sheet. In a trance of awkward delight he held her by the hips. Hot goutts of sun moved fast across her zebra stripes and the backs of her bare arms and seemed to continue their journey through the tunnel of his own frame. (86)

In 1888 all the carriages have left except one victoria, also with four places, enough for the coachman and Van, Ada and Lucette:

Thus, a carefree-looking young trio, they moved toward the waiting victoria. Slapping his thighs in dismay, the coachman stood berating a tousled footboy who had appeared from under a bush. He had concealed himself there to enjoy in peace a tattered copy of

⁸ The Novels of Jane Austen, IV, 128-29.

Tattersalia with pictures of tremendous, fabulously elongated race horses, and had been left behind by the charabanc which had carried away the dirty dishes and the drowsy servants. (278)

They are now one place short, and little Lucette, now twelve, as Ada had been in 1884, must hop up on her "cousin's" knee. Van in 1884 had been almost on the point of orgasm under pantyless Ada:

With his entire being, the boiling and brimming lad relished her weight as he felt it responding to every bump of the road by softly parting in two and crushing beneath it the core of the longing which he knew he had to control lest a possible seep perplex her innocence. He would have yielded and melted in animal laxity had not the girl's governess saved the situation by addressing him. (87)

We watch the same thing almost happen in 1888 as "we find ourselves . . . sitting within Van while his Ada sits within Lucette, and both sit within Van" (281). Lucette's

ember-bright hair flew into his face and smelt of a past summer. Family smell; yes, coincidence: a set of coincidences slightly displaced; the artistry of asymmetry. . . . Lucette's compact bottom and cool thighs seemed to sink deeper and deeper in the quicksand of the dream-like, dream-rephrased, legend-distorted past. Ada, sitting next to him, turning her smaller pages quicker than the boy on the box, was, of course, enchanting, obsessive, eternal and lovelier, more somberly ardent than four summers ago--but it was that other picnic which he now held as if she were present in duplicate, in two different color prints.

Through strands of coppery silk he looked aslant at Ada, who puckered her lips at him in the semblance of a transmitted kiss (pardoning him at last for his part in that brawl!) and presently went back to her vellum-bound little volume, Ombres et couleurs, an 1820 edition of Chateaubriand's short stories with hand-painted vignettes and the flat mummy of a pressed anemone. The gout and glooms of the woodland passed across her book, her face and Lucette's right arm, on which he could not help kissing a mosquito bite in pure tribute to the duplication. (280)

(In 1884, just before the coach ride back, "the first bad mosquito of

the season was resonantly slain on Ada's shin by alert Lucette" [85].)

The bliss of recapitulation reaches a complicated peak:

He remembered with a pang of pleasure the indulgent skirt Ada had been wearing them. . . . and he regretted (smiling) that Lucette had those chaste shorts on today, and Ada . . . trousers. In the fatal course of the most painful ailments, sometimes (nodding gravely), sometimes there occur sweet mornings of perfect repose--and that not owing to some blessed pill or potion (indicating the bedside clutter) or at least without our knowing that the loving hand of despair slipped us the drug..

Van closed his eyes in order better to concentrate on the golden flood of swelling joy. Many, oh many, many years later he recollected with wonder (how could one have endured such rapture?) that moment of total happiness, the complete eclipse of the piercing and preying ache, the logic of intoxication, the circular argument to the effect that the most eccentric girl cannot help being faithful if she loves one as one loves her. He watched Ada's bracelet flash in rhythm with the swaying of the victoria and her full lips, parted slightly in profile, show in the sun the red pollen of a remnant of salve drying in the transversal thumbnail lines of their texture. He opened his eyes: the bracelet was indeed flashing but her lips had lost all trace of rouge, and the certainty that in another moment he would touch their hot pale pulp threatened to touch off a private crisis under the solemn load of another child. But the little proxy's neck, glistening with sweat, was pathetic, her trustful immobility, sobering, and after all no furtive friction could compare with what awaited him in Ada's bower. A twinge in his kneecap also came to the rescue, and honest Van chided himself for having attempted to use a little pauper instead of the princess in the fairy tale--"whose precious flesh must not blush with the impression of a chastising hand." (281-82)

The repetition is wondrously exact--"their hot pale pulp threatened to touch off a private crisis"--but within the miraculous re-enactment there is a real and very moving recognition of the power of ongoing time: "In the fatal course of the most painful ailments," "indicating the bedside clutter." (Later we shall see more directly how much old Van and Ada need to rely on that clutter of pills and potions to induce a semblance of sleep or a simulacrum of bearable wakefulness.) Note,

too, the quick jab of jealousy in "that moment of total happiness," the threat of Percy de Prey in "the piercing and preying ache." Yet it is "the golden flood of swelling joy" that predominates, the possibility of perfectly recapturing the heady happiness of the past.

The increasingly ominous undertones of jealousy are about to drown out the paean to joy. Before we come to that, though, let us recollect the tuning-up and the overture to despair, the rising level of anticipation. In the first chapter of *Ardis the Second*, as we have seen, Percy's kissing Ada's hand and Ada's "parable" to Van the next morning after a "strenuous 'Casanovanic' night" (198) anticipate the eventual disclosure quite exactly, but are rather discounted since we are encouraged to take Van's amused reaction to his fiery tearing of the necklace ("I made the best study of the dustiest floor every accomplished by a romantic character") as a sign that Van's jealousy is only romantic intensity and since we are distracted by the surrounding comedy ("Larivière blossoming forth, bosoming forth as a great writer!"). In the next chapter Van is jealous of and hostile to the handsome movie star Pedro, and when "pure, fierce Van" (202) objects to Ada's conduct with the actually irrelevant Pedro, Ada exhales in "glorious relief"-- Van has not noticed anything between her and the musician Philip Rack--

the cause of which was to torture Van only much later.

"Oh, wait for me!" yelled Lucette.

(Torture, my poor love! Torture! Yes! but it's all sunk and dead. Ada's late note.) (204)

This anticipation, too, though, is defused: again we interpret the pulse of Van's jealousy only as an indication that his ardour is healthily

alive; we see his obvious mistake over Pedro; we are distracted by the comedy of Lucette's intrusions; we are reassured even at the moment of most explicit anticipation ("Torture, my poor love! Torture!") by the note of continuing love.

The first two chapters of *Ardis the Second*, then, forewarn us that Ada has had two lovers other than Van, but encourage us, like Van himself, to pay little heed to any warning. Numerous anticipations follow, though most cannot be caught until at least a second reading, until we are quite sure of the identity of Ada's other lovers. It is not until Pt.1 Ch.39--July 21, the day of the picnic, only four days before Van's furious departure--that the anticipations will become unmistakably threatening.

A good many of the proleptic notices depend on the fact that Percy de Prey is going off to war--the Second Crimean War, as it happens. For Ada Percy's enlistment promises an end to the strain, lets her off having to bring the affair to a close herself, and at the same time is a touching sign of Percy's devotion and despair, since she realizes that he knows he cannot overcome Van's hold on her affections and that he has therefore enlisted in search of death.

The first news of the war comes in this way. While Ada is in town seeing a gynecologist (though Van is sure he has taken all the necessary precautions), dejected Van is reading in the library:

At ten minutes to five, Bout quietly came in with a lighted kerosene lamp and an invitation from Marina for a chat in her room. As Bout passed by the globe he touched it and looked with disapproval at his smudged finger. "The world is dusty," he said. "Blanche should be sent back to her native village. Elle est folle et mauvaise, cette fille." (231)

(The story of Bout's being loved and then spurned by Blanche forms an amusing subplot.) Van drowzes over his book and redreams Bout's message:

He hastily got up from his couch recalling that Blanche had just come in to ask him to complain to Marina that Mlle Ada had again refused to give her a lift to "Beer Tower," as local jokers called her poor village. For a few moments the brief dim dream was so closely fused with the real event that even when he recalled Bout's putting his finger on the rhomboid peninsula where the Allies had just landed (as proclaimed by the Ladore newspaper spread-eagled on the library table), he still clearly saw Blanche wiping Crimea clean with one of Ada's lost handkerchiefs. (231)

(More of the lost handkerchief shortly.) On his way to Marina Van, still not quite awake, "decided that Blanche or rather Marina probably wished to know if he had been serious when he said the other day he would enlist at nineteen, the earliest volunteer age" (231-32).

In mid-July Demon makes a rare visit to Ardis. Almost half of what he says seems to point to either Percy de Prey or Philip Rack as Ada's lover, but Van is eager not to notice (and as narrator he makes no remark). Demon mentions that he has been talking recently to the Countess de Prey:

"... Well, she tells me her boy and Ada see a lot of each other, et cetera. Is that true?"

"Not really," said Van. "They meet now and then--at the usual parties. Both like horses, and races, but that's all. There is no et cetera, that's out of the question."

"Good! . . . Prascovie de Prey has the worst fault of a snob: overstatement." (242)

We share Van's sense of security, for we like Van know of his and Ada's love, of which Demon can suspect nothing: we feel only one half of the

dramatic irony. Shortly afterwards Demon asks, "when the butler, having removed en passant a crumpled little handkerchief from the piano top, had left the room . . . : 'How do you get along with Ada? She's what--almost sixteen now? Very musical and romantic?'" (242-43) He has spotted the woman's handkerchief on the piano, guessed (rightly) that it is Ada's, flaunted his flair for deduction and guessed (wrongly) that she is musical. In fact, she has never learnt to play the piano. But Philip Rack is Lucette's music teacher, a fact which Van could--but dare not--place beside Ada's having left her handkerchief on the piano. Now we can see why it is that Van had dreamt of "Blanche wiping Crimea clean with one of Ada's lost handkerchiefs" (231): the Crimea suggests de Prey, the lost handkerchief Rack, and Blanche will tell Van of Ada's relations with both.

Demon continues:

"By the way, the de Prey woman tells me her son has enlisted and will soon be taking part in that deplorable business abroad which our country should have ignored. I wonder if he leaves any rivals behind?"

"Goodness no," replied honest Van. "Ada is a serious young lady. She has no beaux--except me, ça va sein's durs. . . ." (244-45)

Ada herself comes running in and Demon declares:

"And now I'll show what a diviner I am: your dream is to be a concert pianist!"

"It is not," said Van indignantly. "What perfect nonsense. She can't play a note!"

"Well, no matter," said Demon. "Observation is not always the mother of deduction. However, there is nothing improper about a hanky dumped on a Bechstein. You don't have, my love, to blush so warmly. Let me quote for comic relief

"Morsque son fi-ancé fut parti pour la guerre
Irène de Grandfief, la pauvre et noble enfant

Ferme son pi-ano . . . vendit son éléphant

"The gobble enfant is genuine, but the elephant is mine." (246)

Demon again touches on both Rack and de Prey: when Ada blushes at the tell-tale handkerchief (which Van still refuses to consider) Demon's "comic relief" is to cite lines which depict a lover going off to war.⁹

By the time of the picnic the tension is unmistakable, in the cat-and-mouse game over the muscatel, in the wrestling, in Van's direct anticipation of Percy's death ("Percy, you were to die very soon . . . [in] a Crimean ravine" [273]). The picnic, of course, is a replay of the 1884 outing, but the very expert reader can see that even in this respect it must be a pointed anticipation of the impending disclosure. As we have noted, the necklace Van breaks at the beginning of Ardis the Second matches the butterfly bowtie he will break at the end of his stay when he reads the note that warns him of Ada's betrayal. Now in the 1884 picnic (which, as we recall, is like the 1888 picnic the occasion of the governess's birthday as well as Ada's) Mlle Larivière had read out her story, "La Rivière de Diamants" (de Maupassant's "La Parure") and decided on a pseudonym:

A pale diaphanous butterfly with a very black body followed them and Ada cried "Look!" and explained it was closely related to a Japanese Parnassian. Mlle Larivière said suddenly she would use a pseudonym when publishing the story. (85)

The pseudonym, as we learn later, is "Monparnasse" (Montparnasse plus

⁹ These lines are the beginning, approximately remembered, of François Coppée's "La Veillée." Irène's fiancé will not return from the war--and nor will Percy de Prey.

Parnassian plus de Maupassant). But "The Necklace" and the butterfly have foreshadowed the early jealousy (the broken necklace) and the finally-discovered betrayal (the broken butterfly tie) of Ardis the Second. If the 1888 picnic "triumphantly" re-enacts the earlier one, it also re-enacts this delicate foreshadowing of the dreadful discovery.

When Van finds the anonymous note, "One must not berne you" (287) (a French-speaking person's misspelling of the English colloquial "burn" meaning "cheat," under the influence of French "berner," "to hoax"), he ponders which of the many French servants at Ardis might have sent him the warning. He takes it to Ada, who tells him it is meaningless, commanding him to "Destroy and forget" (290). (Ironically, she is now wearing for the first time the newly-repaired diamond necklace--just after Van has wrecked his new butterfly tie.) In the background is "the remote dreamy rhythm of Blanche's 'linen-folding' voice humming 'Malbrough' (. . . ne sait quand reviendra, ne sait quand reviendra)" (288). The tune is a triple anticipation: it lets us know that it is Blanche who left the note for Van; it points to Percy de Prey's being the lover, for he, like Malbrough in the opening line of this famous French folk-song, "s'en va-t'en guerre"; and it points to Percy's being killed in the war as Malbrough was. (At the same time, we should note, it is a parody of the anticipation of the near-fatal wounding of Prince Andrey at the battle of Austerlitz. Just before Andrey's departure for the army, the old general his father sings: "Malbroug, s'en va-t'en guerre. Dieu sait quand reviendra." [War and Peace, Bk.I Pt.I.xxiii].) Blanche continues to sing in the background:

"Mon page, mon beau page,
 --Mironton-mironton-mirontaine--
Mon page, mon beau page . . ." (289)

The foreboding next line of the song is not sung, but it should be heard: "Quell' nouvelle apportez?"

That night Blanche does bring the news. She appears in the toolroom, "a wretched simulacrum of seduction" (292). "C'est ma dernière nuit au château," she says, "T'is my last night with thee" (292). She hopes to spend this night with Van, but he wants only to know "When and how had it started?" (293). The disclosure comes: Blanche tells Van that Ada's affair with Rack had begun last August. "How anybody could do it with l'immonde Monsieur Rack . . . was beyond the informer's comprehension" (293). Rack is indeed a surprise, a sick shock, after we and Van have been expecting to hear Percy de Prey's name pronounced.

Van storms off to pack and depart. But he meets up with Ada:

"I have just learned qu'on vous culbute behind every hedge. Where can I find your tumbler?"

"Nowhere," she answered quite calmly. . . .

"But he exists, he exists," muttered Van, looking down at a rainbow web on the turf.

"I suppose so," said the haughty child, "however, he left yesterday for some Greek or Turkish port. Moreover, he was going to do everything to get killed, if that information helps. . . . I shall never see him again. He is nothing, I swear. He adores me to the point of insanity."

"I think," said Van, "we've got hold of the wrong lover. I was asking about Herr Rack, who has such delectable gums and also adores you to the point of insanity."

He turned, as they say, on his heel, and walked toward the house. (296)

Having thought the worst was already known, Van finds the second shock

an even bitterer surprise.

This same morning Van rides off to the station, taking along Blanche, who is also leaving Ardis, to deposit her at her family home in nearby Tourbière. Blanche explains to Van why the note was left: her sister Madelon, a serving-girl for the de Preys, was in love with her young master and jealous of Ada, just as Blanche, poor Cinderella, was in love with Van and hence also jealous of Ada. Knowing that Van and Percy de Prey would fight a duel as soon as Van found out, Madelon and Blanche waited till the day of Monsieur le Comte's embarkation before leaving the note for Van. Thus both the war and Cinderella's own feelings are confirmed as reasons for the disclosure.

Having left "Cendrillon" in her "poor shack smothered in climbing roses" (299), Van drives on to Maidenhair station. From the name Maidenhair a stream of associations starts to flow:

Maidenhair. Thus named because of the huge spreading Chinese tree at the end of the platform. Once, vaguely, confused with the Venus'-hair fern. She walked to the end of the platform in Tolstoy's novel. First exponent of the inner monologue, later exploited by the French and the Irish. N'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert. L'arbre aux quarante écus d'or, at least in the fall. Never, never shall I hear again her "botanical" voice fall at biloba; "sorry, my Latin is showing." Ginkgo, ginkgo, ink, inkog. Known also as Salisbury's adiantofolia, Ada's infolio, poor Salisburia: sunk; poor Stream of Consciousness, marée noire by now. Who wants Ardis Hall! (299-300)

Ardis the First ends with the ride on black Morio, foreshadowing Van's Othello-like jealousy in Ardis the Second, which in turn ends now with suspicions confirmed, despair ascendant, and an echo of Anna Karenin's fateful last voyage to the station and the interior monologue that streams through her mind just before she takes her life.

Ardis the Second ends in despair, then, a despair made all the more poignant because it has been combined with the intensest bliss. On "the day preceding the most miserable one in his life" (285), Van meets Ada after she has "returned from one of her long 'brambles' as she called her botanical rambles, succinctly and somewhat sadly, for the florula had ceased to yield much beyond the familiar favorites" (285). In fact with the help of Blanche's disclosure in the coach we can see on a rereading that Ada has been saying farewell to Percy de Prey as he embarked for the Crimea. Quite unaware of where she has been, Van asks Ada to come for a "walk" ~~and~~ through the park. At first she demurs, "but unaccountably and marvelously her dazed look melted into one of gentle glee, as if in sudden perception of new-found release" (286). Their love bursts into one of its most magic moments:

He held her, and kissed her, and kissed her again as if she had returned from a long and perilous journey. The sweetness of her smile was something quite unexpected and special. It was not the sly demon smile of remembered or promised ardor, but the exquisite human glow of happiness and helplessness. All their passionate pump-joy exertions, from Burning Barn to Burnberry Brook, were nothing in comparison to this zaychik, this "sun blick" of the smiling spirit. Her black jumper and black skirt with apron pockets lost its "in-mourning-for-a-lost flower" meaning that Marina had fancifully attached to her dress . . . ; instead, it had acquired the charm of a Lyaskan, old-fashioned schoolgirl uniform. They stood brow to brow, brown to white, black to black, he supporting her elbows, she playing her limp light fingers over his collarbone, and how he "labeled," he said, the dark aroma of her hair blending with crushed lily stalks, Turkish cigarettes and the lassitude that comes from "lass." "No, no, don't," she said, I must wash, quick-quick, Ada must wash; but for yet another immortal moment they stood embraced in the hushed avenue, enjoying, as they had never enjoyed before, the "happy-forever" feeling at the end of never-ending fairy tales. That's a beautiful passage, Van. I shall cry all night (late interpolation). (286-87)

But even at this sublime moment the piercing and preying ache is present: "One common orchid, a Lady's Slipper, was all that wilted in the satchel" (287). As the "Slipper"'s by now inevitable Cinderella overtones remind the rereader, the announcement is about to come. And the Turkish cigarettes--associated, as we shall see, with Percy--suggest with whom Ada has been lying among the "crushed lily stalks." The solitary orchid and the lilies recall her "parabolic" confession at the beginning of *Ardis the Second*: "you will still see me going out alone, to wander alone in the woods and return alone with a little lone lily" (193). All of Van's stay at *Ardis* is shot through with the pain of betrayal, even in its greatest moments.

Van had summed up the scene where Ada had made her oblique confession, at the breakfast table, after a night of love, like this: "two cheerful cousins, 'raiding the icebox' as children in old fairy tales, and the thrushes were sweetly whistling in the bright-green garden as the dark-green shadows drew in their claws" (191). As at the end of *Ardis* Van stumbles from the toolroom where Blanche has told him all he needs know of Ada and Rack, he walks

aimlessly for some time among the trees of the coppice where thrushes were singing so richly, with such sonorous force, such fluty fioriture that one could not endure the agony of consciousness, the filth of life, the loss, the loss, the loss. (294)

Walking to the hammock to pick up his watch, Van happens to look up and see Ada on her balcony:

She signaled telegraphically, with expansive linear gestures, indicating the cloudless sky (what a cloudless sky!); the

jacaranda summit in bloom (blue! bloom!) and her own bare foot raised high and placed on the parapet (have only to put on my sandals!). (295)

The scene on the balcony four years ago and even Ada's delightful liveliness this very moment remind him acutely of the happiness he must leave, the despair that is crashing around him. He can maintain some self-control only "by the magic method of not allowing the image of Ada to come anywhere near his awareness of himself" (294). He adopts a mechanical routine, a pure automatism, as he packs to leave Ardis: he cannot bear to think about his future without Ada or his past with her. So much for their matchless happiness, their triumph over time.

4. The End of Part 1

After the double disclosure, Van flees Ardis determined to dispose of Rack and de Prey: "Van felt that for him to survive on this terrible Antiterra, in the multicolored and evil world into which he was born, he had to destroy, or at least to maim for life, two men" (301). But in his seething anger he turns a chance jostle into the occasion for a duel with a stranger; he is distracted at the vital moment of the duel, and is shot; he is taken to a hospital where Rack happens to be already dying, and is rescued thence by Cordula de Prey,¹⁰

¹⁰ The flight from the hospital under the aegis of a friendly woman visitor is an incident reworked from Nabokov's life. On June 6, 1944, Nabokov was hospitalized in Cambridge, Massachusetts, after a severe attack of food poisoning. Because he found the noise, the inconsiderateness and the petty restrictions in the ward intolerable, he had himself sprung from the hospital, wearing only a dressing gown, by a friend, Madame Karpovich, who drove the getaway car. See Andrew Field,

Percy's second cousin, who tells him that Percy is already dead.

Van stays for a month, convalescing, in Cordula's Manhattan apartment, as is summarized in Pt.1 Ch.43, the last chapter of Part 1. Towards the end of the month Van steps onto the apartment terrace and tries to walk on his hands. He fails: the chest wound and the lack of practice have robbed him of his special talent.

To appreciate what this means, it is necessary to consider Van's earlier comment on the thrill of his handwalking stunts. While at Chose (Cambridge) he had become famous in his spare time as "Mascodagama," a maniambulating vaudeville artist. This is how he describes the peculiar excitement the act afforded him:

It was the standing of a metaphor on its head not for the sake of the trick's difficulty, but in order to perceive an ascending waterfall or a sunrise in reverse: a triumph, in a sense, over the ardis of time. Thus the rapture young Mascodagama derived from overcoming gravity was akin to that of artistic revelation in the sense utterly and naturally unknown to the innocents of critical appraisal, the social-scene commentators, the moralists, the idea-mongers and so forth. (184-85)

Van has chosen the word "ardis" here--again in the Greek sense of "the point of an arrow"--partly because the sense of triumph and magic and indeed the very handwalking itself remind him of Ardis and Ada.

Van's failure to walk on his hands in August 1888 signals his failure to reverse the direction of time. He has been robbed of his handwalking powers by his duelling wound and the following month of inactivity. The antecedents of the wound, Ada's unfaithfulness and

Van's angry flight, mark that the recapture of Ardis the First has not succeeded: Van does not triumph over time's onward march; he cannot turn back the direction, the ardis, of time.

On the same day as he discovers he has lost the knack of man-ambulation, Van answers the telephone and hears a deepish voice ask for Cordula. After she has hung up Cordula tells Van the caller was a girl:

"Her name is Vanda Broom, and I learned only recently what I never suspected at school--she's a regular tribadka--poor Grace Erminin tells me Vanda used to make constant passes at her and at--at another girl. There's her picture there," continued Cordula with a quick change of tone, producing a daintily bound and prettily printed graduation album of Spring, 1887. . . . (323)

Cordula stops herself just a little late when she says "at her and at--at another girl." For Van realizes (though the narrative voice says nothing) that Vanda is sure to be the girl Ada had in mind when she had mentioned at the end of Ardis the First that "there's a girl in my school who is in love with me" (158).

Van says that since the handwalking fiasco and the phone call from Vanda took place on the same day "the two nasty little incidents thus remained linked up in his mind forever" (323). But he does not quite say why the incidents are so indissolubly related. What Van sees in the graduation album of Brownhill College that Cordula produces for him is that the blazer Ada was wearing when he first saw her in Ardis in 1884 was in fact Vanda's. Though this is not apparent within Pt. 1 Ch. 43, it becomes explicit when Van describes Kim's picture of Ada on Van's first day at Ardis: she is "in a black hockey blazer--belonging really to Vanda" (398).

Part 1 ends, therefore, with a recollection of the miserable end of Ardis the Second and an undermining of the happy beginning of Ardis the First. Let us recall that beginning:

Ada carried an untidy bunch of wild flowers. She wore a white frock with a black jacket and there was a white bow in her long hair. He never saw that dress again and when he mentioned it in retrospective evocation she invariably retorted that he must have dreamt it, she never had one like that, never could have put on a dark blazer on such a hot day, but he stuck to his initial image of her to the last. (37)

The blazer occasions the first anticipation within the Ardis sections of Van and Ada's shared recollections of their youthful days. At the time we first read these lines they are a source of delight and eager promise; now they become a source of pain and introduce the stab of betrayal into the very beginning of the first idyll at Ardis. The opening and closing of the whole Ardis part of the novel are linked here, then, and in an aggrieved key--though of course no first-time reader could hear the undertones of complaint.

Note also that the discovery made through a photograph in an album looked at in a penthouse in the last chapter of Part 1 matches the discovery Van and Ada make through a newspaper photograph and a herbarium album found in the loft of Ardis Hall in the first chapter of Part 1. Nabokov confirms that Part 1 is framed in this way: after quoting Ada's contribution to the graduation album, Van reports his brooding--"It did not matter, it did not matter. 'Destroy and forget!' (324)--thus nicely recalling Ada's "Destroy and forget" after she and Van have discovered the secret of their parentage.

V.

SEPARATION

1. Separation and the Antithetic Response

After Ardis the Second, Van and Ada are kept apart for the next four years, from 1888 to 1892, by Van's proud and unyielding jealousy. They are apart again for the following twelve years, from 1893 to 1905, because their father has discovered that they are lovers and because they agree to his edict of separation, an agreement sealed by Ada's marrying Andrey Vinelander at Demon's eager prompting. After Démon's death in 1905, they reunite adulterously and are about to elope together when Ada's husband is diagnosed to have advanced tuberculosis. Since Ada decides to remain with her Andrey until his illness comes to some resolution, she and Van are apart for another seventeen years, from 1905 to 1922.

Yet Ada's proportions and structures ensure that one feels the delight of the reunions one confidently expects much more than one feels the grief of the separations. Because the joint composition and joint recollection involved in the narrative of Ardis the First show Van and Ada still tenderly together as they record their distant past and because Ardis the Second seems such a magnificent reliving and retrieval of their first ecstatic summer one is keenly concerned for Van and Ada's love and is prepared for another reunion that excitingly

recaptures the past.

Each of the separations, moreover, is not only treated far more briefly than each reunion but is also paired with a fore-announcement of the coming conjunction. Thus although the first chapter of Part 2 contains the letters Ada writes during their second separation, letters written in desperation to Van, whose smouldering jealousy and pride preclude his answering, the chapter ends by letting us know Van will respond to Ada's next letter:

We must not blame Van, however, for failing to persevere in his resolution, for it is not hard to understand why a seventh letter (transmitted to him by Ada's and his half-sister, at Kingston, in 1892) could make him succumb. Because he knew it was the last in the series. Because it had come from the blood-red érable arbors of Ardis. Because a sacramental four-year period equaled that of their first separation. Because Lucette turned out to be, against all reason and will, the impeccable paranymp. (337)

When the letter comes, and when Van and Ada are reunited in Manhattan, their reunion is a delightful acknowledgement of change at the same time as Ardis is almost relived. The advance announcement of the letter itself indicates that the Manhattan reunion will be a sort of Ardis the Third: "Because it had come from the blood-red érable arbors of Ardis. Because a sacramental four-year period equaled that of their first separation." The manner of Van and Ada's meeting confirms this hint.

At the beginning of Ardis the Second, disgruntled Van fobs off the people whose presence keeps him away from Ada:

"I am exhausted," he said. "My horse caught a hoof in a hole in the rotting planks of Ladore Bridge and had to be shot. I have walked eight miles. I think I am dreaming. I think you

are Dreaming Too." "No, I'm Cordula!" she cried, but he was off again.

Ada had vanished. He discarded the caviar sandwich that he found himself carrying like a ticket and, turning into the pantry, told Bout's brother, a new valet, to take him to his old room and get him one of those rubber tubs he had used as a child four years ago. Plus somebody's spare pajamas. His train had broken down in the fields between Ladoga and Ladore, he had walked twenty miles, God knows when they'd send up his bags.

"They have just come," said the real Bout with a smile both confidential and mournful (Blanche had jilted him). (189)

This passage marvelously reworks the luggage problem implicit in the metamorphic voyage at the beginning of *Ardis the First*, when Van, with two suitcases, finds no trap waiting, is lucky to catch a hackney coach, and somehow ends up at *Ardis* alone on horseback (where are the suitcases?). At the beginning of *Ardis the Second*, moreover, Van and Ada's passionate embraces had been prevented from going any further by Lucette's drumming at the door—an interruption that was the prototype of many such frustrations during that summer. Thus at the beginning of the 1888 picnic:

While the rustic feast was being prepared and distributed among the sun gouts of the traditional pine glade, the wild girl and her lover slipped away for a few moments of ravenous ardor in a ferny ravine where a rill dipped from ledge to ledge between tall burnberry bushes. . . .

As they crouched on the brink of one of the brook's crystal shelves, where, before falling, it stopped to have its picture taken and take pictures itself, Van, at the last throb, saw the reflection of Ada's gaze in the water flash a warning. Something of the sort had happened before: he did not have time to identify the recollection that, nonetheless, led him to identify at once the sound of the stumble behind him.

Among the rugged rocks they found and consoled poor little Lucette, whose foot had slipped on a granite slab in a tangle of bushes. Flushed and flustered, the child rubbed her thigh in much-overdone agony. (266-67)

The luggage problem, the initial interruption by Lucette and the interruption at Pinedale are all hilariously repeated in the Manhattan apartment. After tearful embraces, unrecorded words, ardent kisses, Ada declares that she must take a bath before proceeding "to the next stage of demented impatience" (392).

But mad, obstinate Van shed his terry and followed her into the bathroom, where she strained across the low tub to turn on both taps, and then bent over to insert the bronze chained plug; it got sucked in by itself, however, while he steadied her lovely lyre and next moment was at the suede-soft root, was gripped, was deep between the familiar, incomparable, crimson-lined lips. She caught at the twin cock crosses, thus involuntarily increasing the sympathetic volume of the water's noise, and Van emitted a long groan of deliverance, and now their four eyes were looking again into the azure brook of Pinedale, and Lucette pushed the door open with a perfunctory knuckle knock and stopped, mesmerized by the sight of Van's hairy rear and the dreadful scar all along his left side.

Ada's hands stopped the water. Luggage was being bumped down all over the flat. (392-93)

But despite the amusing and obscene repetition, Manhattan is not Ardis, and it is winter now, not Ardis's high summer. Yet Nabokov does make this a real Ardis the Third. For Ada, who has flown in straight from Ardis, brings with her a photograph album, Kim Beauharnais's blackmail book, which is a visual record of Ardis the First. The album is a travesty of that first idyll, as Van observes ("It's our entire past that has been spoofed and condemned" [408]), and Van and Ada's over-looking its photographs parodies Ardis the Second, with its interplay of recapitulation and lovemaking:

"You remember that trash but I remember our nonstop three-hour kiss Under the Larches immediately afterwards."

"See next illustration," said Ada grimly.

"The scoundrel!" cried Van; "He must have been creeping

after us on his belly with his entire apparatus. I will have to destroy him."

"No more destruction, Van. Only love."

"But look, girl, here I'm glutting your tongue, and there I'm glued to your epiglottis, and--"

"Intermission," begged Ada, "quick-quick."

"I'm ready to oblige till I'm ninety," said Van (the vulgarity of the peep show was catchy), "ninety times a month, roughly."

"Make it even more roughly, oh much more, say a hundred and fifty, that would mean, that would mean--"

But, in the sudden storm, calculations went to the canicular devils. (403)

Though the album upsets Van it is a pure treat for the reader. It offers the thrill of repetition in time, the charm of a new perspective on old scenes, the tease of a memory quiz, the comedy of the interplay between shots of Van and Ada's first caresses and their present resumption of the initial ardour. Kim has included three shots taken on the night of the Burning Barn:

Three footmen, Price, Norris, and Ward dressed up as grotesque firemen. Young Bout devotedly kissing the veined instep of a pretty bare foot raised and placed on a balustrade. Nocturnal outdoor shot of two small white ghosts pressing their noses from the inside to the library window. (405)

The first photograph gives us three preposterous new avatars for the Ward sisters (Lady Bertram, Frances Price, Mrs Norris) of Mansfield Park. The second explains exactly why Blanche, Cinderella-like, left a slipper on the stairs. And the third shows, from an enchanting new angle, Van and Ada kneeling on the divan, watching the night outside and in fact almost making out young Kim standing below:

"Look, gipsies," she whispered, pointing at three shadowy forms --two men, one with a ladder, and a child or dwarf--circumspectly moving across the gray lawn. They saw the candle-lit window and decamped, the smaller one walking à reculons as if taking pictures.

If Van despises the photos for travestyng his private recollections, we enjoy the exciting and wildly comic review, which tests and delights our memories and shows how alive Van has made his past for us. He can well claim to have done what he proposes to do as he glances over the album, to "redeem our childhood by making a book of it: Ardis, a family chronicle" (406).

Even apart from the recapitulation of Ardis the Second and especially Ardis the First that the photograph album initiates, the Manhattan reunion is one of intense delight. Van and Ada can now live together with no intrusions from a little sister or inquisitive family retainers. Their cohabitation establishes a "new pattern of radiance" (434) in which, Van notes, he can reach "heights of happiness he had not known at his brightest hour before his darkest one in the past" (431).

By the time this new reunion is over, the novel is three-quarters finished, and we expect that another reunion, another recapturing of time, perhaps the very reunion that lasts until Van and Ada die, must loom close ahead. Though the terms of the separation at the end of Manhattan seem so gloomy that Van feels like committing suicide, he resists taking this fatal step, and at once, before the impending separation itself is described, we see Van and Ada together after this new sentence of solitude:

Anyway, what he held in his right hand was no longer a pistol but a pocket comb which he passed through his hair at the temples. It was to gray by the time that Ada, then in her thirties, said, when they spoke of their voluntary separation:

"I would have killed myself too, had I found Rose wailing over your corpse. 'Secondes pensées sont les bonnes,' as your other, white, bonne used to say in her pretty patois. . . ." (445)

At the beginning of Part 3 Van briefly sums up his desolation-- and the hope that we know will be rewarded:

He wondered what really kept him alive on terrible Antiterra, with Terra a myth and all art a game, when nothing mattered any more since the day he slapped Valerio's warm bristly cheek; and whence, from what deep well of hope, did he still scoop up a shivering star, when everything had an edge of agony and despair, when another man was in every bedroom with Ada. (452)

But the events leading up to Lucette's suicide now become the centre of the plot and absorb all our attention. Almost immediately after Lucette's death Van and Ada are back together again at Mont Roux for "~~the highest ridge~~ of their twenty-one-year-old love: its . . . ineffably radiant coming of age" (521). Yet this reunion, which could have been the beginning of a lifetime together, comes to an unexpected close. But the next reunion, which does last a full forty-five years, until Van and Ada's deaths, begins on the following pages.

As a consequence of these proportions and the anticipations of the next reunion carefully positioned before each separation, our first reading of Ada is dominated by Van and Ada's first coming together, their continued love, our eagerness to see them together after each parting, and the peaking of each new reunion above the last.

But the brief gap in reading between Van and Ada's separating at Mont Roux after their penultimate reunion and that final reunion itself lets seventeen years slip by--it is not until Van is fifty-two and Ada fifty that they come inseparably together--and the gap between the penultimate reunion and its predecessor is itself a yawning thirteen years. On a rereading our sense of the shape of Van and Ada's lives is

very different, deeply coloured by our awareness of the bleak stretches of time they will be apart.

The end of a first reading (Part 5) emphasizes again what was apparent in the joint narrative of Part 1, the length of time for which Van and Ada have been together, and the very close of the novel, the parodic blurb, stresses the joy of the Ardis sections. Not only do the last pages of a first reading convincingly and enchantingly insist on the joy of Van and Ada's love, but the beginning of a second reading, Ardis the First itself, through its double radiance of youth and age, also refreshes our sense of the pure delight of their romance. But our high happiness is disappointed: as we enter Ardis the Second, we see the foreshadowing of betrayal everywhere; as we enter the periods of separation we foresee the long duration of these waste stretches of time; a sense of desolation seems to surround the middle sections of the book.

There are good reasons for our being led to this radical change in response, reasons which because they cannot be seen at the time make our traumatic disillusionment after the euphoria set up by Ardis the First all the more forceful. We experience now the same shock of disappointment Van and Ada have felt in their earlier lives, a shock we were protected from on a first reading by knowing in advance the triumph of Van and Ada's years together in age. Later we will recognize --even as we are discovering new intensities of happiness in Ada and in Van and Ada's lives--that we must accept the interpenetration of pain and joy in human lives, the balance of responsibility and freedom, of fond remembrance and regret. We are also made to feel the strange force

of time: that a later event can utterly change the significance of an earlier one, that one's state of happiness or unhappiness in the present may be totally reassessed in the light of a future one cannot see. Like Van in Ardis the Second, we are unaware on a first reading of the pain about to dump down; now we anticipate this impending anguish throughout the second Ardis section. And whereas after Ardis Van had depicted the pain of separation because he had experienced it so intensely, with only desolation to look forward to, we, confident in the foreknowledge of Van and Ada's happy ultimate reunion, had tended to discount this as only romantic self-dramatization. On a second reading the foreknowledge of the bleak waste of time in each separation makes us able to see Van and Ada's real distress, their own sense during each separation of the barrenness of their future.

But this change in the assessment of the climate of happiness in Ada is only one of the major changes in response we come to during an "antithetic" reading of the novel. On a first reading the intense love of Ada and Van seems to accord the novel a sufficient and even radiant unity. But on a rereading, partly because we know so much of Van and Ada's lives will be spent apart, partly because we realize the full extent of their separations and thus the thorough selectivity that ought to have been exercised in treating so briefly such long periods of time, partly because elements that we had expected to be integrable on a rereading seem now only more fiercely individual, we feel that there is little unity indeed in the book, little shaping at all, especially in Parts 2 and 3. On a synthetic reading we will see profound structural control, complex and richly significant harmonies of design,

but it is vital to Nabokov's most secret purposes that we appreciate how difficult design can be to discern and no less vital that we apprehend the individuality of the fictional particulars--whether details of character or phrasing, plot or idea--only now becoming distinct and visible.

On a first reading of *Ada* the rare purity and durability of Van and Ada's love dominate the novel and make the central characters lushly attractive. On a rereading our attitudes change profoundly. We register, for instance, Ada's deceit and unfaithfulness to Van throughout what had seemed the bliss of Ardis the Second. We know of Lucette's doom, and cannot but see the inconsiderateness of Van and Ada towards this delicate child. We become a little uneasy, indeed, about many aspects of Van and Ada's behaviour, without realizing quite what is wrong, without quite knowing how we should respond. This uncertainty is necessary: it precedes our discovery of Nabokov's own assessments, so much sharper than our own, so carefully attentive to what each character does, and it precedes, too, the recognition that Nabokov's assessments of the characters will force us to re-evaluate our own individual perceptions and to see how easily we have each been swayed by the persuasiveness of Van's rhetoric and the pervasiveness of his assumptions.

At the time our antithetic reaction to the novel is building up, as we become increasingly less sure of the radiance, the unity, the attractiveness of the lives of Van and Ada, we are becoming more and more aware of the delights of discovery, the exciting individuality of a minor character or a single moment of perception, or the equally

fascinating patternedness of the book's web of interwoven words.

Certain dissatisfactions and hesitations in our attitudes to the novel as a whole will be far more than matched by the thrills, the glimpses of new pleasure in almost every line: in his description of that chess problem in Speak, Memory Nabokov described the combination perfectly when he wrote of the "pleasurable torments" of the antithetic stage. In reading a novel the torment may be greater than in solving a chess problem, for we cannot be sure (until we have found them) that there are solutions; but the pleasures are commensurately greater, inexhaustible and bracing enough to draw us eagerly on.

2. The Discord of Separation: Pt.1 Ch.28

Let us now look closely at the most important parts of the "antithetic" reading, the chapters in which Van and Ada are apart (Pt.1 Chs.26-30, Pt.2 Chs.1-5, Pt.3 Chs.1-7). We see these chapters from Van's viewpoint only, and Van depicts himself in brittle fashion: rather than any tracing of his emotional development, there are only sudden scenes and unexpected veers of thought. The mood of these chapters, moreover, is dominated by the fact that all that is not Ada in this book forms a kind of counterpoint to the main theme of the novel, Van and Ada's love: all of Van's life other than those parts of it he shares with Ada is a sort of paltry compensation, a pursuit of activities in which he may find both pleasure and satisfaction but which could only circle and could never fill the void he feels at his centre.

Pt.1 Ch.28, situated in the 1884-1888 gap between Ardis the

First and Ardis the Second, begins with a summary of Van's activities in 1880, with the wild flurry of his "most retentive and talented" year (171):

He was ten. . . . He could solve an Euler-type problem or learn by heart Pushkin's "Headless Horseman" poem in less than twenty minutes. With white-bloused, enthusiastically sweating Andrey Andreevich, he lolled for hours in the violet shade of pink cliffs, studying major and minor Russian writers--and puzzling out the exaggerated but, on the whole, complimentary allusions to his father's volitations and loves in another life in Lermontov's diamond-faceted tetrameters. He struggled to keep back his tears, while AAA blew his fat red nose, when shown the peasant-bare footprint of Tolstoy preserved in the clay of a motor court in Utah where he had written the tale of Murat, the Navajo chieftain, a French general's bastard, shot by Cora Day in his swimming pool. (171)

The next paragraph depicts one of Van's occupations during that rewarding year, his learning the art of cheating at cards from "Demon's casino-touring companion, bodyguard and guardian angel, monitor and adviser, Mr. Plunkett, a reformed card-sharper" (172). Plunkett, who relies solely on sleight of hand and disdains all mechanical aids, appears to have an expertise with cards as devious and nimble as Nabokov's verbal trickery: "Most essential was the 'feel' of a card, the delicacy of its palming, and digitation, the false shuffle, deck-sweeping, pack-roofing, prefabrication of deals, and above all a finger agility that practice could metamorphose into veritable vanishing acts or, conversely, into the materialization of a joker or the transformation of two pairs into four kings" (173).

After these two wild paragraphs on Van in 1880 and on Plunkett, a brief paragraph provides the transition to the main focus of the chapter, a poker game in England:

In 1885, having completed his prep-school education, he went up to Chose University in England, where his fathers had gone, and traveled from time to time to London or Lute (as prosperous but not overrefined British colonials called that lovely pearl-gray sad city on the other side of the Channel).

Sometime during the winter of 1886-7, at dismally cold Chose, in the course of a poker game with two Frenchmen and a fellow student whom we shall call Dick, in the latter's smartly furnished rooms in Serenity Court, he noticed that the French twins were losing not only because they were happily and hopelessly tight, but also because milord was that "crystal cretin" of Plunkett's vocabulary, a man of many mirrors--small reflecting surfaces variously angled and shaped, glinting discreetly on watch or signet ring. . . . (173)

Van manages to doctor the deck and though Dick goes on "fleecing poor Jean and Jacques with reckless haste," he finds himself

with three honest aces (dealt to him lovingly by Van) against Van's nimbly mustered four nines. This was followed by a good bluff against a better one; and with Van's generously slipping the desperately flashing and twinkling young lord good but not good enough hands, the latter's martyrdom came to a sudden end (London tailors wringing their hands in the fog, and a money-lender, the famous St. Priest of Chose, asking for an appointment with Dick's father). (175)

Having won back more than the twins have lost, Van writes out a cheque for the Frenchmen, then

collected a handful of cards and chips and hurled them into Dick's face. The missiles were still in flight when he regretted that cruel and commonplace bewgeest, for the wretched fellow could not respond in any conceivable fashion, and just sat there covering one eye and examining his damaged spectacles with the other--it was also bleeding a little--while the French twins were pressing upon him two handkerchiefs which he kept good-naturedly pushing away. Rosy aurora was shivering in green Serenity Court. Laborious old Chose.

• (There should be a sign denoting applause. Ada's note.)

(175-76)

The applause Ada feels due is for Van's nimble adaptation, in his last

two sentences, of the last stanza of Baudelaire's "Le Crépuscule du Matin" (1852):

L'aurore, grelottante en robe rose et verte
S'avavançait lentement sur la Seine déserte,
Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux,
Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.¹

The incident of the game concludes thus:

Van fumed and fretted the rest of the morning, and . . . decided to pen . . . a note of apology to the cheated cheater. As he was dressing, a messenger brought him a note from Lord C. (he was a cousin of one of Van's Riverlane schoolmates), in which generous Dick proposed to substitute for his debt an introduction to the Venus Villa Club to which his whole clan belonged. Such a bounty no boy of eighteen could hope to obtain. It was a ticket to paradise. Van tussled with his slightly overweight conscience (both grinning like old pals in their old gymnasium)--and accepted Dick's offer.

(I think, Van, you should make it clearer why you, Van, the proudest and cleanest of men--I'm not speaking of abject physicalities, we are all organized that way--but why you, pure Van, could accept the offer of a rogue who no doubt continued to "flash and twinkle" after that fiasco. I think you should explain, primo, that you were dreadfully overworked, and secundo, that you could not bear the thought that the rogue knew, that he being a rogue, you could not call him out, and were safe, so to speak. Right? Van, do you hear me? I think--.) (176)

The whole chapter is immediately attractive for its rich colour²

¹ Les Fleurs du Mal, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Garnier, 1961), p. 116.

² The colour of the chapter is brightened by the "moneylender . . . St. Priest" reference. This is a vivid double allusion. St. Priest, who appears in a passage on the payment of Dick's new gambling debts to Van--eventually paid by the unusual method of giving Van entry to the high-class brothels of Villa Venus--brings to mind Count Emmanuel Saint Priest and what was reputed to be his even more unusual method of paying a gambling debt: "This young artist shot himself, according to some, . . . in the presence of an eccentric Englishman who had promised

and humour, for Van's effortless mastery at whatever he does and his Robin Hood-like intervention on the French twins' behalf. The local colour here is one of several qualities characteristic of the chapters that cover the periods of Van and Ada's separations. Here as elsewhere, too, Van's career is slighted: that transitional paragraph between Plunkett in 1880 and "Dick" in the winter of 1886-1887 contains the first reference to Van's main occupation in the years 1884-1888, his attendance at Chose (Cambridge). The fact of Van's university studies is quickly passed over as if it were there only to identify the locale for the game. One should note too that Van does not mention Ada in this chapter (though she herself adds two notes), and the chapter's time-shift from 1880 to 1886-1887 bears no relation to Van's affair with Ada. This combination of Van's not referring to Ada--as if he is "in the throes of an emotional disarray which only the heroic self-control of an American aristocrat could master" (484-85), and as if he will show only the mastery, not the disarray--and his concentrating instead on a topic of vivid local interest, in this case his card-sharpping (mentioned nowhere else in the novel) is typical of Van's manner throughout the "separation" chapters.

Nabokov's ability to create a sudden sharply-imagined and

to pay his gambling debts if granted the spectacle of self-murder" (EO. 3.197-98). Van is surprised to find himself the morning after the card game a member of an exclusive brothel club, as St. Preux, in the Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (hence the "Jean" and "Jacques" of the French twins) does not realize his companions have led him to a brothel, and after mistaking white wine for water is surprised on regaining his senses "to find himself 'dans un cabinet reculé, entre les bras d'une de ces créatures' (pt. II, Letter XXVI)" (EO.2.340).

amusing scene out of nothing affords sufficient pleasure to make one's first reading of this chapter delightful. But on a rereading, when one knows how little of the period between 1884 and 1888 is depicted, one needs to know why this particular scene is included. One also wonders about the unattractiveness of the chapter, especially of the tone at the end of Ada's second note: is Nabokov so indulgent towards Van's mastery in so many fields (something with which as an expert tennis, chess and Scrabble player, literary scholar and lepidopterist, he can readily identify) that he notices nothing wrong?

Nabokov is far from not noticing. Let us look at those chips Van flings at Dick. Van's gesture is stupid and cruel, but he admits as much and regrets it even before the damage (which is slight) is done. Ada's note, moreover, distracts one immediately ("Applause"? What have I missed?") and quiets any doubts even before they could be formulated, for Ada obviously thinks the chip-throwing incident not worth a mention. The combination of expressed regret, distraction by means of an uncaught reference, and serene condonation by a second person is common in "defusing" whatever might seem slightly sinister in Van's conduct.

Van's throwing the chips at Dick's face and causing Dick's eyes to bleed foreshadows his blinding of Kim Beauharnais, a blackmailer, a cheat, like "Dick," who also deserves some punishment--but not to be brutally blinded. The blinding of Kim Beauharnais is itself an example of Nabokov's delaying the impact of an event so that it will be unlikely to affect a first reading. At a peak moment in the novel's drama, Van swings into a narrative digression on "the Black Miller," blackmailer

Norbert von Miller; within the digression Van adds another digression:

We may add, to complete this useful parenthesis, that in early February, 1893, not long after the poet's death, two other less successful blackmailers were waiting in the wings: Kim who would have bothered Ada again had he not been carried out of his cottage with one eye hanging on a red thread and the other drowned in its blood. . . . (441)

It is not stated that Van was Kim's attacker or even that he was responsible for the attack. But several pages later, Ada says:

"But, you know, there's one thing I regret. . . . Your use of an alpenstock to release a brute's fury--not yours, not my Van's. I should never have told you about the Ladore policeman. You should never have taken him into your confidence, never connived with him to burn those files--and most of Kalugano's pine forest. Eto unizitel'no (it is humiliating)."

"Amends have been made," replied fat Van with a fat man's chuckle. "I'm keeping Kim safe and snug in a nice Home for Disabled Professional People, where he gets from me loads of nicely brailled books on new processes in chromophotography."

There are other possible forkings and continuations that occur to the dream-mind, but these will do. (445-46)

These lines are the last in Part 2, and because they are left isolated, because there is no context following on, one cannot be sure on a first reading that the exchange is more than an imagined revenge; and it is unlikely that on first encountering these lines one would connect them with the earlier passage.³

As we noted in Chapter 1, the alpenstock which blinds Kim--at the end of the Manhattan reunion, that "Ardis the Third"--is linked

³ Immediately after reading Ada a friend, a sensitive and observant reader, was asked if he had noticed that Van had blinded another character and admitted he had to answer "No." Reviewers too, even after more than one reading, appear not to have noticed Van's single most reprehensible act.

with the riding crop with which Van lashes out at the end of Ardis the First in a rage of despair and jealousy without object, and with the canes at the end of Ardis the Second which are not used on Rack only because the poor musician is already all but dead. But Kim, unlike the surrogate "victims" of the riding crop scene or the intended object of Van's cane attack, is no target of Van's jealousy. Why then is the connection made between Kim and Van's rivals?

At the end of Pt.2 Ch.9 Ada tells Van of her part (Irina) in a production of Chehov's Four Sisters. Irina's fiancé within the play is Baron Tuzenbach, who dies at the hands of a rival in a duel at the end of the play.

Now Tuzenbach is in part a stand-in for Andrey Vineland, Ada's future husband, whom Demon in the following chapter calls "Ada's fiancé" (436), and whom Van intends to duel, as is indicated in the preceding chapter. There, Lucette at first refuses to tell Van Vineland's name: "Nope. I can't do that . . . because we know you could hit that keyhole with a pistol." (415) When Van does find out his rival's name, it becomes tangled in his sleep with a line from a romance by Mihail Glinka that he, Ada and Lucette have heard the night before:

Had she cabled him? Canceled or Postponed? Mrs. Viner--no, Vingölfer, no, Vineland--first Russki to taste the labruska grape.

"Me snitsa saPERnik SHCHASTLEEVOY!" (Mihail Ivanovich arcatig the sand with his cane, humped on his bench under the creamy racemes).

"I dream of a fortunate rival!" (417)

This is the context of the line Van recalls:

I dream of a fortunate rival,
 And secretly, malevolently,
 Seething jealousy flares,
 And secretly, malevolently,
 My hand seeks out weapons.⁴

The context of the quoted line and the cane in Glinka's hand link Van's unstated plans for Andrey Vineland with his other, more explicit, attempts to wreak vengeance upon his rivals. The only reason that Van does not call Vineland out to a duel, of course, is that by agreeing to Demon's edict he must accept Ada's marriage to Andrey Vineland. Once again Nabokov preserves our initial sympathy for Van by not allowing his vengeful hostility--except in Kim's case--to find an outlet. Yet careful rereading will alert us to a consistent viciousness of motive, a viciousness we then realize we should have observed even in the immediately visible facets of Van's behaviour.

But Tuzenbach in the version of Four Sisters in which Ada plays is also a reminder of "Dick" from Pt.1 Ch.28. Van describes Plunkett as a "shuler" (Russian for "card-sharper," "cheat") and insults Dick thus: "I have often wondered why the Russian for it--I think we have a Russian ancestor in common--is the same as the German for 'schoolboy,' minus the umlaut" (175). No doubt Dick does not understand Van's hostile prattle, his play upon German "Schüler" and Russian "shuler." But Van's words are recalled when Ada in Pt.2 Ch.9 tells her brother: "our wretched Yakima production could rely on only two Russians, Stan's protégé

⁴ "Mne snitsya sapernik shchastliviy, / i tayno, i zlobno / kipyashchaya revnost' pilaet! / i tayno, i zlobno / oruzhiya ishchet ruka." ("Somnenie," M. Glinka, Romansy i pesni [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Muzika, 1970], II, 12-13.)

Altshuler in the role of Baron Nikolay Lvovich Tuzenbach-Krone-Altschauer, and myself as Irina, la pauvre et noble enfant" (427).⁵ The "Altshuler" (a genuine Russo-German name) associates "Dick" with the Baron, and the association is confirmed by two other verbal echoes. Van, reading the programme of Ada's play, sees that a girl named Dawn played the part of Natasha, who in one of the most amusing moments in Chehov's play has the bad taste to appear in a pink dress with a green sash or belt. When Van imagines the scene as "Dawn en robe rose et verte, at the end of Act One" (430), he alludes to the Baudelaire line--"L'aurore grélottante en robe rose et verte"--he has played upon in Pt. 1 Ch. 28.⁶ Ada comments further on the play: "All poor Starling had to do . . . was to hollo off stage from a rowboat on the Kama River to give the signal for my fiancé to come to the dueling ground" (430). The Kama River flows through Perm, which Chehov imagines (in a letter to Gorkiy, October 16, 1900)⁷ to be the sort of town in which Three Sisters takes place. But there is no "rowboat" in Chehov's directions, of course: the rowboat is there

⁵ Ada's "la pauvre et noble enfant" refers to Irène from Coppée's "La Veillée," mentioned in Pt. 1 Ch. 38, where it foreshadows (see above, pp. 315-16) Percy de Prey and Rack, two other rivals Van would have attacked had Fate not intervened.

⁶ The double allusion to Chehov and Baudelaire--though not its connection with the previous "Crépuscule du Matin" allusion--was also pointed out by Simon Karlinsky, "Nabokov's Russian Games," New York Times Book Review, April 18, 1971, pp. 2, 10.

⁷ "Deystvie proiskhodit v provintsial'nom gorode vrode Permi" (Sobranie sochineniy, ed. V. V. Ermilov et al. [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Hudozhestvennaya Literatura," 1964], XII, 385).

to make the Kama evoke the Cam,⁸ and to float us again back to the scene (Cambridge or Chose) of the card game.

The point of the relationship established between Dick and Tuzenbach is not easy to grasp. By the eye wound that Van inflicts on him, Dick is a forerunner of Kim Beauharnais; but through the Tuzenbach connection, Dick is also associated with the other Tuzenbach, Andrey Vinelander. A grisly pattern is emerging. Van would like to fight a duel with Vinelander, but since he has yielded to Demon's conditions (Demon being the only person in the world, other than Ada, to whose wishes he attends) he must relinquish that pleasure. He would also like to punish Kim, though the most important danger in Kim's blackmail threat is already removed, since Demon has found out that Van and Ada have been lovers. But Van, in despair at the end of the Manhattan sojourn as he had been at the end of Ardis the First and Ardis the Second and frustrated in his desire to have at Andrey Vinelander, deliberately uses Kim as an escape valve to release the pressure of his anguish, as a calculated compensation for his not being able to attack Andrey Vinelander. Someone else is for him a mere object on whom he can vent his passion--and this too is exactly the position of our card-sharper Dick, whose injury is less grave not only because his offence is less serious but because he is not the object of Van's immediate

⁸ Cf. the caption to a photograph (facing p. 225) in SM: "The author in Cambridge, Spring 1920. It was not unnatural for a Russian, when gradually discovering the pleasures of the Cam, to prefer, at first, a rowboat to the more proper canoe or punt."

despair over being separated from Ada.⁹

Van's anguish at being parted from Ada is always fierce. At first one accepts it as colourful bluster, but later, as one sees the secret links between Van's victims, actual or intended (Kim, Captain Tapper, Percy de Prey, Rack, "Dick," Andrey Vineland, Johnny Starling, Yuzlik, Van Zemski) one recognizes how serious Van is. His claim to need relief from his despair--rather like Humbert Humbert's attitude to killing Quilty, an act Humbert thinks quite excusable by any sensitive and reasonable standards--is romantic egotism at its most dashing and despicable.

Let us return to Pt.1 Ch.28, to Plunkett, Dick and the card game, and focus our attention now not on the chips Van throws at Dick but on the message Dick sends offering membership in the Venus Villa club in lieu of monetary repayment.

Just as Ada's first note "defuses" the explosive threat of the throwing incident, so her second note serves to neutralize any reflection on Van's joining the club of high-class brothels: Ada's complaint is that Van should not have accepted this rogue's offer not because of the nature of the offer ("--I'm not speaking of abject physicalities, we are all organized that way--") but simply because the fellow is a "rogue" with whom Van should have made no compromise.

But if Ada ignores the Villa Venus club, Nabokov does not. A subtle cluster of correspondences reveals a special connection between

⁹ In his immediate despair at parting from Ada at the end of Ardis the Second, Van challenges Captain Tapper to a duel for an "offense" far less serious than Dick's.

Pt.1 Ch.28 and Pt.2 Ch.1. In Pt.1 Ch.28 the French twins are called Jean and Jacques. In Pt.2 Ch.1 Van is brought a letter from Ada by the ultra-secretive and ultra-fashionable VPL organization; the messenger's name is James Jones, a name which metamorphoses into "Jim or John" (330) and, when he brings a second letter from Ada, becomes "John James" (331). ("James," of course, like "Jacques," derives ultimately from "Jacob.")¹⁰ Plunkett, in Pt.1 Ch.28, had "done some sleuthing for the police" (172), and in Pt.2 Ch.1 Demon, noticing the VPL messenger, asks Van if he "or his poule [Cordula de Prey] had got into trouble with the police (nodding toward Jim or John . . .)" (330). Plunkett concedes that "secret pockets were useful (but could be turned inside out and against you)" (173), while James Jones has Van sign a "card that then went back into some secret pit or pouch within the young detective's attire or anatomy" (330).

These verbal connections are only pointers to the significant relationship between the two chapters, between the letter brought to Van from Dick, inviting him to become a member of the Villa Venus club, and the letter brought to Van from Ada, imploring him to forgive her, imploring him to accept her back. Aptly, the organization into which Dick's letter promises to introduce Van and the organization which brings Ada's letter are very similar in tone. The Villa Venus club and its chain of palatial brothels are international in scope, famous and dignified, while the "famous international agency, known as the VPL,

¹⁰ In TT Nabokov plays extensively on "Jimmy Major" and "Jake, Jack and Jacques."

which handled Very Private Letters" (329), is associated with the sexual privileges of the prominent: "even . . . King Victor [=Queen Victoria] . . . preferred the phenomenally discreet, and in fact rather creepy, infallibility of the VPL organization to such official facilities as sexually starved potentates have at their disposal for deceiving their wives" (329).

Van describes Dick as "the cheated cheater" (176). He gets the message from Dick because he, Van, is the more successful cheater, and it is for exactly the same reason that Ada sends her imploring letter to Van: he is merely the more accomplished cheater in the gamble of sex. He acts with a fuming sense of betrayal when he discovers Ada has been unfaithful to him (just as he expresses righteous indignation when hurling the chips at Dick) but refuses to let her see anything to reproach in his conduct with other women--such as the whores of the Villa Venus system to which he is introduced by Dick. In his relations with women as in his manipulating a pack of cards Van displays total mastery. In both, he is an expert cheater, so expert he can assume a mask of righteousness that is certainly unjustified in the hypocrisy of his relations with women: Ada must beg to be forgiven for having other sexual partners, for a freedom Van considers his unquestionable right.

3. Letters

The themes operating in Pt.1 Ch.28 recur throughout the "separation" chapters: Van's violent venting of his despair, possibly on an innocent surrogate, as anticipated here by his throwing those chips at

Dick; the letters that pass between Van and Ada, alluded to via the parallelism of Dick's and Ada's messages to Van; other occupations, like his playing cards or his studies at Chose which if they do not fill the void of Van's feelings at least take up his time; and the solace of sexual gratification announced in Dick's introducing Van to the Venus Villa club. We have already considered Van's violence thoroughly enough for the present; let us now trace the theme of Letters, the theme of Other Occupations and the theme of Other Women.

The letter theme is a little sub-topic made fascinating by the ample variety of its manifestations (the different means of transmission, the varying needs for secrecy or subterfuge or restraint, the changing frequencies of the correspondence, the diverse proportions of direct citation in the narrative) and by the aptness with which these varied manifestations epitomize the different conditions of Van and Ada's separations.

The theme first appears in Pt.1 Ch.26, in the form of a description of the code the two children employed while kept apart at their different schools in the years 1884-1888. The letters would be sent poste restante both ways and encoded to keep secret the incestuous passion they expressed. The chapter describing this phase of Van and Ada's correspondence is extremely flat, empty, a little antagonistic towards the reader. Its tone matches the emptiness and frustration Van and Ada feel without each other as much as it reflects the difficulty of the code:

Codes are a bore to describe; yet a few basic details must be, reluctantly, given. . . . If [he would only consider]¹¹ the description of our lovers' code (the "our" may constitute a source of irritation in its own right, but never mind) with a little more attention and a little less antipathy, the simplest-minded reader will, one trusts, understand that "overflowing" into the next ABC business. (160-61)

The correspondence, which of course is in both directions, is frequent at the outset but becomes gradually less so. Ada's letters, especially, appear with dwindling constancy in 1887 and 1888, the years she is conducting affairs with Philip Rack and then with Percy de Prey.

The letters of the second period of separation are actually quoted in full, mostly in Pt.2 Ch.1. There are only seven letters during this period, all from Ada, who implores Van to let her return to him. Proud and unyielding, he makes no answer to any but the seventh. This letter, brought by Lucette and also quoted in full, announces that Ada will marry a suitor of whom she is not particularly fond if Van does not take her back. The first five letters are sent by the amusing VPL,

which handled Very Private Letters. After a first flash of surprise, Van reflected that Ada Veen, a recent mistress of his, could not have chosen a smarter (in all senses of the word) way of conveying to him a message whose fantastically priced, and prized, process of transmission insured an absoluteness of secrecy which neither torture nor mesmerism had been able to break down in the evil days of 1859. (329)

Since when Van fled Ardis Ada could hardly stop him to arrange a code

¹¹ A tentative textual emendation on the authority of the French translation ("revue par l'auteur"): "pour peu qu'il veuille bien considérer" (Ada ou l'ardeur, trans. Gilles Chahine and Jean-Bernard Blandénier [Paris: Fayard, 1975], p. 137).

for their correspondence, it is important now that she be able to secure complete secrecy of transmission.

After the end of their Manhattan reunion in 1893, there are no letters at all: the absolute severance of all relations between Van and Ada is a condition, of course, of Demon's edict. But Lucette's death re-establishes contact. Van writes to Demon, asking him to forward to Ada, whose address he does not know, a letter correcting details of Lucette's death which have already been distorted in newspaper reports. Since Demon must read the letter (quoted in full), Van can say little: only that "somebody she [Lucette] could not compete with entered the picture" (497), a literal as well as a metaphorical remark, as we shall see, and deeply tragic. "Somehow," as Van writes, "after the interchange occasioned by Lucette's death such nonclandestine correspondence had been established with the tacit sanction of Demon" (502). Since Ada must write under the surveillance of Dasha, Andrey's jealously protective sister, there can be no direct declaration of love--but the one letter quoted is a masterpiece of obliquity, expressing both Ada's love for Van and her detestation of Dasha in ways the latter will not understand; "I think you once met pretty Miss 'Kim' Blackrent, well, that's exactly dear Dasha's type" (503). ("Blackrent" is a synonym for "blackmail," and Ada has thus compared the unsuspecting Dasha to Kim Beuharnais.)

After they separate in 1905, Van and Ada need no longer be secretive: since Marina and Demon are both dead, there is no proof Van Veen and Ada Vineland are anything but cousins. But Ada has renounced the happiness of being with Van by deciding to stay with the dying--

though slowly dying--Andrey:

Would she write? Oh, she did! Oh, every old thing turned out superfine! Fancy raced fact in never-ending rivalry and girl giggles....

So she did write as she had promised? Oh, yes, yes! In seventeen years he received from her around a hundred brief notes, each containing around one hundred words, making around thirty printed pages of insignificant stuff--mainly about her husband's health and the local fauna. (531-32)

Ada knows that she and Van must keep well clear of anything of importance or they would both drown in exasperation and grief.

4. Other Occupations

The third theme running through the "separation" periods is that of Van's occupations, the activities in which he engages while he is not with Ada and which he treats as poor compensation for her absence. After Van's card-playing in Pt.1 Ch.28 comes an account of his brief fame as Mascodagama, a metaphysical acrobat. Van first puts his hand-walking skills to vaudeville use at a club in Chose. His reputation spreads rapidly and he soon has a contract to perform his eerie stunts in London:

The stage would be empty when the curtain went up; then, after five heartbeats of theatrical suspense, something swept out of the wings, enormous and black, to the accompaniment of dervish drums. The shock of his powerful and precipitous entry affected so deeply the children in the audience that for a long time later, in the dark of sobbing insomnias, in the glare of violent nightmares, nervous little boys and girls relived, with private accretions, something similar to the "primordial qualm," a shapeless nastiness, the swoosh of nameless wings, the unendurable dilation of fever which came in a cavern draft from the uncanny stage. (183)

Van comes in, gigantic, black, masked, strutting with an ominous restlessness; he springs onto his hands and kicks off his head--revealing that he had in fact been reversed when he appeared first.

It was the standing of a metaphor on its head not for the sake of the trick's difficulty, but in order to perceive an ascending waterfall or a sunrise in reverse: a triumph, in a sense, over the ardis of time. Thus the rapture young Mascodagama derived from overcoming gravity was akin to that of artistic revelation in the sense utterly and naturally unknown to the innocents of critical appraisal, the social-scene commentators, the moralists, the idea-mongers and so forth. Van on stage was performing organically what his figures of speech were to perform later in life--acrobatic wonders that had never been expected from them and which frightened children. (184-85)

Like the card-sharping episode, this zany interlude also reveals Van's mastery, a mastery that reflects his confidence that he will return to Ada, that with her he can triumph over the ardis of time. But that triumph turns to defeat at the end of Ardis the Second when the shot he receives in his duel and his forced inactivity rob him of his magic powers of maniambulation. Like the card-sharping episode, too, this chapter of vivid local interest is a means of detracting from the significance of Van's academic career: new information appears about his studies, but only as a backdrop to the strange excitement of his Masco-dagama role.

In his academic career Van is both a psychologist and a philosopher. He is particularly concerned with the study of the insane, which he hopes might help answer the riddle of Terra and clarify the nature of space and time:

During his first summer vacation, Van worked under Tyomkin, at the Chose famous clinic, on an ambitious dissertation he never

completed, "Terra: Eremitic Reality or Collective Dream?" He interviewed numerous neurotics, among whom there were variety artists, and literary men, and at least three intellectually lucid, but spiritually "lost," cosmologists who either were in telepathic collusion (they had never met and did not even know of one another's existence) or had discovered, none knew how or where, by means, maybe, of forbidden "ondulas" of some kind, a green world rotating in space and spiraling in time, which in terms of matter-and-mind was like ours and which they described in the same specific details as three people watching from three separate windows would a carnival show in the same street. (182)

Despite the successes that come so easily to him, Van minimizes his career, summarizing it cursorily and coldly:

Van pursued his studies in private until his election (at thirty-five!) to the Rattner Chair of Philosophy in the University of Kingston. . . . Van neither needed nor appreciated the thing, but accepted it in a spirit of good-natured perversity or perverse gratitude. . . . He spent in Kingston a score of dull years (variegated by trips abroad), an obscure figure around which no legends collected in the university or the city. Unloved by his austere colleagues, unknown in local pubs, unregretted by male students, he retired in 1922, after which he resided in Europe. (506-07)

Even when Van is pretending to represent his academic life in its purest form the pain of losing Ada disrupts the academic façade. During Pt.2 Ch.4, ostensibly a lecture on the nature of dreams representative of his lectures from 1891 on, Van categorizes his classifiable dreams into the professional, the fatidic, and the erotic. Between the latter two, between "the dim-doom and the poignantly sensual," he notes,

I would place "melts" of erotic tenderness and heart-rending enchantment, chance frôlements of anonymous girls at vague parties, half-smiles of appeal or submission--forerunners or echoes of the agonizing dreams of regret when series of receding Adas faded away in silent reproach; and tears, even

hotter than those I would shed in waking life, shook and scalded poor Van, and were remembered at odd moments for days and weeks. (361)

This is at once emotionally stirring as personal recollection and enchantingly inappropriate as part of an academic lecture.

5. Other Women

Three of the four chief themes of the "separation" chapters in Ada (letters, Van's career, his other women) unite in the novel. Van begins to write shortly after wrenching himself from Ardis. The chapter on Van's Letters from Terra appears immediately after Pt.2 Ch.1, which cites in full Ada's letters to Van: the novel is obviously a compensation for the fact that Van will not allow himself to write back to Ada. The relationship is emphasized by the fact that "When in early September Van Veen left Manhattan for Lute, he was pregnant" (325) with his first novel: it is just a few minutes before boarding the airliner from which he leaves Manhattan that Van reads Ada's first letter, which by dint of this careful timing is thus designated his "impregnator." In his book Van attempts to prove that the conventional notion of Terra--Terra as heaven-sweet, "a rainbow mist of angelic spirits" "on the opposite side of the cosmic lane" (21)--is wrong, that there is always an admixture of heaven and hell: "Now the purpose of the novel was to suggest that Terra cheated, that all was not paradise there, that perhaps in some ways human minds and human flesh underwent on that sibling planet worse torments than on our much maligned Demonica" (341). One need not belabour the fact that the relationship between the received Utopian notion

of Terra and Van's rather dystopian revision parallels the relationship between what Van had thought the pure bliss of Ardis and his new sense of pain.

Though Letters from Terra is a novel it is the outcome of Van's "scientific" career, expressing "through verbal imagery a compendium of certain inexplicably correlated vagaries observed by him in mental patients, on and off, since his first year at Chose" (338). Van tries to represent the political history of Terra by creating "a mosaic of painstakingly collated notes from his own reports on the 'transcendental delirium' of his patients" (340). He also tries desperately and comically to keep Ada out of the novel, but she keeps on recurring, as she does in Van's life, too, in the girls to whom he resorts at once to eclipse the image of Ada and to evoke that very image:

Poor Van! In his struggle to keep the writer of the letters from Terra strictly separate from the image of Ada, he guilt and carmined Theresa until she became a paragon of banality. . . . our author found himself confronted with the distressful task of now stamping out in Antilia, a born brunette, all traces of Ada, thus reducing yet another character to a dummy with bleached hair. . . . Flora, initially an ivory-pale, dark-haired funest beauty, whom the author transformed just in time into a third bromidic dummy with a dun bun. (339-40)

Van brings other women into his life, as he brings other women into his novel, in an effort to drive out the image of Ada, or conversely, in an effort to recapture that image. As Van is recuperating from the duel just after he has stormed out of Ardis in 1888, he meets

Tatiana, a remarkably pretty and proud young nurse, with black hair and diaphanous skin (some of her attitudes and gestures, and that harmony between neck and eyes which is the special,

scarcely yet investigated secret of feminine grace fantastically and agonizingly reminded him of Ada, and he sought escape from that image in a powerful response to the charms of Tatiana. . . .) (312)

The most important of the "other women" is Cordula de Prey, the girl who rescues Van from the hospital and with whom he stays in Manhattan, where the first flashes of the inspiration that will become Letters from Terra appear to him.

Van moves in with Cordula to allay his grief, to fill the emptiness he feels inside him after he has broken away from Ada, to provide some simulacrum of soothing routine, some buffer against the most miserable solitude. Since his keeping company with Cordula is based on physical attraction and the need for the consolation of companionship, his relations with her remain strictly limited in scope:

In no sense could Cordula be compared to a writers' muse. . . . The sweet banality of their little ménage sustained him. . . . Cordula had no conversation and that also helped. She had instinctively realized very soon that she should never mention Ada or Ardis. He, on his part, accepted the evident fact that she did not really love him. Her small, clear, soft, well-padded and rounded body was delicious to stroke. . . . (324)

Van's being sexually involved with Cordula makes no difference to his love for Ada, which is for him as always "a condition of being" (574). The insignificance of his relationship with Cordula only confirms how vast is his passion for Ada, how untouchable that love is even in despair. His almost purely carnal treatment of Cordula emphasizes by contrast the delicacy that he has always mingled with his desire for Ada, the tenderness that has always rounded out the triumphs of their love.

This, at least, is the way Van sees his relationship with Cordula, and the reader at first cannot but concur. Yet Nabokov's evaluation is very different.

Before Nabokov's assessment is put forward, let it be very clearly understood that the patterns which lead one to see this authorial assessment are very difficult indeed to discern, to view whole, to construe, no matter how obvious they may appear once isolated from the surrounding text and its myriad other patterns and the many pressures it exerts against one's perceiving and correctly aligning the most important of these patterns. Moreover it should be realized that though it is possible to arrive at a lucidity of judgement such as Nabokov's own without first finding the key to the author's judiciary records, Nabokov uses every element of his fictive skill to delay the reader's making the right judgements, to encourage the reader not to assess the events with the moral clarity with which they should be met--and then to see how he should have reacted and how easily he was beguiled into an unsound moral response.

Nabokov records his evaluation of Van's relationship with Cordula through a careful opposition between Cordula de Prey and her cousin Percy. Several times throughout *Ardis* the Second Percy de Prey is associated with Turkey (whither he will sail en route to the Crimea) or with tobacco or with Turkish tobacco. When Van suspects Ada has been unfaithful to him, he notes that

She smelled of tobacco, either because (as she said) she had spent an hour in a compartment for smokers, or had smoked (she added) a cigarette or two herself in the doctors' waiting room,

or else because (and this she did not say) her unknown lover was a heavy smoker, his open red mouth full of rolling blue fog. (234)

Later we will be able to deduce that she was with Percy de Prey on this day. Another day at dinner Ada takes a cigarette and Van remarks:

"I think I'll take an Alibi--I mean an Albany--myself."
 "Please note, everybody," said Ada, "how voulu that slip was! I like a smoke when I go mushrooming, but when I'm back, this horrid tease insists I smell of some romantic Turk or Albanian met in the woods." (260)

On the day Ada has seen Percy off, Van and Ada stand embraced, "she playing her limp light fingers over his collarbone, and how he 'labeled,' he said, the dark aroma of her hair blending with crushed lily stalks, Turkish cigarettes and the lassitude that comes from 'lass'" (286-87). When Van has been told by Blanche of Ada's lover, he confronts Ada with the fact:

"But he exists, he exists," muttered Van, looking down at a rainbow web on the turf.
 "I suppose so," said the haughty child, "however, he left yesterday for some Greek or Turkish port. . . ." (296)

This motif, it should be realized, is difficult to associate with Percy because it is only by careful analysis that one can discern that Ada has in fact been with Percy on a particular day, and because "Turkish" is also associated with cigarettes in general: on the Night of the Burning Barn, years before Percy appears, Van writes: "I denounce the philistine's post-coital cigarette both as a doctor and an artist. It is, however, true that Van was not unaware of a glass box of Turkish Traumatis on a console too far to be reached." (120-21)

Cordula de Prey marries one Ivan Giovanovich Tobak, whose name derives, we are told, from his ancestor Admiral Tobakoff "who had an épée duel with Jean Nicot and after whom the Tobago Islands, or the Tobakoff Islands, are named, I forget which" (383). This "Tobakoff" would be obviously related to the tobacco motif around Percy were it not for the fact that the explorer Tobakoff also forms part of a pattern with Andrey Vineland. (Can you see how, in terms of the information just given? The answer--and more importantly, the reason for this second relationship--will be explained in Chapter 7.)

Let us consider a second pattern that connects Percy and Cordula. As noted in Chapter 4, one could discern, on an exceptional second or third reading of Ada, the connection between Percy de Prey and the song "Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre." Now Cordula's family home happens to be in a place variously called Malorukino or Malbrook, Mayne, a fact that one could easily link up immediately with Percy's Malbrough if one had already discerned the link between song and character and if there were not another two or three hundred verbal motifs also jostling for one's attention.

There are other connections between the two second cousins, such as the fact that Percy de Prey is three years older than Van, just as Cordula de Prey is three years older than Ada. But surely the mere fact of their surnames would give the game away? No, this is not so, for Cordula and Percy are obviously paired in one way that suffices to explain this immediately apparent relationship and that discourages us from expecting a second, much less apparent, level of relationship which carries its own structural significance. Cordula, Van suspects,

is the lesbian lover at whom Ada had hinted that day at the end of Ardis the First; Percy, he finds out from Ada on the last day of Ardis the Second, is someone whom he really should recognize as a rival. Once we notice this graceful but fairly straightforward structural irony, we accept the cousins' surnames as merely part of the novel's human landscape. It is not until we discover the much less obvious tobacco/Tobak and Malbrough/Malorukino connections that we re-examine the relationship of the two. Then we can see as Nabokov has all along how preposterous is Van's hypocrisy, that he should storm and rage that Ada has "betrayed" him with Percy de Prey when almost immediately he attaches himself to Cordula. And even though Van does present this attachment as only minor, a compensation for the desolation wrought by Ada's unfaithfulness, the hypocrisy remains. Van's hypocrisy and indeed his whole behaviour are based on his needs: he needs Ada's unswerving devotion, and when her relations with other lovers shatter his chances of satisfying this need, he requires as a replacement the emotional stimulus of the violence he plans to unleash on Percy de Prey and the emotional solace and the physical release Cordula can offer.

It is important to ask why one takes so long to discern this really rather blatant hypocrisy: one's own failures of perception are as much part of the effect of Ada as are those of Van or Ada. The criticism of Van's behaviour is present in his attitudes and actions themselves, but one does not make the judgements that, say, an Austen or a Dickens or a Tolstoy or even a James or a Joyce would encourage one to make upon such attitudes and actions. Throughout the novel there appears to be an absolute lack of pressure to make moral judgements more

demanding than those made by the narrators. There is no authorial voice--heard or implied--that is distinguishable in timbre from the narrator's own, nor is there any evident "unreliability" in the narrator's voice itself: Van is enormously intelligent, subtle and sensitive, consistent within himself, quite capable of self-reproach for a cruel or thoughtless act. Then, too, Van is disarmingly frank about his sexual relations with Cordula, as if this were the most natural way for him to behave--as indeed it is within the whole ethos of the world he depicts. Nabokov, moreover, has so richly centrifugal a style and such uncanny skill at narrative transition, he can change direction so rapidly and cram each phrase with such colour and vitality, that one is distracted from making the comparison between Van's fury at Ada's having another lover and his acceptance of the naturalness of his taking someone else, a comparison that in another writer would be if not hinted at by the authorial voice at least pointed out by collocation or an obvious structural irony.

The most important reason of all, though, for our not seeing Van's absurd hypocrisy is the fact that we see the narrative from his point of view. Though Ada's overwhelming passion for Van is clear, we, like Van, cannot see the nature of her feelings for Rack or Percy de Prey. Because we see through Van's eyes we see there would be no basis for Ada to feel that Cordula might challenge her place in Van's affections. There is little but physical attraction and the consolation of companionship in Van's relations with Cordula and there is a sharp difference between his almost purely carnal treatment of Cordula and the delicacy that has always accompanied his desire for Ada. Because

we see Van has formed a bond with Cordula for little more than the satisfaction of his "crude virile pride" (325) we do not even think of the possibility of Ada's being jealous of a Cordula who we know could only ever mean incomparably less to Van than Ada does.

Because we have not seen from Ada's viewpoint the limitedness of her relations with Percy and Rack we have not seen that there need be no challenge to a deeper love to produce the dreadful anguish we do see in Van. That, as we are assured, Van's love for Ada continues throughout his affair with Cordula would not be enough to prevent Ada from suffering an agony of betrayal similar to what Van has felt. But because Ada happens not to be jealous of Van--she tends to ignore what Van calls "his sexual peccadilloes . . . as if demanding, by tacit" implication, a similar kind of leniency in regard to her frailty" (431) --there is nothing to alert us to the dreadful way Ada could have been hurt by Van's hypocrisy and inconsiderateness. Yet the fact that Ada is not hurt does not at all excuse Van's double-dealing or our failure to discern such hypocrisy and the pain it could cause.

Because Van knows his own feelings towards Cordula he cannot envisage any pain he might cause Ada. Sharing Van's viewpoint, we are trapped into the same inconsiderateness and hypocrisy, and when we perceive the marks of Nabokov's much sounder assessment of Van's behaviour, we are forced to admit how poorly we have judged, how easily our adopting the partiality of Van's vision, the inevitable bias of an individual's personality, has led us to discount what could be a grave offence to another.

Wayne Booth notes the likelihood that readers will be unsure of

Nabokov's distance from Humbert Humbert in Lolita, that they will be "unsuccessful, in that they will identify Humbert with the author more than Nabokov intends."¹² Booth's few remarks on Lolita reveal that he has an excellent and subtle understanding of the novel, but he is wrong to suppose that Nabokov is not aware--more aware, indeed, than any other author has been--of the difficulties consequent upon ceding overt and immediate authorial control over one's fiction. Because he is so aware of these difficulties, Nabokov can turn to artistic and moral advantage the possibility that the reader may make errors of judgement when a narrator like "Humbert Humbert"--or Van Veen--"is given full and unlimited control of the rhetorical resources" (Booth, p. 390). In Lolita as in Ada the reader is encouraged to condone--or ignore even more than condone--the very numerous moral flaws of the narrator. But the reader is also encouraged to reread until he reaches the stage at which he can recognize the signs of Nabokov's own assessments, signs as difficult to see initially and as precise when recognized as the Cordula-Percy correspondences. These signs will suddenly reveal a moral flaw that one cannot now unsee but that one could not see unaided, even though the flaw will have been evidenced in the narrator's very conduct. The reader is compelled to recognize the ease with which his moral acuity has been called in question, to recognize--not abstractly but through the direct consciousness of error--the astonishing force personal bias exerts on his moral evaluations and his complicity in the

¹² The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 391.

cruel failure to imagine the reality of another's needs. It is a shock and a salutary lesson to be confronted with one's own frightening readiness not to consider the feelings of others.

6. Villa Venus

Van's relations with other lovers, principally Cordula, form half of the "other women" theme running through the periods of his separation from Ada; the other half of the theme concerns Van's dealings with prostitutes.

In one sense, as Van tells Ada, these encounters do not matter:

"But let me ask you, dear Van, let me ask you something. How many times has Van been unfaithful to me since September, 1884?"

"Six hundred and thirteen times," answered Van. "With at least two hundred whores, who only caressed me. I've remained absolutely true to you because those were only 'obmanipulations' (sham, insignificant strokings by unremembered cold hands)." (195)

He stresses moral and philosophical distinctions between his use of "the live mechanisms tense males could rent for a few minutes" (220) and the overpowering tenderness of his lovemaking with Ada. We need not dwell on the hypocrisy of Van's expecting to be allowed his own carnal release when he shows such vindictive ire at any report of Ada's seeking her satisfaction.

In another sense Van describes his prostitutes as almost an act of homage to Ada, a pitiful search for the recapture of the bliss of the past. Van begins a eulogistic description of Ada's face thus: "Nose, cheek, chin--all possessed such a softness of outline (associated retrospectively with keepsakes, and picture hats, and frightfully expensive

little courtesans in Wicklow) . . ." (103). He concludes the description with a rhapsody on Ada's eyelids and eyes, and adds:

The procuress in Wicklow, on that satanic night of black sleet, at the most tragic, and almost, fatal point of my life (Van, thank goodness, is ninety now--in Ada's hand) dwelt with peculiar force on the "long eyes" of her pathetic and adorable grandchild. How I used to seek, with what tenacious anguish, traces and tokens of my unforgettable love in all the brothels of the world! (104)

Van's search for a repetition of the bliss and fulfilment of the past through some physical means has its counterparts throughout Nabokov's works. Such a search--in works as various as "The Return of Chorb" (1925), Mary (1926), Glory (1932), "The Visit to the Museum" (1939) and Transparent Things (1972)--is always a doomed hope or an ignominious exercise. Van tries to overcome the pain of separation from Ada by renewed contact with at least some image of his beloved. But the image is only that, and it will collapse; Van's wooing such tokens of Ada, far from somehow allowing him to regain the ecstasy of the past, only stresses how pitiful is his attempt at retrieval. Van's separation from Ada remains as real and as piercing as before, and it ominously foreshadows the ultimate separation of death. As Lolita says, "You know, what's so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own" (Lolita 286). Van and Ada feel the pain of separation too much to talk about it directly, but in their flippant or trite remarks their parents express without knowing it exactly the dread Van and Ada will come to feel: "I think even the shortest separation is a kind of training for the Elysian Games" (234), Marina prattles, while Demon declares that "Partir c'est mourir un peu, et mourir c'est partir un peu trop" (261).

We are about to investigate the way Van tries and fails to retrieve in the brothels of Villa Venus (Pt.2 Ch.3) the past's vanished bliss. But first let us make sure we know the exact origins and nature of the Villa Venus system.

In 1869 a wealthy Flemish architect, David van Veen, "in no way related to the Veens of our rambling romance" (347), loses his daughter and son-in-law in a car crash and a suicide. He lavishes his attention on their son, who however dies in Ex in Switzerland, where the consumptive child has been sent for the purity of Ex's "crystal air" (347), when a hurricane hurls "a roof tile at him, fatally fracturing his skull" (347-48). David van Veen finds among the boy's belongings the draft of an essay, "Villa Venus: an Organized Dream," in which the fifteen-year-old had imagined a world-wide network of palatial brothels.

The daydream is appropriate for young Eric Veen. In addition to combining both Eros and Venus, the boy's name also alludes to the religious prostitution that accompanied the worship of Venus Erycina.¹³ The crucial passage at the end of Pt.2 Ch.3 which depicts Van's "last visit to one last Villa Venus" (356) and is not only, as Van says, "the purest sanglot in the book" (584) but is also in certain ways the centre of its structure was written in its first version during a burst of inspiration "at the very end of 1965" (SO 310). In November of that year Nabokov had been in Palermo, a few miles from the town of Erice,

¹³ See p. 196 for evidence of Nabokov's familiarity with the cult.

where the cult of Venus Erycina began.¹⁴

As a memorial to his grandson, as a remedy for his grief, David van Veen sets about building a "thousand and one memorial florampers . . . all over the world" (349). The old architect's styles are wildly eclectic:

In his parodies of paradise he even permitted himself, just a few times, to express the rectilinear chaos of Cubism (with "abstract" cast in "concrete") by imitating . . . such ultra-utilitarian boxes of brick as the . . . great-necessity houses of Dudok in Friesland.¹⁵

But on the whole it was the idyllic and the romantic that he favored. English gentlemen of parts found many pleasures in Letchworth¹⁶ Lodge, an honest country house plastered up to its bulleeyes, or Itchenor Chat with its battered chimney breasts and hipped gables. None could help admiring David van Veen's knack of making his brand-new Regency mansion look like a renovated farmhouse¹⁷ or of producing a converted convent on a small offshore island with such miraculous effect that one could not distinguish the arabesque from the arbutus, ardor from art, the sore from the rose. (350-51)

¹⁴ See "Postscript to the Russian edition" ("Postskriptum k russkomu izdaniyu") of *Lolita*, dated "7 November 1965, Palermo" (*Lolita*, trans. Vladimir Nabokov [New York: Phaedra, 1967], p. 299).

¹⁵ W. M. Dudok (1888-) was a celebrated Dutch architect of the early twentieth century, active particularly in the 1920's and 1930's. His work is indeed "abstract" in "concrete": the buildings are like three-dimensional Mondrians without the colour. See for instance the 1923 school and the 1928-1931 town hall at Hilversum, in Arnold Whittick, *European Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Aylesbury, Bucks.: Leonard Hill, 1974); or see J. G. Wattjes, *Nieuw-Nederlandsche Bouwkunst* (Amsterdam: Uitgevers-Maatschappij "Kosmos," 1926).

¹⁶ Letchworth (founded 1903), England's first garden city, was an important model in town planning.

¹⁷ This mixes two of the styles of John Nash (1752-1835), regular Regency monumentality and the "picturesque" cottage orné.

David van Veen dies before completing his designs, but a hundred of the memorial floramors are already built, and the Villas Venus, those "parodies of paradise," grind into operation.

In its opulence and in the sumptuousness of the erotic pleasures it affords, and in the way Van searches in it for a repetition of the ecstasy of the past, Villa Venus is like Ardis, a parody indeed of the "paradise" in "Ardis." At the end of Pt.1 Ch.4, the chapter preceding the first Ardis visit, there is a marvelous transition between Van's schooldays--and the young girl at the corner shop who serves as a whore for Van and some of the older schoolboys who initiate him into meretricious pleasures--and the trip to Ardis:

He knew she was nothing but a fussy pig-pink whorelet and would elbow her face away when she attempted to kiss him after he had finished and was checking with one quick hand, as he had seen Cheshire do, if his wallet was still in his hip pocket; but somehow or other, when the last of some forty convulsions had come and gone in the ordinary course of collapsing time, and his train was bowling past black and green fields to Ardis, he found himself endowing with unsuspected poetry her poor image, the kitchen odor of her arms, the humid eyelashes in the sudden gleam of Cheshire's lighter and even the creaky steps of old deaf Mrs. Gimber in her bedroom upstairs.

In an elegant first-class compartment, with one's gloved hand in the velvet side-loop, one feels very much a man of the world as one surveys the capable landscape capably skimming by. And every now and then the passenger's roving eyes paused for a moment as he listened inwardly to a nether itch, which he supposed to be (correctly, thank Log) only a minor irritation of the epithelium. (33)

The next chapter begins with Van at "the little rural station whence a winding road led to Ardis Hall, which he was visiting for the first time in his life" (34), and the first of the metamorphic voyages is about to begin. At the end of Pt.2 Ch.2, the chapter preceding the Villa Venus

chapter, there is another transition, also by railway, but this time into the Villas Venus:

He decided that after completing his medical studies at Kingston (which he found more congenial than good old Chose) he would undertake long travels in South America, Africa, India. As a boy of fifteen (Eric Veen's age of florescence) he had studied with a poet's passion the timetables of three great American trans-continental trains that one day he would take--not alone (now alone). (345)

Van goes on to describe the routes of the American, African and Asian Expresses and ponders somnolently:

It is not clear, when you are falling asleep, why all continents except you begin with an A.

Those three admirable trains included at least two carriages in which a fastidious traveler could rent a bedroom with bath and water closet, and a drawing room with a piano or harp. The length of the journey varied according to Van's predormient mood, when at Eric's age he imagined the landscapes unfolding all along his comfortable, too comfortable, fauteuil. Through rain forests and mountain canyons and other fascinating places (oh, name them! Can't--falling asleep), the room moved as slowly as fifteen miles per hour but across desertorum or agricultural drearies it attained seventy, ninety-seven; night-nine, one hund, red dog-- (345-46)

The chapter ends, then, with Van sinking into sleep, but also with Van sinking by train into the parodic dream of Ardis of which the next chapter consists.

Pt.1 Ch.6, which describes Ardis Manor and happens also to depict the first time Van and Ada are alone together (well before they are lovers, of course), is linked particularly closely with Villa Venus. The rooms and nooks little Ada shows Van are the rooms and nooks where they will make love: this chapter and this manor hold the whole amorous frenzy of Ardis in posse. Pt.1 Ch.6 begins: "Ada showed her shy guest the great

library on the second floor, the pride of Ardis" (41). Ardis and its library form part of Van's last great dream-visit to his last Villa Venus: when Van says of the scene of his dream, purportedly "on a rocky Mediterranean peninsula" (358) that "It was not Ardis, it was not the library" (358), he only confirms that the scene has evoked both manor and library. The variegated jumble of Ardis's architectural styles--

Owing to a mixture of overlapping styles and tiles (not easily explainable in non-technical terms to non-roof-lovers), as well as to a haphazard continuum, so to speak, of renovations, the roof of Ardis Manor presented an indescribable confusion of angles and levels, of tin-green and fin-gray surfaces, of scenic ridges and wind-proof nooks. You could clip and kiss.... (45)

--is a less extreme form of the rampant and parodic eclecticism of Villa Venus. (There is a charming inconsistency between Van's assumption that he must limit himself to the "non-technical terms" available to his "non-roof-loving" readers and his availing himself of genuine but comical technical terms, "chimney breasts and hipped gables," in the Villa Venus chapter.) At the end of Pt.1 Ch.6, on Van's first evening at Ardis, an Andalusian architect arrives to select the site for "an 'artistic' swimming pool for Ardis Manor" (45). The architect speaks only Spanish and Ada, Van and Marina are all limited to a few useless words in that language: Marina, for instance, knows "an anatomical term with a 'j' hanging in the middle" (46),¹⁸ and Ada "remembered, of course, mariposa, butterfly, and the names of two or three birds (listed in ornithological guides) such as paloma, pigeon" (46). But "mariposon"

¹⁸ El Ojo is the title of the translation (1967) of Nabokov's The Eye.

means "philanderer," and "paloma" has a colloquial sense of "prostitute." During Van's first night at a Villa Venus he chooses three whores at once and goes

through all three of them grimly and leisurely, "changing mounts in midstream" (Eric's advice) before ending every time in the grip of the ardent Ardillusian, who said as we parted, after one last spasm (although non-erotic chitchat was against the rules), that her father had constructed the swimming pool on the estate of Demon Veen's cousin. (354)

But after Pt.1 Ch.6 has described the existing architecture of Ardis Manor, the very presence of the architect--which signals that the absurd mélange of "styles and tiles" is about to be made even more bizarre by the addition of a swimming pool to a nineteenth-century home--indicates the special nexus between Ardis and that Villa Venus scheme put into operation by an eccentric architect who assembles a ludicrous medley of incompatible styles and eras of design.

Though Villa Venus is a parody of Ardis (in Chapter 7 we shall see much more of this) it is also a dream, a sickeningly convoluted dream where death and life become entangled in the eeriest and most disturbing fashion. As we noted above, the end of Pt.2 Ch.2, just before the Villa Venus chapter begins, is a fade-in to a dream; Pt.2 Ch.4, just after the Venus Villas, begins "What are dreams?" and continues as Van's lecture on the nature of dreams. The lavish brothels themselves are built according to the specifications of Eric Veen's "Villa Venus: an Organized Dream," according to his "pubescent dream of ideal bordels" (345).

Van's first visit to a Villa Venus is invaded by the desperation

of dreams:

I had frequented bordels since my sixteenth year, but although some of the better ones, especially in France and Ireland, rated a triple red symbol in Nugg's guidebook, nothing about them pre-announced the luxury and mollitude of my first Villa Venus. It was the difference between a den and an Eden.

Three Egyptian squaws, dutifully keeping in profile (long ebony eye, lovely snub, braided black mane, honey-hued faro frock, thin amber arms, Negro bangles, doughnut earring of gold bisected by a pleat of the mane, Red Indian hairband, ornamental bib), lovingly borrowed by Eric Veen from a reproduction of a Theban fresco (no doubt pretty banal in 1420 B.C.), printed in Germany (Künstlerpostkarte Nr. 6034, says cynical Dr. Lagosse), prepared me by means of what parched Eric called "exquisite manipulations of certain nerves whose position and power are known only to a few ancient sexologists," accompanied by the no less exquisite application of certain ointments, not too specifically mentioned in the pornolore of Eric's *Orientalia*, for receiving a scared little virgin, the descendant of an Irish king, as Eric was told in his last dream in Ex, Switzerland, by a master of funerary rather than fornicatory ceremonies. (353)

It is apparent that Eric's dream of ideal bordels is stimulated by his acquaintance with the art and the erotic lore of the past. Though the "Egyptian squaws" each with "Negro bangles" and a "Red Indian hairband" are meant to sound as wildly eclectic as the architecture of the Villas Venus, the passage in fact describes very accurately a portion of a fresco from the tomb of Nakht at Thebes (see Pl. 2a, following p. 374).¹⁹ In the luxurious mollitude of his first Villa Venus, Van is within the actualization of Eric's "Organized Dream," but he is also transported

¹⁹ A study of the changing dress styles in Egyptian painting reveals that Nabokov could be referring to no tomb but Nakht's (Theban tomb no. 52). Since Nabokov specifies 1420 B.C. and "printed in Germany" his source would seem to be Hans Wolfgang Müller, Alt-Ägyptische Malerei (Berlin: Safari Verlag, 1959), which unlike other works reproducing the picture in colour specifies 1420 B.C. rather than 1425 B.C. or "reign of Thutmosis, III" or merely "18th Dynasty."

PLATE 2

- a) Tomb of Nakht, Thebes, 1420 B.C..
- b) Superb bird of paradise (Lophorina superba)
- c) Vrubel', Demon poverzhenniy (Demon downcast), 1902



as it were to within the painting with which Eric's dream began. Dream and reality become disturbingly blurred so that it seems as if Van on his couch is within the tomb of Nakht or as if the picture within Eric's dream has suddenly sprung into animation around Van.

But even worse is the strange and sickening shift within the sentence quoted above, a shift whereby the "exquisite application of certain ointments" on Van's body, preparing him for his voluptuary treats, merges with what seems to be the anointing of dying Eric in some rite of extreme unction or in some morticiary preparation: Van's sexual luxuriations seem about to collapse him into the position of a dying boy. Perhaps worse still is the fact that Eric Veen dies at Ex, at some unspecified date late in 1869, in a "hurricane" (347) possibly synchronous with the birth of Van (at Ex, on January 1, 1870, "during an exhausting, yet highly romantic blizzard" [25-26]). The confusion of Eric's death-bed dream and what seems to be Van's throbbing reality combines with the fact that Van seems to have been born as Eric died to suggest that Van's whole life is only the last imploding dot of light in the darkness of dying Eric's consciousness. When one recalls that Van is born at Ex in Ada's first chapter and dies at Ex in its last, one feels as if the whole book is being sucked into that dwindling vortex of Eric's lapsing consciousness. The book's whole world, indeed, may be reduced to that same glint within the infinite vacuum of Eric's mind in death, for Van lives on Antiterre from perhaps the time of Eric's death, 1869, until 1967, and "a gap of up to a hundred years one way or another existed between the two earths" (18). Are Van's life and his world no more than the dream through which Eric passes into black nothingness? Nowhere do Nabokov's powers of involuting his works

become more dreadfully vertiginous, nowhere are we hurtled so helplessly into "the dreadful pitfalls of eternity, the unknowledgeable beyond the unknown, the helplessness, the cold, the sickening involutions and interpenetrations of space and time" (SM 296).

Eric Veen as he dies is "a scared little virgin, the descendant of an Irish king" (353) and an "eric," in old Irish law, is the fine exacted as compensation for causing death. The memorial floramors are a sort of compensation for Eric's death, but they reek of the grave. Their paradises are ghastly, eerie, disturbing, a dreadful reminder of death. Their attempts to create a momentary ecstasy only emphasize the momentaneousness of life. Van's struggle to escape the losses brought by time's advance merely demonstrates the pitifulness of a spatial means of transcending time and the horror of all the enigmas of "space versus time, . . . time as space--and space breaking away from time, in the final tragic triumph of human cogitation: I am because I die" (153). Van's prostitutes are no compensation for his losses; when they voluptuously anoint his body they seem only to allow a mocking skeleton to gleam through the skin, reminding him of the hopelessness of his separation from Ada, the dreadful hopelessness of the total separation death will bring.

Van's last visit to his last Villa Venus is even more haunting and melancholy than his account of that first visit so eerily synchronizing "Eric dying in his sleep and Van throbbing with foul life on a rococo couch" (353-54). This evocation of romantic decadence, one of the finest dream passages in literature, is rendered as factual narrative that is never quite revealed to be more dream than the memory of a

waking scene. Only the transformation at the end, the inconsistency of "the shadows on the ceiling" and "the unwalled rooms," and the wafting uncertainty of the events make it necessary to recognize that this is at least half a dream, that it is at least as much a chronic oneiric ache as it is a lone confrontation with the night that encircles Van and the bed on which he lies with the young child-whore whom he dare not disturb.

The whole passage must be quoted for the sake not only of its intrinsic beauty and its disquieting rhythms but also to establish its morbid and eerie self-sufficiency before one sees of what shards of Van's life its jagged sculpture is assembled:

Van never regretted his last visit to one last Villa Venus. A cauliflowered candle was messily burning in its tin cup on the window ledge next to the guitar-shaped paper-wrapped bunch of long roses for which nobody had troubled to find, or could have found, a vase. On a bed, some way off, lay a pregnant woman, smoking, looking up at the smoke mingling its volutes with the shadows on the ceiling, one knee raised, one hand dreamily scratching her brown groin. Far beyond her, a door standing ajar gave on what appeared to be a moonlit gallery but was really an abandoned, half-demolished, vast reception room with a broken outer wall, zigzag fissures in the floor, and the black ghost of a gaping grand piano, emitting, as if all by itself, spooky glissando twangs in the middle of the night. Through a great rip in the marbleized brick and plaster, the naked sea, not seen but heard as a panting space separated from time, dully boomed, dully withdrew its platter of pebbles, and, with the crumbling sounds, indolent gusts of warm wind reached the unwalled rooms, disturbing the volutes of shadow above the woman, and a bit of dirty fluff that had drifted down onto her pale belly, and even the reflection of the candle in a cracked pane of the bluish casement. Beneath it, on a rump-tickling coarse couch, Van reclined, pouting pensively, pensively caressing the pretty head on his chest, flooded by the black hair of a much younger sister or cousin of the wretched florinda on the tumbled bed. The child's eyes were closed, and whenever he kissed their moist convex lids the rhythmic motion of her blind breasts changed or stopped altogether, and was presently resumed.

He was thirsty, but the champagne he had brought, with the

softly rustling roses, remained sealed and he had not the heart to remove the silky dear head from his breast so as to begin working on the explosive bottle. He had fondled and fouled her many times in the course of the last ten days, but was not sure if her name was really Adora, as everybody maintained--she, and the other girl, and a third one (a maidservant, Princess Kachurin), who seemed to have been born in the faded bathing suit she never changed and would die in, no doubt, before reaching majority or the first really cold winter on the beach mattress which she was moaning on now in her drugged haze. And if the child really was called Adora, then what was she?--not Rumanian, not Dalmatian, not Sicilian, not Irish, though an echo of brogue could be discerned in her broken but not too foreign English. Was she eleven or fourteen, almost fifteen perhaps? Was it really her birthday--this twenty-first of July, nineteen-four or eight or even several years later, on a rocky Mediterranean peninsula?

A very distant church clock, never audible except at night, clanged twice and added a quarter.

"Smorchiamo la secandela," mumbled the bawd on the bed in the bed in the local dialect that Van understood better than Italian. The child in his arms stirred and he pulled his opera cloak over her. In the grease-reeking darkness a faint pattern of moonlight established itself on the stone floor, near his forever discarded half-mask lying there and his pump-shod foot. It was not Ardis, it was not the library, it was not even a human room, but merely the squalid recess where the bouncer had slept before going back to his Rugby-coaching job at a public school somewhere in England. The grand piano in the otherwise bare hall seemed to be playing all by itself but actually was being rippled by rats in quest of the succulent refuse placed there by the maid who fancied a bit of music when her cancered womb roused her before dawn with its first familiar stab. The ruinous Villa no longer bore any resemblance to Eric's "organized dream," but the soft little creature in Van's desperate grasp was Ada. (356-58)

The whole dream scenario combines several distinct phases of Van's life at Ardis. The earliest of these is the phase of exploration, particularly those moments when Van is first alone with Ada on his first day at Ardis, "when she showed him the house--and those nooks in it where they were to make love so soon" (59). Pt.1 Ch.6 foreshadows the erotic pleasures of Ardis which Villa Venus can only parody and transform into an agonizing reminder of loss. In this early chapter, on this first tour of the manor, Van notices the phantom candlesticks in

the library window ledge ("A pair of candlesticks, mere phantoms of metal and tallow, stood, or seemed to stand, on the broad window ledge" [41]) and the "humble" candlestick in his room (42). These reappear in the dream's "cauliflowered candle . . . messily burning in its tin cup on the window ledge" (356). As Ada leads Van through the mansion on that day in June 1884, Lucette peers out at them: "a door of some play-room or nursery stood ajar and stirred to and fro as little Lucette peeped out, one russet knee showing. Then the doorleaf flew open--but she darted inside and away. . . . as her sister and he passed by that open door a toy barrel organ invitingly went into action with a stumbling little minuet." (42) When Van and Ada walk back along the third-floor corridor, a "dwarf Haydn again played a few bars" (44). These little details are strangely metamorphosed and melded in snatches of the dream: "one knee . . . a door standing ajar gave on . . . an abandoned . . . reception room with a broken outer wall . . . and the black ghost of a gaping grand piano, emitting, as if all by itself, spooky glissando twangs" (357). When young Ada shows her big cousin his room, Van finds it

more than modest, and . . . could not help regretting he was too young, apparently, to be assigned one of the two guest rooms next to the library. He recalled nostalgically the luxuries of home as he considered the revolting objects that would close upon him in the solitude of summer nights. Everything struck him as being intended for a cringing cretin. . . . (42)

Van's reaction to his room appears in the bizarre phrasing of the dream: "It was not Ardis, it was not the library, it was not even a human room" (358).

This cramped bedroom at Ardis had been the scene of his first dreams and other bedtime evocations of Ada which he now redreams. But if Van spent many of his nights in this squalid recess, he also spent even more memorable and disturbed nights outside in his hammock. It is because Van is reliving this part of Ardis too that there is that dream-confusion between "ceiling" and "unwalled rooms."

Van's nights in the hammock are vigils disturbed by the whirling eeriness of black space and time around him, disturbed by the residue in time of the even more distracted nights of his uncle Ivan Durmonov, the gifted and doomed young violinist who as a summer guest at Ardis some twenty-two years earlier had also slept in the hammock outdoors, to be woken by a cough ripping through his cancered lungs. Though we have discussed before the passage that treats of Van's and his uncle's nights outdoors, let us recall the scene once more:

The hammock . . . between two tulip trees (where a former summer guest, with an opera cloak over his clammy nightshirt, had awoken once because a stinkbomb had burst among the instruments in the horsecart, and striking a match, Uncle Van had seen the bright blood blotching his pillow).

. . . A breeze ruffled the hangings of his now infinite chamber. Venus rose in the sky; Venus set in his flesh.

. . . the fascinating fireflies, and the still more eerie palé cosmos coming through the dark foliage, balanced with new discomforts the nocturnal ordeal, the harassments of sweat and sperm associated with his stuffy room. Night, of course, always remained an ordeal. . . the intense life of the star-haunted sky troubled the boy's night so much that, on the whole, he felt grateful when foul weather . . . drove him back to his bumpy bed.

. . . His nights in the hammock (where that other poor youth had cursed his blood cough and sunk back into dreams of prowling black spumas and a crash of symbols in an orchal orchestra--as suggested to him by career physicians) were now haunted not so much by the agony of his desire for Ada, as by that meaningless space overhead, underhead, everywhere, the demon counterpart of divine time. . . . (72-73)

Uncle Ivan's opera cloak reappears simply as part of Van's attire at the Villa Venus ("he pulled his opera cloak over her" [358]); but the whole nights of the two young men outdoors, the metaphysical discomforts of the one and the other's dreams of "prowling black spumas"--the "naked sea . . . panting" of Villa Venus--are majestically fused in ". . . in the middle of the night. Through a great rip in the marbleized brick and plaster, the naked sea, not seen but heard as a panting space separated from time, dully boomed, dully withdrew its platter of pebbles, and, with the crumbling sounds, indolent gusts of warm wind reached the unwallled rooms." (357) The overarching night, the hushed but insistent presence of an infinity of space and time, the natural link between night's vast blackness and death's black emptiness and the very personal link Van feels between his own nights and his uncle's early death build up a disquieting and awesome resonance.

Van is dreaming not only as if from within Ardis; he also knows he has left it. He recalls the excitement of his long first night of love with Ada, the night of the burning barn. The candle on the window ledge, the disturbance of the candle's flame, the tickly couch of the Burning Barn all reappear in the dream: "A . . . candle was messily burning in its tin cup on the window ledge. . . . gusts of warm wind . . . disturbing . . . even the reflection of the candle in a cracked pane of the bluish casement. Beneath it, on a rump-tickling coarse couch, Van reclined . . ." (356-57) But Van also recalls the early morning of his agonizing discovery of the names of Ada's lovers.

Van's two rivals are present in his dream. At the picnic where he so openly challenges Van, Percy de Prey presents Ada with "a bouquet

of longstemmed roses" (271) which Ada "ordered to be put back into the boot of the Count's car" (277). These flowers haunt Van again in the "bunch of long roses for which nobody had troubled to find, or could have found, a vase" (356). Percy himself reappears (merged, as we shall see, with Rack) in the dreadful last paragraph of the dream: "merely the squalid recess where the bouncer had slept before going back to his Rugby-coaching job at a public school somewhere in England" (358). These lines recast the fact that Percy, an expert Rugby player, once Van's senior at the pseudo-English public school of Riverlane, leaves Ladore to serve as a soldier just before Van storms away from Ada.

When Van last sees Rack at Ardis, the musician is coming upstairs to see Ada before he leaves to go back to Kalugano; while Rack asks for Ada, Lucettè, whom he coaches on the piano, carries on playing downstairs: "Philip Rack was trudging up . . . while the music continued to play on its own as if by some mechanical device" (207-08). When Van sees Rack for the next (and last) time, Rack is already dying, and in a speech Van prepares to deliver to the dying musician he calls him a "rotting rat" (314). In the last paragraph of the dream, these two last sightings are awfully combined: "before going back to his Rugby-coaching job at a public school somewhere in England. The grand piano in the otherwise bare hall seemed to be playing all by itself but actually was being rippled by rats in quest of the succulent refuse . . ." (358).

Not only are Van's two rivals here; so too is his fey informant: Blanche, the maidservant, appears in the form of the "maidservant, Princess Kachurin" (357) "who fancied a bit of music when her cancered

womb roused her before dawn with its first familiar stab" (358).

Blanche does not have a cancered womb, but she does have gonorrhea, and she is up before dawn on Van's first morning at Ardis (where she mentions the infection that she thinks is only "the whites" [49]) and rouses Van well before dawn on that much more sinister last morning at Ardis, where again reference is made to her "infection" (293).

With Rack, Percy de Prey and Blanche all present, the end of the dream evokes very obliquely but very exactly the fatal morning when the unbearable separation began, and belies the wish-fulfilment of the dream's end, "but the soft little creature in Van's desperate grasp was Ada" (358). Even more painful is the fact that Van's separation from Ada is coupled in this paragraph with the awful death of his uncle: "The grand piano in the otherwise bare hall seemed to be playing all by itself but actually was being rippled by rats in quest of the succulent refuse placed there by the maid who fancied a bit of music when her cancered womb roused her before dawn with its first familiar stab." These lines blend Blanche the informant with dying uncle Ivan, who is a musician, and dreams of music ("the instruments in the horsecart," "a crash of symbols in an orchal orchestra"), who is "roused before dawn" ("had awoken") by his cancer, whose blood cough ("a stinkbomb had burst among the instruments in the horsecart") is gruesomely recalled by the "succulent refuse" on the piano, whose "dreams of prowling black spumas and a crash of symbols in an orchal orchestra" awesomely prefigure the horrible image of the rats running along the piano's keyboard. Van's last visit to his last Villa Venus concludes not in the regaining of Ada but in the most harrowing reassertion of the agony of separation, a

separation almost akin to the anguish of death, a gloomy forewarning of that ultimate separation, not only from Ada, from the possibility of ever recapturing with her the joy of the past, but even from the mere memory of that soaring joy.

VI

LUCETTE

1. Lucette the Pest

On a first reading of Ada we cannot but regard Lucette, throughout the first, Ardis, half of the book, as a pest, an impish little child who gets in the way of Van and Ada's extraordinary love and who also gets in the way of our own eagerness to see the children enjoying a bliss that Van describes so transcendently.

Because Van and Ada do not become lovers until well into Van's first summer stay in Ladore the Lucette theme is announced only towards the end of Ardis the First, in Pt.1 Ch.23, two chapters before the summer of 1884 ends. As Pt.1 Ch.23 explains, Mlle Larivière sprains her back and is in bed for five days in August, during which period

the second upstairs maid, French, whose moods and looks did not match the sweet temper and limpid grace of Blanche, was supposed to look after Lucette, and Lucette did her best to avoid the lazy servant's surveillance in favor of her cousin's and sister's company. The ominous words: "Well, if Master Van lets you come," or "Yes, I'm sure Miss Ada won't mind your mushroom-picking with her," became something of a knell in regard to love's freedom. (142)

Van and Ada have to devise various stratagems to keep Lucette away from their lovemaking: tying her up to a tree, as if she were "a fairy-tale damsel in distress" (143), making her soak a full fifteen minutes in the bath, goading her into going off to learn a poem by heart.

The Lucette theme is announced right at the beginning of Ardis the Second, as we have seen, when Lucette's drumming on the door interrupts Van's first embrace with Ada, who has just declared to the hitherto uncertain Van: "Because I had and have and shall always have only one beau, only one beast, only one sorrow, only one joy" (190). As the theme continues throughout Ardis the Second, we now become even more impatient with Lucette than in Ardis the First, for we appreciate Van and Ada's lovemaking as a reversal of time, a triumph almost of a metaphysical order. Hence we are especially anxious to see Van and Ada able to retrieve time past through the ardour and tenderness of the lovemaking which Lucette is always threatening to interrupt:

Whenever not supervised by her schizophrenic governess, whenever not being read to, or walked, or put to bed, Lucette was now a pest. . . . Lucette . . . seemed to lurk behind every screen, to peep out of every mirror. (211)

Lucette, the shadow, followed them from lawn to loft, from gatehouse to stable, from a modern shower booth near the pool to the ancient bathroom upstairs. Lucette-in-the-Box came out of a trunk. Lucette desired they take her for walks. (213)


Lucette, "always playing her part of the clinging, affectionately fussy lassy" (204-05), is a nosy, charming but very ordinary child who mars the rare and exalted love Van and Ada share.

Van does not see Lucette from 1889 until November 1892, when she arrives bringing a letter from Ada warning that should Van refuse to take her back she will agree to marry an unnamed Arizonian with whom she admits she has almost nothing in common. But in the fall of 1891 Lucette herself has sent Van "a rambling, indecent, crazy, almost savage declaration of love in a ten-page letter" (366), and when she comes to

Kingston with Ada's message the girl Van "had hardly known . . . before --except as an embered embryo" (367) turns out to be a stunningly, rousingly beautiful young woman who can expertly imitate all Ada's "shtuchki (little stunts)" (386)--but still to no avail.

Van does not see Lucette again in 1892 except for the day of Ada's return, when her perfunctory knock and immediate entry give her a glimpse of Van and Ada in mid-convulsion, and except for the night out at the Ursus restaurant and the next morning's debauch. It is another nine years before Van has more than a passing glimpse of Lucette. When he meets her in a Parisian bar in 1901 he finds her still desperately in love with him, eager for him to follow her to her suite and begin at a physical level a relationship that she wants to become a much richer bond. When Lucette discovers Van will shortly be travelling back to America on the liner Admiral Tobakoff, she calls up to get herself a cabin, and determines to seduce Van or die:

Long ago she had made up her mind that by forcing the man whom she absurdly but irrevocably loved to have intercourse with her, even once, she would, somehow, with the help of some prodigious act of nature, transform a brief tactile event into an eternal spiritual tie; but she also knew that if it did not happen on the first night of their voyage, their relationship would slip back into the exhausting, hopeless, hopelessly familiar pattern of banter and counterbanter, with the erotic edge taken for granted, but kept as raw as ever. (485)

Her plan fails, what she wants does not happen, and since she cannot bear knowing she can never have the only man she loves, she takes her own life 

The chapter set on board the Tobakoff is one of the longest and is certainly the most dramatically charged in the novel. When Van spots

Lucette's name on the passenger list, he searches her out; they lunch together; they spend the afternoon by the swimming pool on deck, where Van as he lies sunbathing only manages "to fan, with every shiver and heave of the ship, the fire of evil temptation" (482), and Lucette fearfully suspects that a grotesque bikinied blonde, a Titianesque Titaness, is one of Van's "gruesome girls" (483) (she is not). They dine and drink together, Lucette still imploring Van to visit her cabin. Trying to take the tension out of the situation, Van steers Lucette in to watch a pre-release film, Don Juan's Last Fling. Lucette brushes Van's "cheek with her lips in the dark, she took his hand, she kissed his knuckles, and he suddenly thought: after all, why not? Tonight? Tonight."

He enjoyed her impatience, the fool permitted himself to be stirred by it, the cretin whispered, prolonging the free, new, apricot fire of anticipation:

"If you're a good girl we'll have drinks in my sitting room at midnight." (488)

The film turns out to include Ada in her biggest role yet and Van sees all her moves as "a perfect compendium of her 1884 and 1888 and 1892 looks" (489), "a complete refutation of odious Kim's odious stills" (500). When three old ladies walk out of the movie in disgust, the Robinsons, "old bores of the family" (475), shuffle over from beyond the vacant seats and plump down

next to Lucette, who turned to them with her last, last, last free gift of staunch courtesy that was stronger than failure and death. They were craning already across her, with radiant wrinkles and twittery fingers toward Van when he pounced upon their intrusion to murmur a humorous bad-sailor excuse and leave the cinema hall to its dark lurching. (490)

Shocked out of his mood by Ada's appearing on screen, Van retires to his room, masturbating twice to get "rid of the prurient pressure" (490) the alluring and adoring Lucette has built up all day. When after the film Lucette phones Van's cabin, asking can she come over now, Van replies that he is not alone. Lucette accepts that he must be with "Miss Condor," the Titianesque Titaness, and takes an overdose of "Quietus" pills (seasickness tablets that double as sleeping pills) before jumping from the ship. Van's one attempt at sexual restraint has ended in disaster.

2. Lucette the Virgin and Martyr

If on a first reading we tend to regard little Lucette as a pest, we are appalled to reread the Ardis sections with her death already in mind. Now we can see very plainly Van and Ada's wretched indifference to Lucette, their utter lack of any sensitivity to her needs and her frailty, their deliberate playing upon her affections. (Though it is true Van never plays upon Lucette's devotion in a cynically calculated fashion, he certainly does consciously resort to this form of cruelty under the pressure of the moment.) We must recognize too the failure of our own moral sensitivity and imaginativeness, the terrible force of Van and Ada's--and our own--partiality of interest, the ease with which we were so caught up in eagerness to see Van and Ada together that we became impatient with Lucette and wanted only to see her out of their way. Whereas other readjustments to our moral evaluations necessary in the course of rereading--our response to Van's brutality, for instance,

or to his hypocrisy--may require a complex effort of synthesis before we recognize the original lack of clarity in our moral perception, the readjustment prompted by Lucette's tragic end is a simple one, and can be reached as early as a second reading.

If it is a shock to have to readjust our sense of Lucette, it is also grimly abashing yet deeply touching to see the exact anticipations of her death in the stratagems Van and Ada had used to curb their little sister during Ardis the First. It is some relief that if Van and Ada are guilty of gross inconsiderateness they at least appreciate now their dreadful mistakes. Here is their first ploy to keep Lucette out of the way:

Ada sat reading on a . . . bank, wistfully glancing from time to time at an inviting clump of evergreens (that had frequently sheltered our lovers) and at brown-torsoed, barefooted Van, in turned-up dungarees, who was searching for his wristwatch that he thought he had dropped among the forget-me-nots (but which Ada, he forgot, was wearing). Lucette had abandoned her skipping rope to squat on the brink of the brook and float a fetus-sized rubber doll. Every now and then she squeezed out of it a fascinating squirt of water through a little hole that Ada had had the bad taste to perforate for her in the slippery orange-red toy. With the sudden impatience of inanimate things, the doll managed to get swept away by the current. Van shed his pants under a willow and retrieved the fugitive. Ada, after considering the situation for a moment, shut her book and said to Lucette, whom usually it was not hard to enchant, that she, Ada, felt she was quickly turning into a dragon, that the scales had begun to turn green, that now she was a dragon and that Lucette must be tied to a tree with the skipping rope so that Van might save her just in time. For some reason, Lucette balked at the notion but physical strength prevailed. Van and Ada left the angry captive firmly attached to a willow trunk, and, "prancing" to feign swift escape and pursuit, disappeared for a few precious minutes in the dark grove of conifers. Writhing Lucette had somehow torn off one of the red knobbed grips of the rope and seemed to have almost disentangled herself when dragon and knight, prancing, returned. (142-43)

Ada's piercing the doll is indeed in bad taste, and the first of many

occasions when she disregards the dangerous consequences sex may have for the young and the frail. The doll itself, of course, is a ghoulish foreshadowing of Lucette's fate, while the whole scene is intimately connected with that fate even on the more ordinary level of simple causality. As Ada later finds out, Lucette had in fact untied herself and witnessed Van and Ada copulating before running back to tie herself up as best she could, so that she "seemed to have almost disentangled herself when dragon and knight, prancing, returned" (143). Van recalls this scene as he imagines her death: "She did not see her whole life flash before her as we all were afraid she might have done; the red rubber of a favorite doll remained safely decomposed among the myosotes of an unanalyzable brook . . ." (494). "Myosotes" are the "forget-me-nots" of the earlier brook: Van acknowledges here that he must never forget Lucette and how appallingly he and Ada have treated her. Van's deliberate evocation of the brookside scene at the moment of Lucette's death is one reason--we shall soon see others--why it is wrong for B. A. Mason to declare that Van tries "to rationalize away his guilt" (Mason 13).

The second of Ada and Van's stratagems is to keep Lucette soaking in the bath while they make love around the corner of the L-shaped bathroom:

The liquid prison was now ready and an alarm clock given a full quarter of an hour to live.

"I'm Van," said Lucette, standing in the tub with the mulberry soap between her legs and protruding her shiny tummy.

"And remember," said Ada, "don't you dare get out of this nice warm water until the bell rings or you'll die, because that's what Krolik said. I'll be back to lather you, but don't call me; we have to count the linen and sort out Van's hankies."

. . . barely had they finished their violent and uncomfortable exertions in that hidden nook, with an empty medicine bottle idiotically beating time on a shelf, when Lucette was already calling resonantly from the tub. . . . (144-45)

When Ada tells Van that she has made Lucette confess that she had untied and retied herself that day by the brook, Van exclaims: "Good Lord . . . that explains the angle of the soap!" (152). The humour one catches on a first reading is eclipsed on a rereading by the ghastly irony of the "liquid prison." That Van has chosen these words deliberately, out of remorse, is indicated by his recollecting the medicine bottle "idiotically beating time on a shelf" after he tries to analyze Lucette's state of mind in the chapter that culminates in her death: "He understood her condition or at least believed, in despair, that he had understood it, retrospectively, by the time no remedy except Dr. Henry's oil of Atlantic prose could be found in the medicine chest of the past with its banging door and toppling toothbrush" (485).

Van and Ada's stratagems for keeping Lucette out of the way come almost at the end of Ardis the First. Much earlier in this section two related clusters of literary allusions, one easy to spot, one rather more difficult, have already foreshadowed Lucette's death. In Pt.1 Ch.10's discussion on the translation of "marsh marigold," which we considered in Chapter 1 (see above, pp. 84-87), Marina, trying to swing the conversation back to the theatre, interjects: "when I was playing Ophelia, the fact that I had once collected flowers--" (63). The link between Lucette's drowning and Ophelia's fate is obvious, of course, but it will reappear in certain particularly telling ways. The other allusive thread is more difficult to make out. As the marsh marigold-

discussion continues, Ada mentions Fowlie's mistranslation of "souci d'eau" in Rimbaud's "Mémoire," and Van triumphantly quotes:

"... les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes . . ."
 "Egg-zactly" (mimicking Dan). "Well, Larivière allows me to read him only in the Feuilleton anthology, the same you have apparently, but I shall obtain his oeuvres complètes . . . sooner than anybody thinks. Incidentally, she will come down after tucking in Lucette, our darling copperhead who by now should be in her green nightgown--"

"Angel moy," pleaded Marina, "I'm sure Van cannot be interested in Lucette's nightdress!"

"--the nuance of willows, and counting the little sheep on her ciel de lit which Fowlie turns into 'the sky's bed' instead of 'bed ceiler.' But, to go back to our poor flower. . . . (64)

The "willows" here refer to Rimbaud's lines "Les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes / font les saules" and establish the connection between Rimbaud's poem and the willows from which Ophelia fell.¹

Throughout Ada various quiet recollections of "Mémoire" point towards a final and poignant evocation of Lucette's doom. As we have already shown, Ada's fulminations against Fowlie's translation involve a play on the notion of "deflowering," and it is part of Lucette's tragedy that she dies a virgin: though she has let both men and women touch her to assuage the desires so harshly aroused in her by Ada, she will not yield herself fully to anyone but Van, who refuses to have her.

¹ Lucette, who almost always wears green, will twice more be seen in willow-green clothes (198, 417). Her wearing green is not a "symbol" of her "naturalness," as Mason claims (see especially Mason 120), but an observation on Nabokov's part. Cf. Lolita 192: "Her glossy copper hair had Lolita's silkiness, and the features of her delicate milky-white face with pink lips and silverfish eyelashes were less foxy than those of her likes--the great clan of inter-racial red-heads; nor did she sport their green uniform but wore, as I remember her, a lot of black or cherry dark." When Lucette is not wearing green she, like Eva Rosen here, wears black.

When Lucette is entangled in the débauche à trois, she lies back "on the outer half of Ada's pillow in a martyr's pudibund swoon" (418).

When she meets Van in Paris, she invites him back to her room:

"I'll stretch out upon the divan like a martyr, remember?"

"Are you still half-a-martyr--I mean half-a-virgin?" inquired Van.

"A quarter," answered Lucette. "Oh, try me, Van!" (464)

Considerably later in Ardis the First than the "souci d'eau" passage "guileless Lucette" trots into the room "with a child's pink, stiff-bagged butterfly net in her little fist, like an oriflamme" (127). The "oriflamme" links Lucette again to Rimbaud's poem and to Joan of Arc, virgin (La Pucelle) and martyr: "des oriflammes / sous les murs dont quelque pucelle eut la défense" ("Mémoire," ll. 3-4). Lucette is indeed a martyr to Van and Ada's lack of sexual restraint and the force of their passion: she is initiated into sex too early (when she sees Van and Ada at their lovemaking, when Ada leads her into tactile temptations) but remains a virgin and cannot get Van to take the virginity she so desperately offers.

In Ardis the Second the dangerous inconsiderateness of Van and Ada becomes even more apparent than it had been in Ardis the First. Van views his lovemaking with Ada as something exalted, but he also sees the potential dangers of sex. Hence he is not guilty as Ada is of arousing sexual excitement in Lucette before she is ready to handle it, but he does abuse his little sister by taking advantage of her doting on him, and knows the power of the tiniest gesture of affection, the slightest caress. On one occasion Lucette proves even more recalcitrant than usual:

"The simplest answer," said Lucette, "is that you two can't tell me why exactly you want to get rid of me."

"Perhaps the simplest answer," continued Ada, "is for you, Van, to give her a vigorous, resounding spanking."

"I dare you!" cried Lucette, and veered invitingly.

Very gently Van stroked the silky top of her head and kissed her behind the ear; and, bursting into a hideous storm of sobs, Lucette rushed out of the room. Ada locked the door after her. (229)

Unlike Van, Ada always tends to view sex as intense but harmless physical pleasure and eagerly initiates Lucette into muddled intimacies for which the child is not ready. When in Pt.1 Ch.32 Lucette follows Ada who is in turn following Van away from the pool, the three youngsters stop underneath a sealyham cedar. Lucette asks Van why he is cross:

"I'm not cross with you," replied Van at last.

Lucette kissed his hand, then attacked him.

"Cut it out!" he said, as she wriggled against his bare thorax.

"You're unpleasantly cold, child."

"If's not true, I'm hot," she retorted.

"Cold as two halves of a canned peach. Now, roll off, please."

"Why two? Why?"

"Yes, why," growled Ada with a shiver of pleasure, and, leaning over, kissed him on the mouth. He struggled to rise. The two girls were now kissing him alternatively, then kissing each other, then getting busy upon him again--Ada in perilous silence, Lucette with soft squeals of delight. . . . Ada, her silky mane sweeping over his nipples and navel, seemed to enjoy doing everything to jolt my present pencil and make, in that ridiculously remote past, her innocent little sister notice and register what Van could not control. The crushed flower [a helleborine Ada has picked; Van is wearing only swim trunks] was now being merrily crammed under the rubber belt of his black trunks by twenty tickly fingers. (205)

It is in much the same spirit as that which prompts Ada to make "her innocent little sister notice and register what Van could not control" that Ada brings forth a much more dangerous stratagem than any devised four years earlier:

Ada thought up a plan that was not simple, was not clever, and moreover worked the wrong way. Perhaps she did it on purpose.

(Strike out, strike out, please, Van.) The idea was to have Van fool Lucette by petting her in Ada's presence, while kissing Ada at the same time, and by caressing and kissing Lucette when Ada was away in the woods ("in the woods," "botanizing"). This, Ada affirmed, would achieve two ends--assuage the pubescent child's jealousy and act as an alibi in case she caught them in the middle of a more ambiguous romp. (213)

The quotation marks around "in the woods" and "botanizing" indicate to the rereader, of course, that Ada has devised this strategy at least partly to keep Van busy while she is away meeting Percy de Prey.

If the Lucette theme ripples throughout Ardis the Second along the margins of the Ladore, it becomes the equal of Van and Ada's ardent torrent in Pt.2 Ch.5. In 1892 Lucette comes to Kingston University with that letter from Ada to Van warning that she will marry should Van decline to take her back. Lucette, who in 1891 had written Van her "savage" declaration of love" (366), now tells him of her sexual initiation at Ada's hands: "'She taught me practices I had never imagined,' confessed Lucette in rerun wonder. 'We interweaved like serpents and sobbed like pumas. We were Mongolian tumblers, monograms, anagrams, adalucindas.'" (375) Her plan is to make Van appalled at Ada so that in reaction, even if only out of spite, he might take to her, poor Lucette. At the same time she imitates Ada's tricks in the hope that this too might beguile Van into giving her some return for her helpless desire, for that abject determination which has been agitated by her recent sexual initiation at Ada's hands to the point where it has become all-consuming.

Van incorporates Lucette's passionate letter into the dialogue at Kingston:

"Van, it will make you smile" [thus in the MS. Ed.]

"Van," said Lucette, "it will make you smile" (it did not: that prediction is seldom fulfilled), "but if you posed the famous Van Question, I would answer in the affirmative."

What he had asked little Cordula. ["Are you a virgin?" (p. 165)--B.B.] . . .

"Oh, to be sure, it was not easy! In parked automobiles and at rowdy parties, thrusts had to be parried, advances fought off! And only last winter . . . there was a youngster of fourteen . . . an awfully precocious but terribly shy and neurotic young violinist . . . Well, for almost three months, every blessed afternoon, I had him touch me, and I reciprocated, and after that I could sleep at last without pills, but otherwise I haven't once kissed male epithelia in all my . . . life. Look, I can swear I never have, by--by William Shakespeare" (extending dramatically one hand toward a shelf with a set of thick red books). (371)

Lucette has nothing in her life but her desperate love and her need to be loved by Van. Van, on the other hand, does have an alternative to his love for Ada, something at least to keep him alive. During the Kingston scene Van seems to evoke Hamlet the suicidal. He quotes to Lucette at one point "Whilst the machine is to him" (379), and before her arrival he has brooded on Ardis:

he kept fighting Ardis and its orchards and orchids. . . . in the middle of his twentieth trudge "back to the ardors and arbors! Eros qui prend son essor! Arts that our marblery harbors: Eros, the rose and the sore." I am ill at these numbers, but e'en rhymery is easier "than confuting the past in mute prose." Who wrote that? Voltimand or Voltemand? (366-67)

But Van does have a career to keep him from ending his life. As Lucette is leaving Van's rooms at Kingston, she remarks, "as if continuing their recent exchange":

"I also know . . . who he is."

She pointed to the inscription "Voltemand Hall" on the brow of the building from which they now emerged.

Van gave her a quick glance--but she simply meant the courtier in Hamlet. (386)

Van's "quick glance" is elicited by a suspicion that Lucette may know that it is he who wrote Letters from Terra under the pseudonym of "Voltemand". She does not know this, as it turns out, but her remark emphasizes that Van has a double career, as "Voltemand" the writer and as the academic psychologist and philosopher at Voltemand Hall, Kingston University. Van is not the suicidal Hamlet but Voltemand, a man with a fixed career; he has a course in life that can be a viable, if incomplete, alternative to his love for Ada. Lucette too is a Voltemand, bringing the letter from Ada (as Shakespeare's Voltemand bears letters between Claudius and the Norwegian king), but for her it is a tragic role, for she will be the means to Van and Ada's reconciliation and the confirmation of her own doom.

The letter Lucette brings from Ada is--appropriately for a girl trying to pursue an acting career--self-consciously dramatic. Ada sees herself as an Ophelia, and implies her situation is driving her to madness:

O dear Van, this is the last attempt I am making. You may call it a document in madness or the herb of repentance, but I wish to come and live with you, wherever you are, for ever and ever. If you scorn the maid at your window I will aerogram my immediate acceptance of a proposal of marriage that has been made to your poor Ada a month ago in Valentine State.² (384-85)

In fact, the sad irony is that Ada has long been Van's lover and will be again, while Ophelia is obsessed with the virginity she preserves:

² "Valentine State" is the official nickname for Arizona.

To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,
 All in the morning betime,
 And I a maid' at your window,
 To be your Valentine:
 Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,
 And dupp'd the chamber door;
 Let in the maid, that out a maid
 Never departed more. (IV.v.49-56)

Lucette, on the other hand, who does depart from Van still a maid, will fill Ophelia's part all too well. The confusion of Ada and Lucette in the same role is, as we shall see shortly, an ominous condition; here, exceptionally, it is Ada who is taking over the role that is naturally Lucette's.

Or so it seems. Van's Hamlet musings throughout Pt.2 Ch.5, before he reads Ada's Ophelia letter, appear to be from Hamlet the suicidal. "I have not art to reckon my groans" (378), he thinks to himself at one point; at another, in one of Nabokov's strange dislocations of logic, comes a further passage from Lucette's letter that has been worked into the conversation and generates an exchange that one knows must be Van's narrative fabrication but that one cannot consider not a genuine part of the conversation:

"I hope I've thoroughly got you mixed up, Van, because la plus laide fille au monde peut donner beaucoup plus qu'elle n'a, and now let us say adieu, yours ever."

"Whilst the machine is to him," murmured Van.

"Hamlet," said the assistant lecturer's brightest student. (379)

Both of these Hamlet quotations and Van's previous "I am ill at these numbers" come, in fact, from the end of Hamlet's letter to Ophelia:

But never doubt I love.
 O dear Ophelia! I am ill at these numbers: I have not art

to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O most best!
believe it. Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst
this machine is to him,

HAMLET. (II.ii.118-24)

Van's and Ada's minds seem naturally--or preternaturally--attuned; Ada is the Ophelia, the lover, to this Hamlet, and Lucette is once again excluded.

The morning following the day Lucette brings Ada's letter to Kingston, Van has already driven from Kingston to Manhattan and Ada has flown from Ardis to join him there--where Lucette, arriving with the luggage, comes upon Van and Ada from behind as they are conjoined over the bathtub. Later that day, in Pt.2 Ch.7, Van and Ada look through Kim's album, a parody of Ardis the First, and Ada tells Van, as if to redeem the album, about the myths that grew around Ardis the First, myths that form a superb parody of romance. The next chapter subtly reverses this, beginning with a different kind of parody of romance and then gliding into a parody of Ardis the Second, of the worst and most dangerous part of Van's second spell at Ardis. The first part of this chapter depicts Van, Ada and Lucette out at the Ursus restaurant (named in honour of Petersburg's Medved' [The Bear]),³ where the three Veens are treated to the "romances" (pseudo-gipsy ballads) long popular in Russia. The thoughtlessness Van shows toward Lucette in Ardis and his habit of exploiting Lucette's devotion manifest themselves again with

³ Cf. SO 291: "that dinner at L'Ours (with which, incidentally, the "Ursus" of Ada and the Medved' of St. Petersburg have nothing to do)."

particular acuteness. While Ada is briefly absent from the restaurant table, Van unthinkingly pets poor Lucette: "He went back to whatever he was eating, and cruelly stroked Lucette's apricot-bloomed forearm" (411). Later that night, when the three have returned to Van's apartment, Van decides "to kill two finches with one fircone" (414), to gratify Lucette while he obtains from her the name of the man who had almost become Ada's fiancé. Van is of course preparing for the duel that Demon's edict will make impossible and that will find its cruel substitute in the blinding of Kim Beauharnais. Lucette suspects Van's designs and will not tell him the name, but Van offers a bribe he knows she will be unable to resist:

"Please, little vixen! I'll reward you with a very special kiss."

"Oh, Van," she said over a deep sigh. "You promise you won't tell her I told you?"

". . . Nikak-s net: no lips, no philtrum, no nosetip, no swimming eye. Little vixen's axilla, just that-- . . ."

"Arm up! Point at Paradise! Terra! Venus!" commanded Van, and for a few synchronized heartbeats, fitted his working mouth to the hot, humid, perilous hollow.

She sat down with a bump on a chair, pressing one hand to her brow.

"Turn off the footlights," said Van. "I want the name of that fellow."

"Vineland,," she answered. (415)

Ada's sexual energy and excitement and her conviction that sex can only be harmless and pleasurable also reappear in particularly sinister fashion. After Van returns from Lucette he finds himself making love to Ada in a drunken stupor. Her sexual appetite not yet satisfied, Ada takes the photograph album into the room Lucette occupies for the night, in anticipation of more erotic tidbits. The next morning Van wakes, as

usual, before Ada. He takes a shower and returns to the bedroom naked and "in full pride, only to find a tousled and sulky Lucette, still in her willow green nightie" (417), sitting on the bed. As Lucette tries to leave, Ada holds her back, plucks off her nightie, and proceeds to orchestrate the debauch, leading Van's hand over to stroke poor Lucette's "firebird" (418). The whole scene is depicted in an orgy of narrative style, as if it were a voluptuous Venetian canvas or the image "reflected in the ciel mirror that Eric had naively thought up in his Cyprian dreams" (418-19). The eye is led on a guided tour of the Forbidden Masterpiece that lasts until the dangerous climax:

the newly landed eye starts on its northern trip, up the younger Miss Veen's pried-open legs. A dewdrop on russet moss eventually finds a stylistic response in the aquamarine tear on her flaming cheekbone. . . . Ada's loose black hair accidentally tickles the local curio she holds^o in her left fist, magnanimously demonstrating her acquisition. Unsigned and unframed. (419-20)

When Van's orgasm releases the pressure on her, Lucette escapes: "That about summed it up (for the magical gewgaw liquefied all at once, and Lucette, snatching up her nightdress, escaped to her room)" (420). This will be the last time the three Veens will be together, for Lucette takes her bags and leaves a note: "Would go mad if remained one more night" (421). The entire scene is to have strange repercussions.

The whole of Pt.2 Ch.8 becomes the last and sombrest level of Van's last visit to or last dream of Villa Venus--which, though it is recorded before Lucette's death, occurs later ("nineteen-four or eight or even several years later" [358]) and all too understandably is haunted by that tragedy. In Van's dream there are two girls in the room

with him, the one on his couch being the "younger sister or cousin" of the girl on the nearby bed. The situation is Van's disturbed recollection of the two girls with him in the débauche à trois. As we have just seen, the debauch is viewed "from above, as if reflected in the ciel mirror that Eric had naively thought up in his Cyprian dreams (actually all is shadow up there . . .)" (418-19), and this, blended with the fact that just before the debauch begins Ada is lying on the bed "inhaling her first smoke of the day" (417) is recast as: "On a bed, some way off, lay a pregnant woman, smoking, looking up at the smoke mingling its volutes with the shadows on the ceiling" (356-57). Over the oneiric recollection of the debauch is spread the romantic sweetness at the beginning of Pt.2 Ch.8, transformed into the acrid romantic decadence of the dream. The champagne and the guitars of the restaurant and the moonlight of its songs reappear in "the guitar-shaped paper-wrapped bunch of long roses" (356), in "the champagne he had brought" (357), in the "moonlit gallery" (357) of the dream. The strangest and closest link is between these lines--

the opening bars of a romance . . . started to run over the keys . . .

A radiant night, a moon-filled garden. Beams
Lay at our feet. The drawing room, unlit;
Wide open, the grand piano; and our hearts
Throbbled to your song . . . (411-12)

--and the "gaping grand piano" (357) of the dream. The dream evokes the song's dark room and moonlight--"In the grease-reeking darkness a faint pattern of moonlight established itself" (358)--and changes the innocent "run over the keys" into an element of that dreadful sentence depicting

those rats literally running over the keys.

There are three girls altogether in Van's dream: the young Adora; her sister or cousin, "the wretched florinda on the tumbled bed" (357); and the maidservant. On one level, these are oneiric representatives of the girls of Ardis, Ada, Lucette, and the romantic maidservant Blanche. On another level, the dream-women are transformations of the girls in Pt.2 Ch.8's parody of Ardis's romance: Ada, Lucette and Flora, a "half-naked music-hall dancer" (410) in the Ursus restaurant. Just as Blanche is associated both with Ada--"another girl (Blanche!) stooping and squatting exactly like Ada (and indeed not unlike her in features)" (398)--and with Lucette (they are both Cinderellas), so Flora is not only the third girl, the maidservant, in the dream floramor, but also both the second ("florinda" is a Spanish proper name, diminutive of "Flora") and the first, Adora. Van is not sure, within the dream, who Adora is: "And if the child really was called Adora, then what was she? --not Rumanian, not Dalmatian, not Sicilian, not Irish" (357). He echoes these words unmistakably when he describes Flora as a "music-hall dancer of uncertain origin (Rumanian? Romany? Ramseyan?) whose ravishing services Van had availed himself of several times in the fall of that year" (410).

But Adora in turn seems to split up into both Ada and Lucette. By name, by her black hair, by the fact that at the end of the dream "the soft little creature in Van's desperate grasp was Ada," she is clearly Ada herself. But not only is she, like Lucette, the "younger sister," her name also recalls Lucette at the restaurant. When Ada goes to "powder her nose" and Van strokes Lucette's arm, Lucette turns to him

and says:

"I'm drunk, and all that, but I adore (obozhayu), I adore, I adore, I adore more than life you, you (tebya, tebya), I ache for you unbearably . . . and, please, don't let me swill . . . champagne any more . . . because I will jump into Goodson River if I can't hope to have you. . . ." (411)

But Van, "whose hearing the music impaired," does not catch all Lucette says. What Lucette cannot know is that the reason Van is distracted by the music, the reason "tearful Ada" has left ~~the~~ table, is that the song being sung at this moment confirms her exclusion, for it reminds Van and Ada of a moment of exceptional tenderness at Ardis, when, after a special dinner, Van softly recites the words of this song to Ada. If Lucette is confused with Ada in Adora, then, the confusion only confirms that she is excluded from Ada's happiness.

By transforming the restaurant's romances and the morning of the debauch, themselves parodies of Ardis, this final level of Van's dream of his last visit to a last Villa Venus expresses his regrets for all the damage and evil of Ardis, for what cannot be redeemed, as well as his longing for the charms of a past that have gone and cannot be retrieved.

3. Lucette or Lucile

At many strategic points within Ada, even within some scenes early in Ardis the First, we can acquire as we reread the novel a very rich sense of Lucette's plight, of the inconsiderateness, manipulativeness and insensitivity of Van and Ada. Though the appreciation of the

Hamlet allusions in Pt.2 Ch.5 and the relation of Pt.2 Ch.8 to Van's dream are complicated in the extreme, the antithetic reading opens up a long and touching series of prophetic ironies that in most cases become obvious once we know Lucette's fate. Yet although the antithetic stage of response to Ada is a rebuke for our own inconsiderateness towards Lucette on a first reading, and though it involves shifting much more of the weight of the novel onto Lucette, the synthetic stage of response makes Lucette much more important still, makes her presence ripple through every part of the book—as we shall see not only in this chapter but in everything that remains.

Lucette, for instance, is the real reason for the prominence given to incest in the book. Incest is in Ada not as it has generally been conceived, as an emblem of solipsism or self-love⁴--Nabokov detests such symbols--but rather to stress the intimate interconnections between human lives, interconnections which impose on human life requirements of morality and responsibility.

When Van uses the phrase "real, or at least responsible, life" (97) he expresses Nabokov's position exactly: uncertainty about the "reality" of human life, certainty about the demands of responsibility within the human. We do not know whether life as seen through human consciousness is a very big part of the possibilities of existence, but

⁴ The "solipsism" interpretation is stated most concisely and emphatically by Mason: "Ada is about incest, and, as incest is treated in the book, it is virtually synonymous with solipsism" (Mason 13). The "self-love" argument is championed by Matthew Hodgart: "But the incest theme has another and deeper meaning. In the last analysis self-love is all." ("Happy Families," New York Review of Books, May 22, 1969, p. 3.)

we do know that within the limits of our existence, each of our lives is intimately and complexly connected with other lives for which we are responsible in proportion to the intimacy of our contact with them.

Van and Ada see their incest as a more or less amusing confirmation of their remarkable similarity, and of the degree to which they are each a sufficient world unto the other. But because their love takes place within a family, because there is a little girl around who sees what an eight-year-old is not ready to see, because their connections with Lucette are so intimate and intricate, their passion cannot be seen as a thing apart, as something which can shut out relations with the surrounding world. It is this, of course, that does make incest such a dangerous and damaging act: not that there is something inherently sacred about the relationship of brother and sister, father and daughter, mother and son, but that incest takes place within a network of already intimate relations and responsibilities that it can only cruelly disrupt. Incest in Ada, as we shall see more clearly soon, is a specific instance of the tax of responsibility, a tax exacted on human life by consciousness in return for the privileges and delights consciousness can derive from the intimate interconnections of life.⁵

Through such things as the playful and prominent Chateaubriand allusions and an apparent acceptance of the modern standard of sexual freedom without responsibility, Ada encourages a sophisticated, unserious approach to incest. But this is only another feint to make the reader

⁵ Cf. Lolita 285: "The moral sense in mortals is the duty / We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty."

first acquiesce in a dismissal of responsibility and then see how dreadfully wrong that acquiescence has been, how inevitably lives are interconnected and how inevitably this must call for responsibility and consideration.

That this is the real role of the incest in Ada is confirmed by the fact that Chateaubriand is present not, as all the reviewers and critics have assumed, to mark the relationship between Van and Ada but to mark the presence and entanglement of Lucette in that relationship. The first Chateaubriand allusion in Ada occurs--very significantly, as we shall soon realize--at the first (1884) picnic: "Lucette, one fist on her hip, sang a St. Malô fisher-song" (81). Chateaubriand was born in St. Malô and associated himself fiercely with the sea; Lucette is also called Lucile, after Chateaubriand's dearest sister, the basis for the Amélie of René; this Lucile is believed to have committed suicide.⁶ A few minutes afterward at the picnic,

Ada asked her governess for pencils and paper. Lying on his stomach, leaning his cheek on his hand, Van looked at his love's inclined neck as she played anagrams with Grace, who had innocently suggested "insect."

"Scient," said Ada, writing it down.

"Oh no!" objected Grace.

⁶ "'A terrifying thought had struck me,' said Chênédollé when he heard the news [of the death, on November 10, 1804, of Lucile Caud], 'I fear that she may have attempted her own life. Great God! Grant that it may not be so!' It seems likely, on the contrary, that it was so, for not a single church in Paris has any record of a religious funeral and only suicide can explain why Chateaubriand did not even return from Ville-neuve, why Lucile left the Augustinian convent on the eve of her death, why she was buried in the common grave and why Mme. de Marigny, who had 'paid the last tributes of respect' to her younger sister, did not follow the bier." (André Maurois, Chateaubriand: Poet, Statesman, Lover, trans. Vera Fraser [New York: Harper, 1938], p. 137.)

"Oh yes! I'm sure it exists. He is a great scient. Dr. Entsic was scient in insects."

Grace meditated, tapping her puckered brow with the eraser end of the pencil, and came up with:

"Nicest!"

"Incest," said Ada instantly.

"I give up," said Grace. "We need a dictionary to check your little inventions."

But the glow of the afternoon had entered its most oppressive phase, and the first bad mosquito of the season was resonantly slain on Ada's shin by alert Lucette. (85)

The connection between insects and incest is very firmly established; and that mosquito is identified later as Culex chateaubriandi Brown (105), Chateaubriand's mosquito:

During the last week of July, there emerged, with diabolical regularity, the female of Chateaubriand's mosquito. Chateaubriand (Charles), who had not been the first to be bitten by it . . . but the first to bottle the offender, and with cries of vindictive exultation to carry it to Professor Brown who wrote the rather slap-bang Original Description ("small black palpi . . . hyaline wings . . . yellowy in certain lights . . . which should be extinguished if one keeps open the kasements [German printer!] . . .") The Boston Entomologist for August, quick work, 1840) was not related to the great poet and memoirist born between Paris and Tagne (as he'd better, said Ada, who like crossing orchids).

Mon enfant, ma'soeur,
Songe à l'épaisseur
Du grand chêne à Tagne;
Songe à la montagne,
Songe à la douceur--

--of scraping with one's claws or nails the spots visited by that fluffy-footed insect characterized by an insatiable and reckless appetite for Ada's and Ardelia's, Lucette's and Lucile's (multiplied by the itch) blood. (106)

Note not only Lucette's appearing as Lucile, and the suggestion of the confusion of Ada's and Lucette's blood (in the spirit of Donne's "The Flea": "And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be"), but also the particularly precise confusion in "Ardelia." The name plays upon Ada's

full name, Adelaida, but recalls too Van's first arrival at Ardis, when he sees Lucette and decides "she must be 'Ardelia,' the eldest of the two little cousins he was supposed to get acquainted with" (36).

"Ardelia" comes from "ardelio," busybody (W2 lists the former as "Fem. proper name" and the latter in its small print at the foot of the page)⁷ --which at first is all we think Lucette to be. Note too that the poem is supposed to be by the unrelated namesake of "Charles" Chateaubriand, though it is chiefly an adaptation of Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage." In Pt.3 Ch.3, where Van tells Lucette he is sailing across the Atlantic and where Lucette manages to get herself on the same boat in the hope that she might be able to entice Van to her cabin, Van notes, among other paperbacks on a revolving stand, the multiply ironic Invitation to a Climax (459).

The purest of the Chateaubriand allusions is from the romance in Les Aventures du Dernier Abencérage, which has nothing to do with incest but as we shall see in Chapter 8 is fatally associated with the night of Lucette's death. Much earlier, though, Van plays some exquisitely fine variations on Chateaubriand's lines:

Oh! qui me rendra mon Aline
Et le grand chêne et ma colline?

.....

Oh! qui me rendra, mon Adèle,
Et ma montagne et l'hirondelle?

Oh! qui me rendra ma Lucile,
La Dore et l'hirondelle agile? (138-39)

⁷ Mason, p. 94, also points out the "busybody" in "Ardelia."

Note the punctuation here: only before the name obviously formed from Ada's, Adèle, is there a comma: only in this case is the girl apostrophized. In the other two cases "mon Aline" and "ma Lucile" are included in the things the speaker wants to be given back. If "Aline" is a play on Chateaubriand's "Hélène," it is also the name of his sister-in-law, who like Lucette came to a tragic end (she was guillotined in 1794); Lucette is explicitly related to Aline in this remark: "She was, cette Lucette, like the girl in Ah, cette Line" (152). Moreover, Nabokov takes the trouble in his Darkbloom notes to point out that Lucile in Van's poem is "the name of Chateaubriand's actual sister" (Darkbloom 467), the suicide.

Chateaubriand appears also as the implicit "source" of Mlle Larivière's Les Enfants Maudits,⁸ the name René having been borrowed from René, Hélène from the romance in Les Aventures du Dernier Abencérage. But Les Enfants Maudits has no intrinsic content, only a plot composed of a ludicrous ad hoc relation to the events of the surrounding narrative. The only "accursed" one among the three Veen children is Lucette; and the only time Chateaubriand's name (disguised) is associated with Les Enfants Maudits is that dangerous moment when Ada and little Lucette are both tumbling over Van:

The two girls were now kissing him alternatively, then kissing each other, then getting busy upon him again--Ada in perilous silence, Lucette with soft squeals of delight. I do not remember what Les Enfants Maudits did or said in Monparnasse's novelette--they lived in Bryant's château, I think, and it began with bats

⁸ The title also borrows from Jean Cocteau's Les Enfants Terribles (1929).

flying one by one out of a turret's oeil-de-boeuf into the sunset, but these children (whom the novelettist did not really know--a delicious point) might also have been filmed rather entertainingly had snoopy Kim, the kitchen photo-fiend, possessed the necessary apparatus. (205)

On the return voyage from the second (1888) Ardis picnic, when Lucette is sitting on Van's knee and becoming blended in Van's mind with the Ada who sat on his knee on the voyage back from the 1884 picnic, the present Ada is reading "her vellum-bound little volume, Ombres et couleurs, an 1820 edition of Chateaubriand's short stories" (280).

The Chateaubriand allusions, then, are present where Lucette is also present, and especially where there is a confusion between Lucette and Ada, a confusion which reflects the entanglement of Lucette in Van and Ada's lives and points forward towards the night of her suicide and back towards long years of neglected responsibility.

4. Pictures

If we are to follow Lucette's fate and advance from the morning of the débauche à trois to her next meeting with Van, we must leap from 1893 to 1901. On May 31 of that year Van, in Paris, runs into Greg Erminin, who has just heard from Ivan Tobak that Lucette is in town. No sooner has Van parted from Greg than, "as happens so often in farces and foreign cities, Van ran into another friend" (456), Cordula de Prey-Tobak. Van pressures Cordula into helping him cuckold her husband. After their "brisk nub and its repetition" (457) in a drab hotel nearby, Cordula confirms that Lucette is staying at the Alphonse Four. Van does

not find Lucette at her hotel, and crosses the rue des Jeunes Martyres to Ovenman's tavern. As he heads for the bar, having surrendered his coat but "kept his black fedora and stick-slim umbrella as he had seen his father do in that sort of bawdy, albeit smart, place which decent women did not frequent" (460), Van notices Lucette sitting there alone. Before going up to her, he ogles her intently, and now, as narrator, describes her in extraordinary and lavish and tender detail. She is all in black, wearing a picture hat, drinking alone. Van's description is strangely insistent:

For a minute he stood behind her, sideways to remembrance and reader (as she, too, was in regard to us and the bar), the crook of his silk-swathed cane lifted in profile. . . . We know, we love that high cheekbone (with an atom of powder puff sticking to the hot pink skin), and the forward upsweep of black lashes and the painted feline eye--all this in profile, we softly repeat. (460)

He concludes the meticulous rhapsody thus:

Her Irish profile sweetened by a touch of Russian softness, which adds a look of mysterious expectancy and wistful surprise to her beauty, must be seen, I hope, by the friends and admirers of my memories, as a natural masterpiece incomparably finer and younger than the portrait of the similarly postured lousy jade with her Parisian gueule de guenon on the vile poster painted by that wreck of an artist for Ovenman. (460-61)

That "wreck of an artist" is Toulouse-Lautrec, and the "vile poster" is "Divan Japonais" (1892-1893), painted for Fournier (Ovenman), the proprietor of the cabaret Le Divan Japonais, 75, rue des Martyrs.⁹

⁹ Note that Nabokov has named his street (Jeunes Martyres) in honour of young martyresses.

(See Plate 3a, following p. 414.) Lucette's attire and posture--and Van's attire and posture too--are exactly homologous with the scene depicted in Toulouse-Lautrec's poster, though narrator Van's attention to the finest detail, the most delicate glints of light, is in marked contrast to Toulouse-Lautrec's bold but flat colouring, his vigorous but crude handling of line.

But there is a peculiar insistence in Van's description of Lucette at the bar that even the presence behind the scene of the Toulouse-Lautrec poster does not seem sufficient to account for. There is, too, a special engagement with the reader, a challenge to the reader to imagine the details correctly and with precision. One should note, particularly, that Van stands behind Lucette but sideways "to remembrance and reader": though Van sees Lucette from behind, his memory projects the recorded scene so that both figures appear in profile--as we, too, imagine them as we read.

Indeed, there is a good reason for Van's (and Nabokov's) exceptional insistence in this scene. For what the scene describes, in fact, is not the Toulouse-Lautrec poster, but an advertisement for Barton and Guestier wines that appeared in the New Yorker in the mid-1960's¹⁰ and

¹⁰ I would like to report that this was wholly my own discovery; in fact, Nabokov himself pointed it out: "Nabokov notes that the picture Van imagines is 'none other than a beautifully stylized and glorified version of the Toulouse crudity, namely a Barton and Guestier ('the finest wines of France') publicity photograph (which appeared frequently in the New Yorker in the late sixties). It is meticulously described by Van (460-1) and should be looked up by all admirers of Lucette'" (Mason 163). Neither Mason nor anyone else seems to have followed this delightful clue. Sample dates on which the advertisement appeared in the New Yorker: Nov. 20, 1965 (p. 148), Dec. 4, 1965 (p. 77).

PLATE 3

- a) Toulouse-Lautrec, Le Divan Japonais, 1892-1893
- b) Vrubel', Golova Demona (Head of Demon), 1890-1891



that places two models in the position of Toulouse-Lautrec's models (Jane Avril and Edouard Dujardin),¹¹ with the original poster on the wall behind them. (See Plate 4, following p. 415.) Lucette gets served by bartender Ed Barton, whose name nicely conflates Toulouse-Lautrec's lettering ("Ed Fournier directeur") and the "Barton & Guestier" of the advertisement.

Nabokov marvelously confuses the boundaries between life and art with this advertisement that is at once an objet both trouvé and already very much composé before he makes it more elaborate still. The advertisement which Nabokov has appropriated shows the difference between the subtlety and variety of light and line in life and the much less interesting reductionism of Toulouse-Lautrec's kind of art: it shows the artistry, the subtlety of detail, in life. By being so much less spontaneous, so much more contrived than Toulouse-Lautrec, too, Nabokov is both closer to lifelikeness as he describes Lucette (even as he is imitating an advertisement) and closer to understanding the deceptions of the real, that the real "deceives" us not by being less but by being more real, more detailed, than we are prepared to notice. Van and Lucette's scene is, within the world of the book, "real" life imitating art (or life imitating life--what is realer, more part of the furniture of the everyday, than an advertisement?--imitating art), though of course we know it is Nabokov's art imitating life imitating either life or art. But this comic relationship between life and picture will

¹¹ See G. M. Sugana, ed., The Complete Paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 121.

PLATE 4

Advertisement for Barton & Guestier wines, New Yorker, 1965

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shortly be played in another key.

Let us move on now to the climax of Lucette's drama, four days after she has met Van at Ovenman's bar. Lucette sails on the Tobakoff with Van in the hope that she can make this a sort of honeymoon voyage. She has spent most of the day with Van, at lunch, by the pool, over dinner and champagne, and her looks, her love, her insistence are tempting Van more than he wants:

He cast around for a straw of Procrustean procrastination.

"Please," said Lucette. "I'm tired of walking around, I'm frail, I'm feverish, I hate storms, let's all go to bed!"

"Hey, look!" he cried, pointing to a poster. "They're showing something called Don Juan's Last Fling. It's prerelease and for adults only. Topical Tobakoff!" (487)

Within the cinema, however, Van's resistance is at last worn down as Lucette brushes his cheek with her lips, takes his hand, kisses his knuckles:

the fool permitted himself to be stirred by it, the cratin whispered, prolonging the free, new, apricot fire of anticipation.

"If you're a good girl we'll have drinks in my sitting room at midnight." (488)

At this point the main feature starts. The chief ingredient of Don Juan's Last Fling is the Don Juan legend, as told by Pushkin in his verse play, Kamenniy gost' (The Stone Guest, written 1826-1830, pub. 1839), and its main plot is the revenge of the "stone guest," Donna Anna's dead--and about to be "cuckolded"--husband. But in the film the "Stone Cuckold" (490), as Van calls him, does not return in person. His revenge is accomplished by unmaning Don Juan, which he does through the agency of "Dolores, a dancing girl (lifted from Osberg's novella, as was

to be proved in the ensuing lawsuit)" (488). But Dolores is none other than Lolita (given her full name, and in her Carmen role), and "Osberg" is the Borges to whom critics have often suggested Nabokov should be compared.¹² As if this disruption of literary history were not enough, "cadaverous Don Juan" is ridiculously blended with Don Quixote and "paunchy Leporello on his donkey" with Sancho Panza. But perhaps we had better see the film whole, at least as far as Van sees it:

On the way to the remote castle where the difficult lady, widowed by his sword, has finally promised him a long night of love in her chaste and chilly chamber, the aging libertine nurses his potency by spurning the advances of a succession of robust belles. A gitana predicts to the gloomy cavalier that before reaching the castle he will have succumbed to the wiles of her sister, Dolores, a dancing girl. . . . She also predicted something to Van, for even before Dolores came out of the circus tent to water Juan's horse, Van knew who she would be.

.....
Lucette recognized Ada three or four seconds later, but then clutched his wrist:

"Oh, how awful! It was bound to happen. That's she! Let's go, please, let's go. You must not see her debasing herself. She's terribly made up, every gesture is childish and wrong--"

"Just another minute," said Van.

Terrible? Wrong? She was absolutely perfect, and strange, and poignantly familiar. By some stroke of art, by some enchantment of chance, the few brief scenes she was given formed a perfect compendium of her 1884 and 1888 and 1892 looks.

The gitanilla bends her head over the live table of Leporello's servile back to trace on a scrap of parchment a rough map of the way to the castle. Her neck shows white through her long black

¹² Thus J. D. O'Hara in a mock-comic article, "Shadows of a Shadow," Texas Quarterly, 9:1 (Spring 1966), 18-21, tracks down the identity of Borges and Nabokov. In an interview with Nabokov conducted between Sept. 25 and 29, 1966, Alfred Appel, Jr., stresses similarities between the two writers ("An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 8:2 [Spring 1967], 142; rpt. in L. S. Dembo, ed., Nabokov: The Man and His Work [Madison, Wisc.: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1967], p. 34 and SO 80). Cf. also Patricia Merivale, "The Flaunting of Artifice in Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges," Wisconsin Studies, 8:2 (Spring 1967), 294-309; rpt. in Dembo, pp. 209-24.

hair separated by the motion of her shoulder. It is no longer another man's Dolores, but a little girl twisting an aquarelle brush in the paint of Van's blood, and Donna Anna's castle is now a bog flower.

The Don rides past three windmills, whirling black against an ominous sunset, and saves her from the miller who accuses her of stealing a fistful of flour and tears her thin dress. Wheezy but still game, Juan carries her across a brook (her bare toe acrobatically tickling his face) and sets her down, top up, on the turf of an olive grove. Now they stand facing each other. She fingers voluptuously the jeweled pommel of his sword, she rubs her firm girl belly against his embroidered tights, and all at once the grimace of a premature spasm writhes across the poor Don's expressive face. He angrily disentangles himself and staggers back to his steed. (488-89)

This "premature spasm" is in fact the Stone Cuckold's revenge, for it renders Don Juan impotent when he arrives at Donna Anna's castle. But Van does not appreciate this twist of the plot, because the sudden appearance of Ada on screen--wholly unexpected, of course, even though she has long been pursuing an acting career--has quite jolted Van out of the mood of anticipation Lucette had at last succeeded in creating, and at this point he rushes out of the cinema hall. In his bathroom he masturbates twice to make sure that Lucette's attractiveness and persistence will not tempt him again.

There is a surprising and absurd comic significance in the fact that Van rushes out at this moment and thus fails to realize "that what seemed an incidental embrace constituted the Stone Cuckold's revenge" (490). When in 1888 Van asks Ada when she first "guessed that her shy young 'cousin' . . . was physically excited in her presence" (110) she cannot recall, for in 1884 she had known little about "mammalian maleness" and "had still been rather hazy about the way human beings mated" (111). The closest she had come to "sexual contact" was with an elderly

gentleman, a distinguished painter, who "drew his diminutive nudes invariably from behind" (111) and indeed had a penchant for little girls' bottoms:

His method of contact . . . was to insist, with maniacal force, that he help her reach for something--anything, a little gift he had brought, bonbons, or simply some old toy that he'd picked up from the floor of the nursery and hung up high on the wall . . . and despite her gentle protests he would raise the child by her elbows, taking his time, pushing, granting, saying: ah, how heavy and pretty she was--this went on and on . . . and what a relief it was, for everybody concerned, when in the course of that fraudulent ascension her poor little bottom made it at last to the crackling snow of his shirtfront, and he dropped her, and buttoned his dinner jacket. (112)

Ada recalls that "Every time . . . Pig Pigment [her version of "Paul J. Gignent"'s name] came, she cowered when hearing him trudge and snort and pant upstairs, ever nearer like the Marmoreal Guest, that immemorial ghost, seeking her, crying for her in a thin, querulous voice not in keeping with marble" (111). The "Marmoreal Guest, that immemorial ghost" is a punning reference to Pushkin's The Stone Guest (cf. also Proffer 258): while "gost'" is the Russian for "guest," Pushkin's "Stone Guest" is the marble ghost who gains his revenge by coming as a guest to frighten Don Juan to death.

If "Pig Pigment" is the first male to come into some sort of "sexual contact" with Ada, Van is the second. Just as the old painter who draws his nudes "invariably from behind" enjoys girls' bottoms, so does Van find a special thrill in being behind Ada. When Van is perched behind Ada for their first slight touch, not many minutes after their first meeting at Ardis, the moment is at once associated with orgasmic release:

"You can catch a glint of it from here too," said Ada, turning her head and, pollice verso, introducing the view to Van who put his cup down, wiped his mouth with a tiny embroidered napkin, and stuffing it into his trouser pocket, went up to the dark-haired, pale-armed girl. As he bent toward her . . . she moved her head to make him move his to the required angle and her hair touched his neck. In his first dreams of her this re-enacted contact, so light, so brief, invariably proved to be beyond the dreamer's endurance and like a lifted sword signaled fire and violent release. (39)

The "children's first bodily contact" (86) occurs during the first picnic, when Ada's bottom settles down on Van's lap:

With his entire being, the boiling and brimming lad relished her weight, as he felt it responding to every bump of the road by softly parting in two and crushing beneath it the core of the longing which he knew he had to control lest a possible seep perplex her innocence. He would have yielded and melted in animal laxity had not the girl's governess saved the situation by addressing him. (87)

Their first full sexual experience occurs on the night of the Burning Barn, when Van, sitting with Ada in the "picture window" (116) of the library, begins by moulding Ada's buttocks:

He had started to stroke her, shivering, staring ahead, following with a blind man's hand the dip of her spine through the batiste.

. . . he continued to fondle the flow of her hair, and to massage and rumple her nightdress, not daring yet to go under and up, daring, however, to mold her nates until, with a little hiss, she sat down on his hand and her heels, as the burning castle of cards collapsed. She turned to him and the next moment he was kissing her bare shoulder, and pushing against her like that soldier behind in the queue.

First time I hear about him. I thought old Mr. Nymphobottomus had been my only predecessor. (117)

(Mr. Nymphobottomus is, of course, a nonce name for Gignent.) Not long after the Burning Barn, but when Van and Ada are already becoming expert

in the erotic arts, they decide to adopt a rear-entry approach for their lovemaking after Van reads an absurd report that suggests certain bizarre "contraceptive" advantages of such an amatory position. Delicate or not-so-delicate details tend to confirm that this position is regularly adopted. Early in *Ardis the Second* Van notes that all he "saw there of his new Ada were her ivory thighs and haunches" (212). Van records another scene later that summer: "As they crouched on the brink of one of the brook's crystal shelves . . . Van, at the last throb, saw the reflection of Ada's gaze in the water flash a warning" (267). Four years later, in Manhattan:

she strained across the low tub to turn on both taps, and then bent over to insert the bronze chained plug; it got sucked in by itself, however, while he steadied her lovely lyre and next moment was at the suede-soft root. . . . (392)

Since Van adopts "Pig Pigment"'s approach to Ada from behind, since he has her so often this way, it is comically apt that Gignent, Ada's first "sexual partner," should be described as the cuckolded Marmoreal Guest. In *Don Juan's Last Fling* we can see him as the Stone Cuckold to Ada's Donna Anna, and Van's Don Juan: just as the "premature spasm writhes across the poor Don's expressive face"--and this is "the Stone Cuckold's revenge"--Van gets up to leave, and thus is deprived of the end and promised climax of the film.

But of course Ada is most obviously the Dolores of the film, and to this Dolores, Lucette is Donna Anna, for it is she who is waiting for her Juan, looking forward to "a long night of love" (488). Lucette's hopes are spoiled by Ada's appearance in the role of Dolores:

By some stroke of art, by some enchantment of chance, the few brief scenes she was given formed a perfect compendium of her 1884 and 1888 and 1892 looks.

The gitanilla bends her head over the live table of Leporello's servile back to trace on a scrap of parchment a rough map of the way to the castle. Her neck shows white through her long black hair separated by the motion of her shoulder. It is no longer another man's Dolores, but a little girl twisting an aquarelle brush in the paint of Van's blood, and Donna Anna's castle is now a bog flower. (489)

It is this vision of Ada that is too much for Van, that forces him to leave the movie and get

rid of the prurient pressure as he had done the last time seventeen years ago. And how sad, how significant that the picture projected upon the screen of his paroxysm . . . was not the recent and pertinent image of Lucette, but the indelible vision of a bent bare neck and a divided flow of black hair and a purple-tipped paint brush. (490)

The Don's premature spasm in response to Dolores, unmanning him for Donna Anna, is an exact parallel to Van's own spasm in response to an image of Ada which will unman him for Lucette.

The scene in which Ada appears recalls for Van a picture of Ada in the past that he projects "upon the screen of his paroxysm." Let us look at this earlier picture, which forms another key link in the "behind" chain and which at the time, too, Van had carried off and masturbated over. In the hot afternoons of July 1884 Ada often sits in the music room copying flowers from a botanical atlas or painting new species and variants she subtly invents. Van repeatedly steals up behind her to peer "down her sleek enselluré as far as her coccyx and inhale the warmth of her entire body. His heart thumping, one miserable hand deep in his trouser pocket . . . he bent over her, as she bent over

her work." (99-100) When he can no longer bear the ecstasy he slinks away to his room to "grasp a towel, uncover himself, and call forth the image he had just left behind, an image still as safe and bright as a hand-cupped flame--carried into the dark, only to be got rid of there with savage zeal" (100). The vision of Ada painting on those bright afternoons is one that Van retains with special joy, one that four years later he would like Ada again to imitate: "One of these days . . . I will ask you for a repeat performance. You will sit as you did four years ago, at the same table, in the same light, drawing the same flower, and I shall go through the same scene with such joy, such pride, such-- I don't know--gratitude!" (264) The most detailed of these magical afternoons is the last:

One afternoon he came up behind her in the music room more noiselessly than ever before because he happened to be barefooted--and, turning her head, little Ada shut her eyes and pressed her lips to his in a fresh-rose kiss that entranced and baffled Van.

"Now run along," she said, "quick, quick, I'm busy," and as he lagged like an idiot, she anointed his flushed forehead with her paintbrush in the semblance of an ancient Estotian "sign of the cross." "I have to finish this," she added, pointing with her violet-purple-soaked thin brush at a blend of Ophrys scolopax and Ophrys veenae, "and in a minute we must dress up because Marina wants Kim to take our picture--holding hands and grinning" (grinning, and then turning back to her hideous flower). (101)

Ophrys orchids have flowers that resemble insects; male insects "attempt to copulate with the flowers, which resemble females of their own species. During this process, pollen sacs become attached to the insect's body and are transferred to the next flower visited."¹³ This process, known

¹³ "Ophrys," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974), VII, 550.

as pseudo-copulation, is a fascinating parallel to Van's own pseudo-copulation before his evoked images of Ada. Just as Van's later masturbation, on the night of Lucette's death, before a picture of Ada projected onto "the screen of his paroxysm" (a picture indeed of Ada painting on those afternoons in the music room) strangely mimics the paroxysm in Don Juan's Last Fling, so in these earlier scenes themselves Van's actions before his mental picture of Ada curiously mimic the literal picture Ada paints.

That first "fresh-rose kiss" from Ada at the end of the flower-painting scenes initiates the next stage of their love affair, their kissing phase. In recounting this phase Van eulogizes whatever of Ada he is allowed to kiss, her face and neck and hands. Note here the white neck showing through separations of black hair that Van will see again in Ada as Dolores:

He learned her face. Nose, cheek, chin--all possessed such a softness of outline . . . that a mawkish admirer might well have imagined the pale plume of a reed . . . shaping her profile, while a more childish and sensual digit would have liked, and did like, to palpate that nose, cheek, chin. Remembrance, like Rembrandt, is dark but festive. Remembered ones dress up for the occasion and sit still. Memory is a photo-studio de luxe on an infinite Fifth Avenue. The fillet of black velvet binding her hair that day (the day of the mental picture) brought out its sheen at the silk of the temple and along the chalk of the parting. It hung lank and long over the neck, its flow disjoined by the shoulder; so that the mat white of her neck through the black bronze stream showed in triangular elegance. (103-04)

We should note too the mingling of different kinds of "picture," the "mental picture" and Van's images of memory as a painter or a photo-studio de luxe. Indeed, though Van makes no indication of the fact--and though we do not find out until three hundred pages later--the

mental picture corresponds exactly to an actual photograph taken just after that fresh-rose kiss, just after the children had gone to change for their formal photographs. Because their poses in this photograph correspond exactly to their repeated respective poses on the previous afternoons, Van and Ada know even as it is taken that the photograph will have a special, secret significance for them:

Another photograph was taken in the same circumstances but for some reason had been rejected by capricious Marina: at a tripod table, Ada sat reading, her half-clenched hand covering the lower part of the page. A very rare, radiant, seemingly uncalled-for smile shone on her practically Moorish lips. Her hair flowed partly across her collarbone and partly down her back. Van stood inclining his head above her and looked, unseeing, at the opened book. In full, deliberate consciousness, at the moment of the hooded click, he bunched the recent past with the imminent future and thought to himself that this would remain an objective perception of the real present and that he must remember the flavor, the flash, the flesh of the present (as he, indeed, remembered it half a dozen years later--and now, in the second half of the next century). (402)

Van's glimpse of a future recollection--a future recollection is always a rare and magic moment for Nabokov, a special escape from the order of time¹⁴--is a shock to Van's memory, to the ordinary process of its casual accumulation; just as it shocks the reader's memory to discover that what had earlier been only a mental picture in fact corresponds to an actual photograph.

Ada writes that: "No point would there be, if we left out, for example, the little matter of prodigious individual awareness and young

¹⁴ See the following examples: "A Guide to Berlin," DS 98; KQK 161; Gift 354; "Pouchkine, ou le vrai et le vraisemblable," p. 378; SO 14.

genius, which makes, in some cases, of this or that particular gasp an unprecedented and unrepeatable event in the continuum of life or at least a thematic anathema of such events in a work of art" (70-71). The whole complex of images of Ada bending over her table and Van bending over her provide both a particular gasp, an "unprecedented and unrepeatable" incident, and a thematic anathema. When all this accumulation of exceptionally vivid memories (each part of the whole "behind" motif) reappears in Ada's Dolores role, it is no wonder that the past should break on and overwhelm the sexual tension Lucette has managed to build up in the present, no wonder that Ada as Dolores should so thoroughly unman Van, Don Juan to poor Lucette's desperate Donna Anna.

But the plot of the movie thickens even more. In a new sense, Lucette is Dolores to her own Donna Anna, while Ada becomes the gitana, Dolores's sister: "A gitana predicts to the gloomy cavalier that before reaching the castle he will have succumbed to the wiles of her sister, Dolores" (488). After Lucette flies from the débauche à trois, Van pens a note apologizing to her. On scanning the letter, Ada complains to Van:

"I call this pompous, puritanical rot. . . . Why should we apollo for her having experienced a delicious spazmochka? I love her and would never allow you to harm her. It's curious--you know, something in the tone of your note makes me really jealous for the first time in my . . . life. . . . Van, Van, somewhere, some day, after a sunbath or dance, you will sleep with her, Van!" (421)

In the letter itself, Van had written: "We are even sorrier to have inveigled our Esmeralda and mermaid in a naughty prank" (421). Van calls her "Esmeralda" because the name of Esmeralda, the gipsy dancing

girl in Victor Hugo's Notre-Dame de Paris (1831), comes from the Spanish for "emerald," Lucette's colour; but unwittingly Van's letter and Ada's prophesy establish that Lucette, like Ada herself, is Dolores, the gipsy dancing girl of Don Juan's Last Fling. The identification is twice confirmed. When Lucette meets Van at Ovenman's four days before they see Don Juan's Last Fling, she says to him (referring to "Osberg"'s novel): "I'm like Dolores--when she says she's 'only a picture painted on air'" (464). Lucette, who wears a "short evening frock" (484) on her fateful last night with Van, is also specifically linked with a dancing girl, "a Crimean cabaret dancer in a very short scintillating frock" (185), who had been Van's partner years earlier when he played Masco-dagama: "Fragile, red-haired 'Rita' . . . bore an odd resemblance to Lucette as she was to look ten years later" (185).

Lucette is Dolores to her own Donna Anna: she is present in Don Juan's Last Fling in Ada's evocation of Ada's own past, because her own past is so inextricable from her sister's. If Ada as Dolores evokes herself painting orchids and that acute memory of the mental picture that becomes also a photograph, she also evokes Lucette. Let us look once more at Van's description of Ada's features in the kissing chapter, features remembered particularly from the pose adopted for that photograph taken just after Ada kisses Van while painting her Ophrys orchids:

Nose, cheek, chin--all possessed such a softness of outline (associated retrospectively with keepsakes, and picture hats . . .) that a mawkish admirer might well have imagined the pale plume of a reed . . . shaping her profile. . . . Remembrance, like Rembrandt, is dark but festive. . . . Memory is a photo-studio de luxe. . . . The fillet of black velvet binding her hair that day (the day of the mental picture) brought out its sheen at the silk of the temple and along the

chalk of the parting. It hung lank and long over the neck, its flow disjoined by the shoulder; so that the mat white of her neck . . . showed. . . . (103-04)

Note now the stress on the profile, a stress we observed before in the scene at Ovenman's bar, and the combination of back view (the photograph of this "mental picture" shows Van behind Ada, though the picture is taken from the side) and profile, a combination also witnessed in the "Divan Japonais" re-enactment. That the lines above expressly refer to Lucette and the Divan Japonais scene is established by the echoes of the "softness of outline (associated retrospectively with . . . picture hats, and . . . courtesans . . .) . . . shaping her profile" in the later scene: "in that sort of bawdy . . . place which decent women did not frequent . . . the picture hat . . . profile sweetened by a touch of Russian softness" (460-61). It should be noted too that the rhapsody on Ada's features combines painting (Rembrandt), photograph and actual scene, the same combination as can be seen in the lavish description of Lucette: the Toulouse-Lautrec poster, the Barton & Guestier photograph, the scene of Lucette and Van together.

The confusion of picture and picture in the Divan Japonais scene, then, is more than a play on the relationship of life to art. This confusion and the remarkable insistence on "behind" and "profile" make clear that even when Van is hyperconscious of Lucette's identity and individuality, as he is in the barroom scene, she is still intricately entangled with Ada and with the cumulative force of Van's vividest memories. Even if we grant that Dolores is Lucette she cannot help but evoke for Van his past with Ada.

Lucette at the bar with Van behind her is linked by some fatal network to Ada at her table with Van behind her. But this odd web of fate stretches right across Lucette's past, enmeshing her hopelessly in Van and Ada's affairs. Just as Van's being behind Ada has a special significance in the pattern of their love and their lovemaking, so too does the "behind" relationship appear everywhere in Lucette's life, evidence of her frailty and her dreadful entanglement. We have to begin with a rather grotesque example, but it should be no secret by now that Nabokov finds the grotesque a useful means to his ends. It disguises his patterns (who would think of looking for an artistic pattern in, say, details of sexual position or an outbreak of flatulence?) for a long time before confirming their existence (why else would he repeatedly single out such details when there is no local necessity to do so?).

On the journey back from the 1884 picnic, when "Ada's bottom" (87) is perched on Van's lap, Lucette is seated next to the coachman: "Lucette refused to give up her perch (accepting with a bland little nod the advice of her drunken boxfellow who was seen to touch her bare knees with a good-natured paw)" (86). When Ben Wright is drunk, as he is now, he is exceptionally flatulent, and Lucette complains:

"I want to sit with you. Mne tut neudobno, i ot nego nehorosho pakhnet (I'm uncomfortable here, and he does not smell good)."

"We'll be there in a moment," retorted Ada, "poterpi (have a little patience)."

"What's the matter?" asked Mlle Larivière.

"Nothing. Il pue." (88)

At present, I trust, the good reader finds it quite unlikely that these details bear any relationship to any significant pattern of "bottoms"

or "behinds."

The next day, during the course of a discussion on religious history, Greg Erminin uses the word "crucified" in passing:

Lucette was puzzled by a verb Greg had used. To illustrate it for her, Van joined his ankles, spread both arms horizontally, and rolled up his eyes.

"When I was a little girl," said Marina crossly, "Mesopotamian history was taught practically in the nursery."

"Not all little girls can learn what they are taught," observed Ada.

"Are we Mesopotamians?" asked Lucette.

"We are Hippopotamians," said Van. "Come," he added, "we have not yet ploughed today."

A day or two before, Lucette had demanded that she be taught to hand-walk. Van gripped her by her ankles while she slowly progressed on her red little palms, sometimes falling with a grunt on her face or pausing to nibble a daisy. (91)

Lucette's questions to Van ("crucified," "Mesopotamians") are amusingly innocent, but they mark a relationship of admiration and reliance¹⁵ that Van hardly deserves and certainly abuses. The "Hippopotamians" here pairs Van, behind little Lucette, holding her legs, with "Mr. Nymphobottomus," who would revel in Van's part in the continuing scene:

"Elle devient pourpre, she is getting crimson," commented the governess. "I sustain that these indecent gymnastics are no good for her."

Van, his eyes smiling, his angel-strong hands holding the child's cold-carrot-soup legs just above the insteps, was "ploughing around" with Lucette acting the sallow. Her bright hair hung over her face, her panties showed from under the hem of her skirt, yet she still urged the ploughboy on. (92)

Van makes many rude remarks about Mlle Larivière's being "pathologically unobservant" (96). His judgements seem to be confirmed when she asks

¹⁵ Cf. p. 83: "while puzzled Lucette tugged at the sleeve of Van, of Vanichka, who could explain everything."

Marina to warn Van about any intimacy with Lucette. We who know, as Marina and Mlle Larivière do not, about Van and Ada, find in this evidence of the governess's obtuse folly. But Mlle Larivière, who sees more of Lucette than she does of Van and Ada, has been more observant than proud Van: she can see that he is indeed turning little Lucette's head.

More obviously part of the "behind" pattern, now, are the glimpses curious little Lucette gets of her big sister and cousin at Ardis the Second:

All Van saw there of his new Ada were her ivory thighs and haunches, and the very first time he clasped them she bade him, in the midst of his vigorous joy, to glance across her shoulder over the window ledge, which her hands were still clutching in the ebbing throbs of her own response, and note that Lucette was approaching--skipping rope, along a path in the shrubbery.

. . . Lucette was rocking the glum dackel, or looking up at an imaginary woodpecker, or with various pretty contortions unhurriedly mounting the gray-looped board and swinging gently and gingerly as if never having done it yet, while idiot Dack barked at the locked pavilion door. She increased her momentum so cannily that Ada and her cavalier, in the pardonable blindness of ascending bliss, never once witnessed the instant when the round rosy face with all its freckles aglow swooped up and two green eyes leveled at the astounding tandem. (212-13)

Having seen the older children in action, Lucette is comically but pitifully eager to join their "games": "Lucette insisted on their playing 'leapfrog' with her--and Ada and Van exchanged dark looks" (213). Her mixture of innocence and imitativeness is both funny and a poignant revelation of the dangerous degree to which her development depends on Van and Ada's actions and examples. At the second picnic, while "the rustic feast was being prepared" (266), Lucette hides among the burnberry bushes to watch Van and Ada in their usual position:

As they crouched on the brink of one of the brook's crystal shelves, where, before falling, it stopped to have its picture taken and take pictures itself, Van, at the last throb, saw the reflection of Ada's gaze in the water flash a warning. Something of the sort had happened somewhere before: he did not have time to identify the recollection that, nonetheless, led him to identify at once the sound of the stumble behind him.

Among the rugged rocks they found and consoled poor Lucette, whose foot had slipped on a granite slab in a tangle of bushes. Flushed and flustered, the child rubbed her thigh in much-overdone agony. Van and Ada gaily grasped one little hand each and ran Lucette back to the glade. . . . (267)

On the way back from the picnic the "behind" or "bottom" pattern reaches full prominence. Little Lucette seats her tight little crupper on Van's lap, her "remarkably well-filled green shorts . . . stained with burn-berry purple" (280)--a significant trace of her glimpse of her big siblings earlier that afternoon. "Lucette's compact bottom and cool thighs seemed to sink deeper and deeper in the quicksand of the dream-like, dream-rephrased, legend-distorted past" (280): by now our response to what had seemed a miraculous and triumphant retrieval of the past should be quite different. Note the "Chateaubriand" and "mosquito" pointers:

Ada . . . went back to her vellum-bound little volume, Ombres et couleurs, an 1820 edition of Chateaubriand's short stories with hand-painted vignettes and the flat mummy of a pressed anemone. The gout and glooms of the woodland passed across her book, her face and Lucette's right arm, on which he could not help kissing a mosquito bite in pure tribute to the duplication. Poor Lucette stole a languorous look at him and looked away again--at the red neck of the coachman--of that other coachman who for several months had haunted her dreams. (280)

"That other coachman" is Ben Wright: four years after his dismissal for "letting winds go free while driving Marina and Mlle Larivière home from the Vendange Festival" (140), fragile Lucette is still haunted by his

hand on her knee on the picnic voyage of 1884.

That something about the 1888 ride back from the picnic also troubles Lucette becomes clear three days later, when Ada is trying to teach Lucette to draw flowers:

obstinate Lucette kept insisting that the easiest way to draw a flower was to place a sheet of transparent paper over the picture (in the present case a red-bearded pogonia, with indecent details of structure, a plant peculiar to the Ladoga bogs) and trace the outline of the thing in colored inks. Patient Ada wanted her to copy not mechanically but "from eye to hand and from hand to eye," and to use for model a live specimen of another orchid . . . but after a while she gave in cheerfully and set aside the crystal vaselet holding the Lady's Slipper she had picked. Casually, lightly, she went on to explain how the organs of orchids work-- but all Lucette wanted to know, after her whimsical fashion, was: could a boy pee-impregnate a girl flower through something, through his gaiters or woolies or whatever he wore?

"You know," said Ada in a comic nasal voice, turning to Van, "you know, that child has the dirtiest mind imaginable and now she is going to be mad at me for saying this and sob on the Larivière bosom, and complain she has been pollinated by sitting on your knee."

"But I can't speak to Belle about dirty things," said Lucette quite gently and reasonably. (288-89)

Little Lucette's fears of being impregnated from behind become a little less facetious when we recall what the child saw from the burnberry bushes just hours before that ride home. We should note too Lucette's integration here into the retrospectively ominous repetition of her sister's flower-painting. Four years later, after Ada's rudely initiating her into sexual manipulation, Lucette, "considerably more dissolute [at sixteen] than her sister had seemed at that fatal age" (367), copies "beautiful erotic pictures from an album of Forbidden Masterpieces" (376).

Lucette's peering at Van and Ada on the afternoon of the picnic is repeated in 1892 when Van surprises Ada from behind as she bends over

the bath, "and now their four eyes were looking again into the azure brook of Pinedale, and Lucette pushed the door open with a perfunctory knuckle knock and stopped, mesmerized by the sight of Van's hairy rear" (392-93). On the night of the restaurant outing, a week later, Ada says to Lucette: "Let's all go to bed. You have seen our huge bed, pet?" (413) When they are back at the apartment, Van cruelly kisses Lucette to find out Vinelander's name. The scene flows into the last instance of the "behind" motif as part of Van and Ada's lovemaking:

"I want the name of that fellow."

"Vinelander," she answered.

He heard Ada Vinelander's voice calling for her Glass bed slippers . . . and a minute later, without the least interruption in the established tension, Van found himself, in a drunken dream, making violent love to Rose--no, to Ada, but in the rosacean fashion, on a kind of lowboy. She complained he hurt her. . . . He went to bed and was about to doze off for good when she left his side. Where was she going? Pet wanted to see the album.

"I'll be back in a rubby," she said (tribadic schoolgirl slang), "so keep awake. From now on by the way, it's going to be Chère-amie-fait-morata"--(play on the generic and specific names of the famous fly)--"until further notice."¹⁶

"But no sapphic vorschmacks," mumbled Van into his pillow. (415-16)

This scene in turn leads into the débauche à trois, and it is no accident that the rough copulation from behind should be placed strategically between Van's and Ada's most deliberate acts of inconsiderateness towards Lucette. Note that one can see now that the first element of Lucette's "behind" motif, Ben Wright and his farts, has really been part of the pattern:

¹⁶ The "Chère-amie-fait-morata" is a play on the Serromyia amorata flies that copulate "with both ventral surfaces pressed together" (135). See below, p. 472.

Lucette shrugged her shoulders and made as if to leave, but Ada's avid hand restrained her.

"Pop in, pet (it all started with the little one letting wee winds go free at table, circa 1882). . . ." (418)

"Pet" (from the French for "fart") is a nickname given to Lucette, especially by Ada, throughout the book. It has another, sinister, connotation throughout their past--"The idea was to have Van fool Lucette by petting her in Ada's presence" (213)--and reaches its apotheosis here in the scene of the debauch:

"Pet stays right here," cried audacious Ada, and with one graceful swoop plucked her sister's nightdress off. (418)


Ten eager, evil, loving, long fingers belonging to two different young demons caress their helpless bed pet. (420)

The "pet" motif, like the whole bevy of "behinds" and "bottoms," establishes how dreadfully Lucette's life is enmeshed in the lives of her half-siblings, how hopelessly her frailty has been entangled in Van and Ada's passion and their inconsiderate strength.

The complex interrelationship of the patterns in Ada's and Lucette's lives, all of which come together in the interchangeability of Lucette and Ada as Dolores--Ada recalling herself, Lucette recalling herself only to recall Ada--stresses the impossibility of treating their fates as separate, as Van and Ada have tried to do, and the cruel insensitivity of Van and Ada's insistence that they matter only to each other and affect no one else. The patterns endlessly intertwining the two sisters, the hopeless confusion of Ada and Lucette, emphasize how intimate their contact has been, how the development of one sister could not but be affected by that of the other, how Lucette, being so

close to Van and Ada, could not possibly have been kept out of their affair. No matter how Van and Ada's love seemed, by its intensity and concentration, to exclude the surrounding world, no matter how Van and Ada at Ardis sought and found joy only in each other, another was involved, and her desperate frailty, her needs, the reality of her feelings, should not have been ignored.

Lucette's life has been intimately, and as it turns out, dreadfully interconnected with the lives of Van and Ada. Because their lives have touched the younger and much more defenseless girl so often Van and Ada should have considered the effects of their behaviour, the responsibilities inevitably imposed on human lives by the fact that lives are interconnected. Instead, they have aroused a too-early curiosity, entangled Lucette in too-early embraces, played upon her imitative but powerful passion that has not allowed the rest of her personality to develop. Never showing her the kindness and imaginative considerateness personal contact and responsibility require, they have reveled quite magnificently in the infinity of their own emotion for each other—as if the privilege of an infinity of emotion for another person could exist without one's also being interconnected with other lives and without one's being responsible for each of those interconnections.



VII

LUCETTE AND OTHERS

As we have begun to see, Lucette permeates Ada much more than one could expect on a first or even a fifth reading. She is, among other things, the moral centre of the novel, the key to Nabokov's assessment of Van and Ada's conduct not only towards herself but towards almost everyone else in Ada.

This chapter will identify the essential manifestations of three basic themes: the similarity of Demon's behaviour to that of Van and Ada, expressed particularly in terms of the relationship between the damage Demon inflicts on Aqua and the damage Van and Ada inflict on Lucette; the difference between Demon and Lucette; the fundamental similarity of all Van's moral flaws, expressed particularly in terms of the relationship between the damage Van inflicts on Lucette and the damage he inflicts, intends to inflict or is lucky not to inflict on others.

1. Lucette, Demon and Aqua

One particularly unexpected dimension of Lucette's importance is the vitally significant contrast between her and Demon, whom neither Van nor the reader ever sees together.

The reason for the bond of opposition between Lucette and Demon

can perhaps best be seen in Demon's reaction to Lucette's death, since this hints at the crucial difference, the moral difference, between the two characters. Van sends Demon a letter to read and pass on to Ada in which, to explain that "Lucette never was my mistress, as an obscene ass, whom I cannot trace, implies in the 'write-up' of the tragedy" (496), he describes his last day with Lucette. Demon seizes on one detail of that description: his reply is almost entirely in terms of Don Juan's Last Fling and quite dismisses the tragedy of Lucette's death.

I have followed your instructions, anent that letter, to the letter. . . . I do not give a damn whether you slept or not with Lucette; but I know from Dorothy Vineland that the child had been in love with you. The film you saw was, no doubt, Don Juan's Last Fling in which Ada, indeed, impersonates (very beautifully) a Spanish girl. A jinx has been cast on our poor girl's career. . . . (498)

Passionate and romantic Demon feeds on his own fiery energies and pursues his own intense interests. He will lavish attention only on those few people of whom he happens to be proud or by whom he happens to be excited, and he will utterly scant everybody else. Van is always an object of Demon's excited loyalty and concern, and so too is Ada, especially when she becomes a beautiful young woman: "The bizarre enthusiast had developed the same tendresse for her as he had always had for Van. Its new expression in regard to Ada looked sufficiently fervid to make watchful fools suspect that old Demon 'slept with his niece.'" (391) But should Demon not care for a person, he can be quite indifferent towards his or her life or death, as he is towards his wife, poor Aqua, whose wretched madness receives a new twist towards breaking point every time Demon flaunts another mistress, or as is the case here, at Lucette's death, when Demon

shows no feeling at all for Lucette and quickly passes on to the subject of Ada.

Lucette, on the other hand, is marked by her ordinary human kindness, by the consideration she shows others even when consideration might entail unpleasantness or lead to adverse consequences for herself. Dying Marina, for instance, is regularly visited by "dutiful Lucette" (450), who despite the depressing and dismal circumstances of Marina's illness is present with her until she dies. Van on the other hand acts like Demon's true son: when he last sees "mummy-wizened Marina" he tells her "he must return to America (though actually there was no hurry--only the smell in her hospital room that no breeze could dislodge)" (452). Earlier, in 1892, Lucette has kindly taken Ada's letter to Van at Kingston, knowing well that her acting as messenger will further Ada's cause by reminding Van so intensely of Ardis, knowing that the letter will probably lead to Van and Ada's reconciliation and thus dash her chance of winning some portion of Van's love. Years later, Lucette offers Van a solution to the dilemma of the Veen children which is generous (it offers Van and Ada a chance of seeing each other, which otherwise, under the terms of Demon's edict, they cannot do) and painfully self-effacing. She always recognizes that her desperately needing Van's love will never and need never mean that she should replace Ada in Van's affection:

"Look, Van," she said (finishing her fourth flute). "Why not risk it? Everything is quite simple. You marry me. You get my Ardis. We live there, you write there. I keep melting into the background, never bothering you. We invite Ada--alone, of course--to stay for a while on her estate, for I had always expected mother to leave Ardis to her. While she's there, I go to Aspen or Gstaad, or Schittau, and you live with her in solid crystal with snow falling as if forever all around pendant que je shée in Aspenis. Then I

come back like a shot, but she can stay on, she's welcome, I'll hang around in case you two want me. And then she goes back to her husband for a couple of dreary months, see?" (466)

(Of course, Ada's jealousy of Lucette would have ensured that the plan would not work.) On the last night of her life, when she seems to have finally subdued Van's resistance to her advances, Lucette greets the Robinsons, well-meaning but boring family friends, while she sits watching Don Juan's Last Fling:

the long-lost Robinsons, who apparently had been separated from Lucette by those three women . . . were now moving over to her. Beaming and melting in smiles of benevolence and self-effacement, they sidled up and plumped down next to Lucette, who turned to them with her last, last, last free gift of staunch courtesy that was stronger than failure and death. . . . (498)

And as we shall see in the next chapters, more than one act of the tenderest kindness remains.

Throughout Ada Van and Ada's behaviour, especially but not only their behaviour towards Lucette, is equated in various subtle and damning ways with all that Demon does, and in particular with his mistreatment of Aqua. These equations serve to emphasize the appalling irresponsibilities of Van and Ada and Demon, the damage they wreak on others in their blind pursuit of sexual satisfaction, the devastating effects of their indifference to those around them.

Let us first consider how closely Nabokov associates the gravest consequences of Van and Ada's shirking of personal responsibility and the gravest consequences of Demon's misconduct, how he makes Lucette's death echo so distinctly the death of her aunt.

Van reports that before she jumps from the Tobakoff Lucette

"changed into black slacks and a yellow shirt" (492). Lucette has donned this colour scheme deliberately, in honour of the divan in the library of Ardis Hall, which she has already imitated in her Paris rooms: "Oh, try me, Van! My divan is black with yellow cushions." (464) But she is also wearing the colours of the clothes Aqua puts on just before her suicide, "yellow slacks and a black bolero" (28).¹

Aqua dies in Arizona, by poisoning herself with pills, Lucette in mid-Atlantic, by drowning. There would appear to be little that could relate the circumstances of their deaths, yet Nabokov deftly establishes a number of connections. Realizing that "she must procure for herself a maximum period of undisturbed stupor elsewhere than in a glass house" (28), Aqua manages to earn the right to participate in a picnic, a treat her sanatorium offers patients who conform, as she pretends to do, to psychoanalytic paradigms. Before going on the picnic, she has written a suicide note (found on her body in the chapparal gulch she has reached from the picnic site) that begins with a boisterous mixture of English, French and German: "Aujourd'hui (heute-toity!) I, this eye-rolling-~~toy~~, have earned the psykitsch right to enjoy a land-party with Herr Doktor Sig" (29). Her niece's death repeats these details by way of a painter's diary Lucette, a former student of art history, has been reading in the last week of her life. On the sun deck of the Tobakoff, she tells Van:

¹ Mason, p. 134, discusses and seriously distorts the yellow and black motif.

I always teeter on the tender border between sunburn and suntan--or between lobster and Obst as writes Herb, my beloved painter--I'm reading his diary . . . it's in three mixed languages and lovely. . . . (478)

Later, having decided to leave a final message, Lucette

looked in vain for a bit of plain notepaper without caravelle or crest; ripped out the flyleaf of Herb's Journal, and tried to think up something amusing, harmless, and scintillating to say in a suicide note. But she had planned everything except that note, so she tore her blank life in two and disposed of the pieces in the W. C. (492)

As she climbs up to the deck from which she will dive, fragments of Herb's Journal float through her mind, not only revealing the journal's third language to be French, with which Aqua began her suicide note, but also depicting a picnic:

Six, seven--no, more than that, about ten steps up. Dix marches. Legs and arms. Dimanche. Déjeuner sur l'herbe. Tout le monde pue. Ma belle-mère avale son râtelier. Sa petite chienne, after too much exercise, gulps twice and quietly vomits, a pink pudding onto the picnic nappe. Après quoi she waddles off. These steps are something. (493)

2. Injurious Desire: Ardis and Its Images

i. Ardis: Lucette and Aqua

For Van and Ada Ardis seems a perfect blend of desirability and desire. The home of the Veens, it is the house of Venus; the arrow in Ardis's name--"Ardis." Arrowhead Manor. Le Château de la Flèche, Flesh Hall" (318)--makes it the haunt of Cupid. It seems to be genuinely the paradise its name suggests, and Van makes exuberantly explicit its Edenic qualities:

One afternoon they were climbing the glossy-limbed shattal tree at the bottom of the garden. Mlle Larivière and little Lucette, screened by a caprice of the coppice but just within earshot, were playing grace hoops. One glimpsed now and then, above or through foliage, the skimming hoop passing from one unseen sending stick to another. The first cicada of the season kept trying out its instrument. A silver-and-sable skybab squirrel sat sampling a cone on the back of a bench.

. . . Her bare foot slipped, and the two panting youngsters tangled ignominiously among the branches, in a shower of drupes and leaves, clutching at each other, and the next moment, as they regained a semblance of balance, his expressionless face and cropped head were between her legs and a last fruit fell with a thud. . . .

("Remember?"

"Yes, of course, I remember: you kissed me here, on the inside--". . . .)

. . . Van removed a silk thread of larva web from his lip and remarked that such negligence of attire was a form of hysteria.

"Well," answered Ada, straddling her favorite limb, "as we all know by now, Mlle La Rivière de Diamants has nothing against a hysterical little girl's not wearing pantalets during l'ardeur de la canicule."

"I refuse to share the ardor of your little canicule with an apple tree."

"It is really the Tree of Knowledge--this specimen was imported last summer wrapped up in brocade from the Eden National Park where Dr. Krolik's son is a ranger and breeder."

"Let him range and breed by all means," said Van (her natural history had long begun to get on his nerves), "but I swear no apple trees grow in Iraq."

"Right, but that's not a true apple tree." (94-95)

The fall of the fruit and of Van and Ada appears a fortunate fall indeed. Robert Alter remarks that the scene "clearly enacts a Happy Fall,"² an observation anticipated by Alfred Appel, who says: "theirs would instead seem to be a Fortunate Fall. Innocence still prevails. . . . In regaining Paradise, Nabokov has miraculously succeeded in retelling a story so old that it becomes utterly new."³ But a few pages after the incident

² "Nabokov's Ardor," p. 49.

³ "Ada Described," p. 182.

Van recalls that "first contact, so light, so mute, between his soft lips and her softer skin . . . established--high up in that dappled tree, with only that stray ardilla daintily leavesdropping" (98). The "stray ardilla daintily leavesdropping" sends us back to that "silver-and-sable skybab squirrel" but also to the fact that Mlle Larivière (who, however, is notoriously unobservant) and Lucette are just within earshot: the squirrel was not alone in eavesdropping; Lucette has overheard Van and Ada's exchange and her curiosity is now fired. The significance of this incident is underlined by the fact that when Van first sees Lucette he thinks she must be "Ardelia" (busybody), an exact homophone of "ardilla." Nabokov notes that in this Edenic scene there is the beginning of a far from fortunate loss of innocence.

Even earlier in his first stay at Ardais, Van had caught a glimpse of Ada

washing her face and arms over an old-fashioned basin on a rococo stand, her hair knotted on the top of her head, her nightgown twisted around her waist like a clumsy corolla out of which issued her slim back, rib-shaded on the near side. A fat snake of porcelain curled around the basin, and as both the reptile and he stopped to watch Eve and the soft wobble of her bud-breasts in profile, a big mulberry-colored cake of soap slithered out of her hand, and her black-socked foot hooked the door shut with a bang which was more the echo of the soap's crashing against the marble board than a sign of pudic displeasure. (60)

The fall of the mulberry soap and the "bang which was more the echo of the soap's crashing" comically imitate the fruit of the Fall and nature's groaning echo of man's first disobedience:

Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate:
Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe.
(Paradise Lost IX.781-83)

But the mulberry soap reappears on the day when Van and Ada imprison Lucette in the bath while they make love around the corner of the L-shaped room:

"I'm Van," said Lucette, standing in the tub with the mulberry soap between her legs and protruding her shiny tummy.

"You'll turn into a boy if you do that," said Ada sternly, "and that won't be very amusing." (144)

Ada tells Van later that their tying Lucette up by the bank had not worked as planned:

she had confessed, Ada had made her confess, that it was, as Van had suspected, the other way round--that when they returned to the damsel in distress, she was in all haste, not freeing herself, but actually trying to tie herself up again after breaking loose and spying on them through the larches. "Good Lord," said Van, "that explains the angle of the soap!" (152)

Ardis may be a sexual paradise for Van and Ada, but it is a dangerous wonderland for little Lucette.

The difference between the romantic self-absorption which characterizes Van and Ada's affair at Ardis and the demanding circumspectness Nabokov prefers is never revealed more fully than in Van's final departure from Ardis. Having just found out from Blanche of Ada's unfaithfulness, Van rides off from the Veen manor in a carriage and pair:

They passed undulating fields of wheat speckled with the confetti of poppies and bluets. . . .

"The express does not stop at Torfyanka, does it, Trofim?"

"I'll take you five versts across the bog," said Trofim, "the nearest is Volosyanka."

His vulgar Russian word for Maidenhair; a whistle stop; train probably crowded.

Maidenhair. Idiot! Percy boy might have been buried by now!

Maidenhair. Thus named because of the huge spreading Chinese tree at the end of the platform. Once, vaguely, confused with the Venus'-hair fern. She walked to the end of the platform in Tolstoy's novel. First exponent of the inner monologue, later exploited by the French and the Irish. N'est-vert, n'est vert, n'est vert. L'arbre aux quarante écus d'or, at least in the fall. 'Never, never shall I hear again her "botanical" voice fall at biloba, "sorry, my Latin is showing." Ginkgo, ginkgo, ink, inkog. Known also as Salisbury's adiantofolia, Ada's infolio, poor Salisburia: sunk; poor Stream of Consciousness, marée noire by now. Who wants Ardis Hall! (299-300)

Van expresses the depth of his despair at leaving Ada and Ardis by comparing his thoughts with the stream of consciousness flowing through Anna Karenin's mind immediately prior to her suicide (Bk.7 Chs.29-30).

But Nabokov suggests that Van has a much more valid reason for overwhelming regret than the loss of Ada and Ardis--namely, his and Ada's indifference to Lucette. The lines quoted above continually refer to Lucette's death and to the irony that Lucette remains physically a virgin but is subjected far too early to the shock of sexual initiation, an initiation which warps her development and leads ultimately to her suicide. Van's inner monologue here compares itself to the monologue intérieur immediately preceding Anna Karenin's death but also foreshadows the one other inner monologue in Ada, Lucette's thoughts just before her death ("ten steps up. Dix marches. Legs and arms. Dimanche. Déjeuner sur l'herbe . . ." [493]).

If the form of Van's thoughts foreshadows Lucette's death, the thoughts themselves refer us back to Pt.1 Ch.10, which so pointedly anticipates Lucette's suicide. The lines: "in Tolstoy's novel. First exponent of the inner monologue, later exploited by the French and the Irish," allude to the beginning of Pt.1 Ch.10, where Van prepares for

Ada's discussion of "Mémoire" by depicting her customary mealtime volubility: "Arch and grandiloquent, Ada would be describing a dream, a natural history wonder, a special belletristic device--Paul Bourget's 'monologue intérieur' borrowed from old Leo . . ." (61). Bourget here, in whose Cosmopolis (1893) the term "monologue intérieur" first appeared,⁴ is the "French" of Van's own monologue; the "Irish," of course, is Joyce, and Molly's monologue is referred to slightly later in Pt.1 Ch.10 in the "mollyblob, marybud, maybubble" that concludes Van's account of Ada's disquisition on "Mémoire" and that is the climax of the play upon "deflowering."

Most of the rest of Van's monologue concerns Ada's botanical names (maidenhair, Venus'-hair fern, Ginkgo biloba) and her translating ("N'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert"),⁵ themes which reach their fullest expression in Pt.1 Ch.10's discussion of Fowlie's mistranslation of the French for Caltha palustris, marsh marigold, in his version of "Mémoire." The monologue thus refers back to the novel's most emphatic play upon the fact of Lucette's fatal virginity. Its last lines evoke Lucette's death much more directly ("sunk; poor Stream of Consciousness, marée noire by now") and also pointedly relate the stream of Rimbaud's poem and the black tide in which Lucette drowns.

But if the end of Ardis foreshadows the fate that is the conse-

⁴ See Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 534.

⁵ This is part of Ada's preposterous mock-translation of Lear's "Never, never, never, never, never": "Ce beau jardin fleurit en mai, / Mais en hiver / Jamais, jamais, jamais, jamais, jamais, / N'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert" (92).

quence of Lucette's too early initiation, it is also shaded itself by Aqua's fate. To see how this can be we must turn back in time.

Reminiscing with Van in the woods near Ardis, Ada recalls a visit she made as a little girl of four to Demon's summer house at Radugalet, the "other Ardis." It appears that Dan has had word from Demon that a young cocotte, a former scullery maid at Ardis, is now keeping him company. Marina suspects something of the sort is behind Dan's excursion to Radugalet and at the last minute insists to her uncomfortable husband that she and Ada are coming too:

However, when they arrived, it became instantly clear that Demon had not expected ladies. He was on the terrace drinking goldwine (sweet whisky) with an orphan he had adopted, he said, a lovely Irish wild rose in whom Marina at once recognized an impudent scullery maid who had briefly worked at Ardis Hall, and had been ravished by an unknown gentleman--who was now well-known. In those days Uncle Dan wore a monocle in gay-dog copy of his cousin, and this he screwed in to view Rose, whom perhaps he had also been promised. . . . The party was a disaster. (150)

Marina, Ada remembers, stalks off in anger, but "Van had not the slightest recollection of that visit or indeed of that particular summer, because his father's life, anyway, was a rose garden all the time" (151). The "rose garden" seems charming and funny at first, until one recollects the strain Demon's behaviour puts on Aqua's frailty, and the suicide that results; significantly, it is "in the rose garden of Ardis Manor" (29) that Van and Ada read and discuss Aqua's suicide note.

While the account of Van's departure from Ardis obliquely affirms that Lucette's death as well as Van's immediate loss is necessary to any assessment of Ardis, the passage also subtly evokes Aqua's death to point out the relationship between Van and Ada's conduct here and their

father's at Radugalet, the "other Ardis": their common assumption that one's own immediate pleasure need not be spoilt by consideration for others. In Pt.1 Ch.3 Aqua's taking her life is compared to the tragic ends of two other nineteenth-century heroines, Emma Bovary and Anna Karenin, both of whom are called upon here as Van leaves Ada. Aqua's death is explicitly linked with a rather twisted Antiterranean version of Emma Bovary (to whom a dash of Poe's "Lenore" and "Eleonora" has been added):⁶

Being unwilling to suffer another relapse after this blessed state of perfect mental repose, but knowing it could not last, she did what another patient had done in distant France, at a much less radiant and easygoing "home." . . . Aqua, in her turn, repeated exactly clever Eleonore Bonvard's trick, namely, opting for the making of beds and the cleaning of glass shelves. . . .

In less than a week Aqua had accumulated more than two hundred tablets of different potency. (27)

At the outset of his last voyage from Ardis, Van passes "undulating fields of wheat speckled with the confetti of poppies and bluets" (299). The last three words exactly recall part of a pseudo-quotation from Flaubert earlier in Ada: "'like a provincial come an hour too early to the opera after jogging all day along harvest roads with poppies and bluets catching and twinkle-twining in the wheels of his buggy' (Floeborg's Ursula)" (128).

The association of Aqua's death and Anna Karenin's is more direct: immediately after gulping down an overdose of drugs, Aqua "smiled,

⁶ This addition is another tie between Aqua and Lucette, whose death is variously associated with the actress and Ada look-alike Lenore Colline.

dreamily enjoying the thought (rather 'Kareninian' in tone) that her extinction would affect people about as deeply as the abrupt, mysterious, never explained demise of a comic strip in a Sunday paper one had been taking for years" (28). These thoughts are "Kareninian" in tone particularly in that they reflect the mood of Anna's inner monologue, her final vision of people's not caring for one another, the penetrating cynicism she suddenly applies to the most routine actions. This in itself is enough to relate Aqua to Van's Kareninian monologue, but within the stream of Van's thoughts there is also a definite ripple of Aqua. The greatest single shock to Aqua's mental security is of course that delivered by the substitution of Van for her still-born child, a melodrama recorded in that herbarium in the attic, which includes the following item: "Golden [ginkgo] leaf: fallen out of a book 'The Truth about Terra' which Aqua gave me before going back to her Home. 14.XII.69" (7: brackets in original). That ginkgo leaf is recalled as Van reflects: "Never, never shall I hear again her 'botanical' voice fall at biloba. Ginkgo, ginkgo, ink, inkog." (300)

In between the Madame Bovary and the Anna Karenin references in Van's last journey from Ardis, Van drops Blanche off at her "poor shack smothered in climbing roses" (299). As we shall see, Blanche is precisely and repeatedly linked with the "Rose" of Demon's "rose garden" at Radugalet, which, being recalled here, reminds us briefly of the additional strain Demon's amorous affairs impose on his wife's dreadful frailty. The last scene of the Ardis sections, then, while being moving in terms of Van's loss of his paradise, also emphasizes the irresponsibility of Van and Ada at Ardis towards one whose life is entangled with theirs by

comparing it with Demon's more blatant irresponsibility and crueler inconsiderateness towards Aqua.

ii. Ardis: Lucette and Blanche

Van is devoted to his dashing, romantic, fiery father, and is closer to him than to anyone but Ada. He follows Demon's advice and example in numerous matters of conduct and style, and many of Nabokov's most telling criticisms of his narrator are made by associating Van with his father and his father's utter unconcern for anything outside the circle of his own intense desires. Nabokov's criticisms are extremely penetrating but almost silently made, often by pointing out at a significant moment Van's debt of style, a debt that appears to contain no reference at all to more serious similarities of conduct.

Van brings to Ardis all he has learned from his father's example, from Radugalet and the "rose garden" of Demon's life. Hence his seigneurial attitude towards women shows itself on his very first morning at Ardis. Rising very early "with the intention of going for a dip in the brook he had observed on the eve" (48), Van comes across

a young chambermaid whom he had glimpsed (and promised himself to investigate) on the preceding evening. She wore what his father termed with a semi-assumed leer "soubret black and frissonnet frill." . . . the savage sense of opportune license moved Van so robustly that he could not resist clasping the wrist of her raised tight-sleeved arm. (48)

The only reference to Demon is his term "soubret black and frissonnet frill," but this is enough to point to the fact that Van's behaviour towards and his expectations of Blanche are shaped by what he has seen of Demon's treatment of serving girls such as "Rose."

Indeed, just how well Van has learnt from that example becomes apparent some years later. Van's rooms in his Manhattan apartment are looked after by "Rose, the sportive Negro maid whom he shared in more ways than one with the famous, recently decorated cryptogrammatist, Mr. Dean, a perfect gentleman, dwelling on the floor below" (390). "Dean" here neatly combines the beginning and end of "Demon Veen." Van reveals that he fully shares his father's assumption that he can always avail himself of others, that he may treat others as means to satisfy his own ends.

If Van's behaviour towards Blanche owes something to Demon's behaviour towards the maidservant he has brought from Ardis to Radugalet, Blanche herself is directly associated with Radugalet Rose. Directly, but only after a circuitous approach.

One of the oddest paragraphs in the Villa Venus chapter is that which follows the account of David van Veen's death while building his hundredth Villa Venus:

His nephew and heir, an honest but astoundingly stuffy clothier in Ruinen (somewhere near Zwolle, I'm told), with a large family and a small trade, was not cheated out of the millions of guildens, about the apparent squandering of which he had been consulting mental specialists during the last ten years or so. All the hundred floramors opened simultaneously on September 20, 1875. . . . By the beginning of the new century the Venus revenues were pouring in (their final gush, it is true). A tattling tabloid reported, around 1890, that out of gratitude and curiosity "Velvet" Veen traveled once--and only once--to the nearest floramor with his entire family --and it is also said that Guillaume de Montparnasse indignantly rejected an offer from Hollywood to base a screenplay on that dignified and hilarious excursion. Mere rumors, no doubt. (350)

"Velvet" Veen appears to have no connection with anything else in the

novel,⁷ but in fact the paragraph is a remarkable parody of the Radugalet visit of Dan and his family. "Velvet" Veen is the nephew of the architect and labyrinth designer ("access to Venus . . . continued through a labyrinth of hedges" [351]) David van Veen, grandfather of Van's counterpart Eric van Veen; Dan Veen is the nephew of Dedalus Veen, grandfather of Van himself. Both "Velvet" Veen and Dan Veen are drab figures in comparison with the rest of their sparkling families: the Dutchman is "an honest but astoundingly stuffy clothier," the American a "much duller" chap than his cousin Demon and with "no need whatever to jolt with the ups and down of a 'job' the solid fortune inherited from a series of far more proficient and venturesome Veens" (5) becomes a Manhattan art dealer. While Velvet Veen is Dutch ("the ecstatic Neverlander"), Dan is associated with the Dutch through his struggles "to read, with the aid of one of the dwarf dictionaries for undemanding tourists which helped him to decipher foreign art catalogues, an article apparently devoted to oystering in a Dutch-language illustrated paper" (68; "oystering" is Dan's misapprehension of "Oosters," the Dutch for "eastern," "oriental"). Velvet Veen travels "once--and only once--to the nearest floramor with his entire family." This "dignified and hilarious excursion" parodies Dan's equally absurd trip with wife and daughter to Demon's pleasure garden at Radugalet, and almost suggests that Radugalet and its Rose are to be equated with Villa Venus and the "florindas" of its brothels. The association of the whores of Villa

⁷ The name of course calls up the ghost of Jan "Velvet" Brueghel (1568-1625), also known as "Flower" or "Paradise" Brueghel, names very aptly related to these "floramors" that are "parodies of paradise."

Venus and Rose, the servant girl who runs away from Marina's Ardis in 1878, becomes even stronger when one recalls the brutal end of Demon's letter to Marina in mid-April, 1869, just before he marries Aqua: "Your runaway maid, by the way, has been found by the police in a brothel here and will be shipped to you as soon as she is sufficiently stuffed with mercury" (16).

Now Dan's visit to Radugalet is not only oddly allied to the Venus Villa chapter: it also reappears in strange fashion within the events of Ardis, in the brief and whimsical Pt.1 Ch.11. On Dan's first weekend visit to Ardis after Van's arrival, it starts to rain after evening tea: "Not long did the rain last--or rather stay: it continued on its presumable way to Raduga or Ladoga or Káluga or Luga, shedding an uncompleted rainbow over Ardis Hall" (68). "Raduga" and "an uncompleted rainbow" both anticipate "Radugalet" (the Russian for "rainbow" with an English diminutive). It is at this point that the parallel is drawn between Dan and the "ecstatic Neverlander":

Uncle Dan in an overstuffed chair was trying to read . . . an article . . . in a Dutch-language illustrated paper somebody on the train had abandoned opposite him--when an abominable tumult started to spread from room to room through the whole house.

As the mad chase continues, Dan shows that he understands what is going on around him as little as he understands the Dutch paper:

The sportive dackel . . . was in the act of carrying away, to a suitable hiding place where to worry it, a sizable wad of blood-soaked cottonwool, snatched somewhere upstairs. Ada, Marina and two maids were pursuing the merry animal but he was impossible to corner among all the baroque furniture as he tore through innumerable doorways. Suddenly the whole chase veered

past Uncle Dan's armchair and shot out again.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, on catching sight of the gory trophy, "somebody must have chopped off a thumb!" Patting his thighs and his chair, he sought and retrieved--from under the footstool--the vestpocket wordbook and went back to his paper, but a second later had to look up "groote," which he had been groping for when disturbed.

The simplicity of its meaning annoyed him. (68-69)

The blood-soaked cottonwool is from Blanche's room, where Dack should have been locked up. The dog here ties Blanche firmly to Demon's Rose of Radugalet, whose dog has also bothered Dan: "it did remind one of Rose's terrier that had kept trying to hug Dan's leg" (151).

Van's conduct towards Blanche owes much to Demon's treatment of girls like the "Rose" of Radugalet, and Blanche herself will be associated with the whores (the runaway servant girl Demon finds in a brothel, the florindas of Villa Venus) with whom "Rose" has been linked. The relationship of Van's behaviour to that of his father and the relationship of Blanche to "Rose," to the girls of Villa Venus and to that syphilitic maid charge with significance what appear to be casual details in the account of Demon's visit to Ardis for a dinner one night in July 1888.

When he arrives on that July afternoon, Demon passes through a gallery on his way into Ardis Hall. Blanche, who is working in the gallery, promises him drinks will be brought. Shortly afterwards, as he sits talking with Van before dinner, Demon mentions that he "ran into a remarkably pretty soubrette" (244). His words echo Van's description of Blanche on that first morning at Ardis: "She wore what his father termed with a semi-assumed leer 'soubret black and frissonnet frill'" (48).

Later we see that in the brief moment he had brushed past Blanche Demon

had been infected with a "fugitive urge to plunge both hands in a soft bosom" (262). Demon's reaction demonstrates that Van's earlier approaches to Blanche are indeed conditioned by seigneurial attitudes inculcated in him by his father.

We even see one stage of the process of inculcation:

"A moment ago, in that gallery, I ran into a remarkably pretty soubrette. She never once raised her lashes and answered in French when I--Please, my boy, move that screen a little, that's right. . . . Do you like the type, Van--the bowed little head, the bare neck, the high heels, the trot, the wiggle, you do, don't you?"

"Well, sir--"

(Tell him I'm the youngest Venutian? Does he belong, too? Show the sign? Better not. . . .) (244)

Van decides not to show the sign only because he does not wish to violate the secrecy of the Villa Venus system, not because he fears Demon could disapprove. But this rejected answer leagues Blanche directly with Villa Venus.

At the dinner itself, Marina enters followed by the scurrying dachshund:

Our old friend, being quite as excited as the rest of the reunited family, had scampered in after Marina with an old miniver-furred slipper in his merry mouth. The slipper belonged to Blanche, who had been told to whisk Dack to her room but, as usual, had not incarcerated him properly. Both children experienced a chill of déjà-vu. . . . (248)

The "déjà-vu" prompts the reader to search out the dachshund's earlier escapade, and eventually to notice the relationship between that earlier scene and Rose's dog at Radugalet harrying Dan. Note that the slipper is "miniver-furred": both the misplaced slipper and the "miniver"

(always associated in Ada with the "vair"/"verre" confusion which generated Cinderella's "glass" slipper) strengthen the bond between Cinderella-like Blanche and Radugalet Rose, for Dan and family had traveled to Radugalet in railway "carrosses of pumpkin origin" (150).

Before the dinner and when he has just begun talking to his son Demon is impatient for the drinks to arrive: "Damn it, the servants here are not Mercuries" (241). Rather amusing in itself, the "Mercuries" is even funnier in context. On the previous page, a reference to Tolstoy engenders a brief literary exchange:

Demon preferred Walter Scott to Dickens, and did not think highly of Russian novelists. As usual, Van considered it fit to make a corrective comment:

"A fantastically artistic writer, Dad." (240)

Though Demon dislikes Dickens, he is about to repeat one of that author's comic touches: in Bleak House (1852-1853) "the Mercuries" is the ironic name given to the Dedlock footmen. But because the person who offered Demon drinks was Blanche ("Where are the drinks? They were promised me by a passing angel" [239]) there is a much more serious side to Demon's "the servants here are not Mercuries." The conjunction of the maid Blanche with the "Mercuries" establishes a firm connection between Blanche and the "runaway maid . . . found by the police in a brothel here" who "will be shipped to you as soon as she is sufficiently stuffed with mercury" (16). Blanche is not (professionally speaking, at least) a whore, but she too has venereal disease. On that first morning of Van's stay at Ardis Blanche resists Van's advances because, she claims, "je suis vierge--ou peu s'en faut" and because "Finalement, . . . I have

the whites" (49). In fact, she deters Van only because he has intruded just before she and Bouteillan are to commence a tryst, and we can deduce from later evidence that Blanche has gonorrhea rather than leucorrhea.

The fact that Blanche says "je suis vierge, ou peu s'en faut" when she also makes the first reference to what proves to be her venereal disease is significant far beyond the amusing discrepancy. Throughout Ardis, Blanche's venereal disease will be both compared and contrasted with Lucette's condition, with Lucette's remaining a virgin despite a too-early and too-persistent initiation into sex.

Lucette's fate revolves around the hopeless irony that she remains a virgin even on that last night on the Tobakoff and yet has been harmed by such sexual initiation as the romp under the sealyham cedar where Ada makes "her innocent little sister notice and register what Van could not control" (205). A consequence and an expression of this ironic and fateful combination of damaging initiation and preserved virginity is the series of images of defloration, such as those in Ada's diatribe on the translation of "Mémoire," that appears throughout Ardis. Throughout Ardis, too, these defloration images and the associated damage done to Lucette are united with and opposed to the virginity to which Blanche has laid claim and the venereal disease which belies that protestation.

During the Night of the Burning Barn, when Van and Ada become lovers (imperfectly, for Van's "impatient young passion . . . burst at the lip of the orchid" [121]), a flurry of Cinderella images emphasizes the exclusion of Blanche and Lucette, Van's two perpetually unrequited admirers. The next morning Van breakfasts with Ada in a dining room

full of bright yellow baguenaudier flowers before arranging to meet, when Ada is free in an hour's time, in the Baguenaudier Bower, where they can search for a more secluded nook in which to make love. After describing the tryst and how he "feted" Ada's legs "from the A of arched instep to the V of velvet," Van adds:

Neither could establish in retrospect, nor, indeed, persisted in trying to do so, how, when and where he actually "deflowered" her --a vulgarism Ada in Wonderland had happened to find glossed in Phrody's Encyclopedia as: "to break a virgin's vaginal membrane by manly or mechanical means," with the example: "The sweetness of his soul was deflowered (Jeremy Taylor)." Was it that night on the lap robe? Or that day in the larchwood? Or later in the shooting gallery, or in the attic, or on the roof, or on a secluded balcony, or in the bathroom, or (not very comfortably) on the Magic Carpet? We do not know and do not care.

(You kissed and nibbled, and poked, and prodded, and worried me there so much and so often that my virginity was lost in the shuffle; but I do recall definitely that by midsummer the machine which our forefathers called "sex" was working as smoothly as later, in 1888, etc., darling. Marginal note in red ink.) (129)

Pt.1 Ch.20 is a "defloration" chapter, plainly, because of Ada-- but Blanche and Lucette are also both involved. Van comes down to breakfast before Ada, and eagerly awaits her descent:

Suddenly Van heard her lovely dark voice on the staircase saying in an upward direction, "Je l'ai vu dans une des corbeilles de la bibliothèque"--presumably in reference to some geranium or violet or slipper orchid. There was a "bannister pause," as photographers say, and after the maid's distant glad cry had come from the library Ada's voice added: "Je me demande, I wonder qui l'a mis là, who put it there." Aussitôt après she entered the dining room. (125)

What Ada has seen in one of the library's wastepaper baskets is, in fact, as the reader knows, not "some geranium or violet or slipper orchid" but a slipper that Cinderella-Blanche had lost on the staircase the night before (young Bout, her newest lover, had been "devotedly kissing the

veined instep of a pretty bare foot raised and placed on a balustrade" [405]) and that Ada had brought into the library before joining Van on the divan.

After Ada comes down and engrosses Van's attention Dan, also at the breakfast table, opens "his arms wide in paternal welcome as guileless Lucette trotted into the room with a child's pink, stiff-bagged butterfly net in her little fist, like an oriflamme" (127). "Oriflamme," as we have seen above (p. 394), alludes to the opening quatrain of Rimbaud's "Mémoire." The allusion sends the good reader back to Pt.1 Ch.10, to Ada's analysis of Fowlie's translation of "Mémoire," to the subtle insistence on Lucette's perpetual virginity and eventual drowning --and so too do other details in this chapter ostensibly about Ada's defloration. The reason Ada cannot sneak off with Van at once but must arrange to meet with him in an hour's time is that she must finish a translation of François Coppée for Mlle Larivière, as in Pt.1 Ch.10 it had been for Mlle Larivière that she was translating "Mémoire." The "Marginal note in red ink" which contains Ada's memories of her defloration recalls the passage from Molly Bloom's soliloquy ("and they always want to see a stain on the bed to know you're a virgin for them . . . they're such fools too . . . a daub of red ink would do" [U 754]) which is alluded to in the earlier "mollyblob, marybud, maybubble" which ends the "defloration" theme introduced by "Mémoire."

In Pt.1 Ch.20, then, the theme of Ada's defloration, amplified through the floral background of breakfast table and blissful bower, is accompanied by Blanche's slipper (lost while her newest lover was kissing her bare foot and imagined to be a lost flower, "some geranium . . .") and by the sonorous echo of the theme of Lucette's defloration in Pt.1 Ch.10.

If now we return again to Van's last voyage from Ardis, and if we keep in mind that Van's inner monologue, which begins just after Blanche has been dropped off, also evokes Lucette with reference to the defloration images in the "Mémoire" discussion, we can appreciate that Nabokov is once more comparing Lucette's virginity-cum-initiation with Blanche's disease. For these are the words that break in on Van's mental soliloquy:

"Barin, a barin," said Trofim, turning his blond-bearded face to his passenger.

"Da?"

"Dazhe skvoz' kozhaniy fartuk ne stal-bi ya trogat' etu frantsu-zskuyu devku."

Bárin: master. Dázhe skvoz' kózhaniy fártuk: even through a leathern apron. Ne stal-bi ya trógat': I would not think of touching. Étu: this (that). Frantsúzskuyu: French (adj., accus.). Dévku: wench. (300)

It is no accident that at the very end of the Ardis sections Van leaves Blanche off at her home in Torfyanka or Tourbière. When Van describes a photograph (called "Kim's apotheosis of Ardis". [406]) taken at the end of Ardis the First, Blanche is listed as "Blanche de la Tourberie" (407). The name of her native hamlet, Torfyanka to its Russian inhabitants, Tourbière to its French ones, means "peaty" to all its citizens, signifying that Blanche de la Tourberie is strategically equated with the Veens, whose Dutch surname means "peat."⁸ Blanche has been associated with the syphilitic, mercury-stuffed runaway maid Demon finds in a brothel, and with the Rose of Radugalet, the "other Ardis" which

⁸ As noted by R. M. Adams, "Passion among the Polyglots," Hudson Review, 22 (Winter 1969-70), 722.

is at the same time so closely related to Villa Venus. Blanche herself, then, links the summer home of the Veens with Villa Venus, but in a way markedly different from those we have considered hitherto: now it is not so much that the Villa Venus is a parody of Ardis or a poignant reminder of Van's having banned himself from his paradise, but that the attitudes Van brings to Ardis from Radugalet make the former too like a palatial bordello, where the sexual exploitation of others is taken for granted, where people are indifferent to others in their pursuit of sexual satisfaction.

Nabokov has established a relationship between the damage done to a girl devastated by syphilis and the "destruction Demon" casually wreaks on his wife; he has associated the consequences for Aqua of that "rose garden" in Radugalet and the exactly equivalent consequences for Lucette of the "Eden" in Ardis; he has drawn a parallel too between the gonorrhea of a girl Van expects to be able to avail himself of and the dangerous initiation of Lucette into a world of frenzied sexual energy. The indifference shown to others in treating them as only a means to one's own sexual satisfaction is closely related, Nabokov insists, to the cruelty of neglecting close personal responsibility.

The comparison first of the cases of Demon's syphilitic whore and his wife and then of Van's diseased Blanche and his sister may seem unjustified: Van is no more responsible for Blanche's gonorrhea than is Demon for the runaway maid's syphilis, whereas Van's responsibility in Lucette's case and Demon's in Aqua's are both painfully evident. But this very difference in responsibility is essential to Nabokov's point. Venereal disease is spread not through a single person's neglect of

responsibility and considerateness but through the actions of many who treat others as only the means to their own ends, who assume their right to use other people and to take no thought for those they may be helping to destroy. But if an extensive evil (venereal disease, the degradation of women, the abuse of privilege, or other more potent evils we shall see associated with Blanche's disease and Aqua's and Lucette's fates) cannot be traced to a single source, nevertheless individual acts within such a contagion can and should be as fully governed by the demands of responsibility and consideration for the feelings of others as actions in which--as in the conduct of Demon towards Aqua, or of Van and Ada towards Lucette--a simpler sum of relationships makes the vectors of responsibility much easier to determine.

iii. Ardis Upended: Lucette and Cherry

When in November 1892 Van and Ada finish viewing Kim's photographs, Van remarks on Blanche's prominence in the album and adds:

"By the way, where is my poor little Blanche now?"

"Oh, she's all right. She's still around. You know, she came back--after you abducted her. She married our Russian coachman, the one who replaced Bengal Ben, as the servants called him."

"Oh she did? That's delicious. Madame Trofim Fartukov. I would never have thought it."

"They have a blind child," said Ada.

"Love is blind," said Van.

"She tells me you made a pass at her on the first morning of your first arrival."

"Not documented by Kim," said Van. "Will their child remain blind? I mean, did you get them a really first-rate physician?"

"Oh yes, hopelessly blind. But speaking of love and its myths. . . ." (408)

Van's bizarre citation of the cliché depends on the fact that Trofim

married Blanche knowing she had venereal disease (having said, indeed, that "even through a leathern apron . . . I would not think of touching . . . that . . . French . . . wench" [300]) and on the fact that Blanche's child's blindness has been caused by its developing gonococcal ophthalmia neonatorum from its mother's gonorrhea. Once again the damage a whole network of promiscuous sex has caused Blanche is poignantly matched with Lucette's virginity and yet too early initiation:

She increased her momentum so cannily that Ada and her cavalier, in the pardonable blindness of ascending bliss, never once witnessed the instant when the round rosy face with all its freckles aglow swooped up and two green eyes leveled at the astounding tandem. (213)

The "pardonable blindness of ascending bliss" makes horribly plain that sexual irresponsibility, sexual gratification without regard to the consequences, has been an essential part of Ardis, blindfolded Cupid's domain, that Van and Ada have been blinded by the ferocity of their desire to the effects of their actions upon others.

Blanche's disease and the blindness of her child and the relation between these and the injurious combination of virginity and sexual initiation in Lucette are necessary to an understanding of one of the strangest chapters in Ada, a parody from within Ardis of Ardis's own eroticism.

The library chapter, Pt.1 Ch.21, follows the Night of the Burning Barn and its sequel, the defloration variations. In this chapter the library books at Ardis to which Ada now has access, works like the Perfumed Garden or the "collection of Uncle Dan's Oriental Erotica prints" (137); are a parodic reflection of the new order at Ardis, of Van,

and Ada's indefatigable repetition of the lovemaking they began in this very library.

Prior to the deepening of her relationship with Van, Ada had not been allowed free access to the library's collections, kept

in a careful mess by Mlle Larivière and in a kind of desperate order (with the insertion of queries, calls of distress, and even imprecations, on bits of pink, red or purple paper) by a cousin of hers, Monsieur Philippe Verger, a diminutive old bachelor, morbidly silent and shy, who moused in, every other week, for a few hours of quiet work--so quiet, in fact, that one afternoon when a tallish library ladder suddenly went into an eerie backward slow-motion swoon with him high up, it embracing a windmill of volumes, he reached the floor, supine, with his ladder and books, in such a hush that guilty Ada, who had thought she was alone (pulling out and scanning the utterly unrewarding Arabian Nights), mistook his fall for the shadow of a door being stealthily opened by some soft-fleshed eunuch. (130-31)

When Van becomes intimate with Ada he threatens Mlle Larivière that if he is not permitted to remove any item he fancies from the library,

he would have Miss Vertograd, his father's librarian, a completely servile and infinitely accommodative spinster of Verger's format and presumable date of publication, post to Ardis Hall trunkfuls of eighteenth-century libertines, German sexologists, and a whole circus of Shastras and Nefsawis⁹ in literal translation with apocryphal addenda. (131)

Meek Verger, if not quite a "soft-fleshed eunuch," is decidedly virginal, yet oddly linked with Blanche. In a letter to Van Ada borrows a phrase from Blanche (who, we recall, has also told Van "je suis

⁹ "Nefsawi" here is the Sheikh Nefsawi, author of the Perfumed Garden, first published in English in 1886 by Burton's Kāma Shāstra society.

vierge): "Van, je suis sur la verge (Blanche again)" (334),¹⁰ the latter of course being much closer to Blanche's real position than "vierge." Verger has psoriasis, a condition aggravated by Van's instituting a new order in the Ardis library:

the only visible consequence of Verger's perplexities and despair was an increase in the scatter of a curious snow-white dust that he always left here and there, on the dark carpet, in this or that spot of plodding occupation--such a cruel curse on such a neat little man! (131)

Verger's "curious snow-white dust" is a wonderfully deft metamorphosis of fairy-tale Blanche's "whites," her gonorrhea.

Miss Vertograd also has Verger's disease:

At a nice Christmas party for private librarians arranged under the auspices of the Braille Club in Raduga a couple of years earlier, empathic Miss Vertograd had noticed that she and giggling Verger, with whom she was in the act of sharing a quiet little cracker (tugged apart with no audible result--nor did the gold paper frilled at both ends yield any bonbon or breloque or other favor of fate), shared also a spectacular skin disease. . . . (131-32)

The "Braille Club in Raduga" (Russian for "rainbow") is a caustic reminder of the blindness that results from Blanche's infection and of the similarity between Blanche and Demon's Radugalet "Roses" or the "runaway maid . . . stuffed with mercury." This mercury in fact appears again in

¹⁰ Blanche's speech is full of pseudo-Québécois ("Canady French") borrowings from English. English "verge," apart from the sense of "edge" or "border" in "on the verge of" can also refer to various rod-shaped objects. The word is used in the Perfumed Garden, on a page from which Nabokov draws information incorporated into a later part of the library chapter: "This is a good position for a man with a long verge" (The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi, trans. Sir Richard Burton, ed. Alan Hull Watson [St. Albans, Herts.: Panther, 1963], p. 132). This is the edition Nabokov consulted when writing Ada (see Ada 344).

the first of a series of suggestions made to Verger: "Very delicately, Miss Vertograd would transmit through Van library slips to the rather unresponsive Frenchman with this or that concise suggestion: 'Mercury!' or 'Höhensonne works wonders'" (132). But the Höhensonne (ultraviolet lamp) points not to Blanche but to Lucette, a virgin, like Verger and Vertograd, who also has problems with her skin: the red-haired daughter of red-haired Dan, Lucette must be very careful before exposing herself to the sun. Thus Lucette is involved (and indeed is the very raison d'être of the passage) when virginal Verger's psoriasis is absurdly linked with venereal disease in the last piece of advice prepared for the unfortunate librarian:

"Crimson-blotched, silver-scaled, yellow-crusts wretches, the harmless psoriatics (who cannot communicate their skin trouble and are otherwise the healthiest of people--actually, their bobo's protect them from bubas and buboes, as my teacher used to observe)¹¹ were confused with lepers--yes, lepers--in the Middle Ages, when thousands if not millions of Vergers and Vertograds crackled and howled bound by enthusiasts to stakes erected in the public squares of Spain and other fire-loving countries." But this note they decided not to plant in the meek martyr's index under PS as they had first intended. . . .

(132)

Allied to Blanche's disease and the blindness it causes, the psoriasis is also associated in a way at once ridiculous and horrific with Lucette as virgin and martyr. By comparing Blanche and Lucette in this way Nabokov insists on the human capacity for causing harm, but he

¹¹ "Bobo" is a French child-word for "hurt" or "sore." "Buba" is another name for framboesia, a "contagious disease of the skin, having many analogies with syphilis" (W2). A "bubo" is an "inflammatory swelling of a lymph gland, esp. in the groin, due to the absorption of infective material, as in gonorrhea, syphilis, or the plague" (W2).

also suggests that though the origin of a widespread evil--whether a venereal disease whose propagation is ensured through repeated sexual irresponsibility, or mass persecution--cannot be exactly ascertained, each individual act in what constitutes a whole system of oppressive disregard for others is as much subject to the demands of responsibility as actions within a narrower circle where responsibility can be more readily apportioned.

An image similar to the one above appears in an equally unlikely context, and again with no overt reference to Lucette: The scene is the dinner for which Demon has called in at Ardis:

Alas, the bird had not survived "the honor one had made to it," and after a brief consultation with Bouteillan a somewhat incongruous but highly palatable bit of saucisson d'Arles added itself to the young lady's fare of asperges en branches that everybody was now enjoying. It almost awed one to see the pleasure with which she and Demon distorted their shiny-lipped mouths in exactly the same way to introduce orally from some heavenly height the voluptuous ally of the prim lily of the valley, holding the shaft with an identical bunching of the fingers, not unlike the reformed "sign of the cross" for protesting against which (a ridiculous little schism measuring an inch or so from thumb to index) so many Russians had been burnt by other Russians only two centuries earlier on the banks of the Great Lake of Slaves. (259)

The historical allusion is to the Great Schism in the seventeenth-century Russian Orthodox church. One of the reforms that led to the schism was the requirement proposed by Nikon, the Russian patriarch, in 1654-1655, that the benedictory sign of the cross be made with three fingers rather than two. Persecution hounded the Old Believers who resisted this and other changes. But the "sign of the cross" here is linked with Lucette's account of her sexual initiation at Ada's hands:

"She kissed my krestik while I kissed hers" (375). Van feigns not to understand what Lucette means by "krestik" ("Come, come, Lucette, it means 'little cross' in Russian, that's all, what else?" [378]) and proceeds to taunt her:¹²

"Oh, I know," cried Van (quivering with evil sarcasm, boiling with mysterious rage, taking it out on the redhaired scapegoating, naive Lucette, whose only crime was to be suffused with the phantasmata of the other's innumerable lips). "Of course, I remember now. A foul taint in the singular can be a sacred mark in the plural. You are referring of course to the stigmata between the eyebrows of pure sickly young nuns whom priests had over-anointed there and elsewhere with cross-like strokes of the myrrherabol brush." (378)

The passage from the dinner scene in which Demon and Ada voluptuously devour asparagus stalks equates the supreme sensuality of father and daughter and reflects the fact that Ada's sensuality is as ready as Demon's to disregard its potential for cruelty.

Just as Van owes much of his behaviour to the poor example of his father, so Ada too follows Demon in a number of ways. Earlier in the dinner scene, Demon says to Van:

"Your dinner jacket is very nice--or, rather, it's very nice recognizing one's old tailor in one's son's clothes--like catching oneself repeating an ancestral mannerism--for example, this (wagging his left forefinger three times at the height of his temple), which my mother did in casual, pacific denial; that gene missed you, but I've seen it in my hairdresser's looking-glass when refusing to have him put Cr mlin on my bald spot. . . ."

(240)

¹² Though "krestik" is Russian for "little cross," the sense Lucette intends derives rather from the Perfumed Garden, p. 188: "Abou tertour (the crested one)" (by which, Burton notes, "the author wanted to designate . . . the . . . clitoris").

These remarks echo a slightly earlier scene, in which the three children are playing Russian scrabble:

"Je ne peux rien faire," wailed Lucette, "mais rien--with my idiotic Buchstaben, REMNILK, LINKREM . . ."

"Look," whispered Van, "c'est tout simple, shift those two syllables and you get a fortress in ancient Muscovy."

"Oh, no," said Ada, wagging her finger at the height of her temple in a way she had. "Oh, no. That pretty word does not exist in Russian. A Frenchman invented it. There is no second syllable."

.....
"Well," said Van, "you can always make a little cream, KREM or KREME--or even better--there's KREMLI, which means Yukon prisons." (227)

The link between father and daughter is strongly established, though not yet more significant than a repeated gesture. But in Lucette's account to Van of her seduction by Ada she resorts to what is later described as "Punning in an Ophelian frenzy on the feminine glans" (394). The punning includes a recollection of their Scrabble games:

"--I got stuck with six Buchstaben in the last round of a Flavita game. Mind you, I was eight and had not studied anatomy, but was doing my poor little best to keep up with two Wunderkinder. You examined and fingered my groove and quickly redistributed the haphazard sequence which made, say, LIKROT or ROTIKL and Ada flooded us both with her raven silks as she looked over our heads, and when you had completed the rearrangement, you and she came simultaneously, si je puis le mettre comme ça (Canady French), came falling on the black carpet in a paroxysm of incomprehensible merriment; so finally I quietly composed ROTIK ("little mouth") and was left with my own cheap initial. . . ."

.....
"Okay, okay," replied her and his tormentor, "but, you know, a medically minded English Scrabbler, having two more letters to cope with, could make, for example, STIRCOIL, a well-known sweat-gland stimulant, or CITROILS, which grooms use for rubbing fillies."

(379)

That this passage is to be related to the previous one is confirmed by

the fact that both deal with the "last round" of a "Flavita" game and that in both cases Lucette refers to the letters as "Buchstaben." The point of the correlation, though, is that the KREM (cream) or KREMLI of the earlier Scrabble scene, linked with Demon's Crêmlin, reappears here in Van's clever and brutal play on vaginal lubrication in STIRCOIL and CITROILS. Ada's perverse behaviour in manipulating frail Lucette to satisfy her own sexual voracity is closely allied, as the KREM-Crêmlin-CITROILS pattern points out, to Demon's own perversion. Demon's availing himself of others purely as a means to his own immediate satisfaction degenerates towards the end of his life into the pursuit of ever younger and younger girls: "he was getting more and more occupied with Spanish girls who were getting more and more youthful every year until by the end of the century, when he was sixty, with hair dyed a midnight blue, his flame had become a difficult nymphet of ten" (391-92). The "Spanish" and "nymphet" here link Demon's perversion with the Humbertian one it parodies,¹³ and thus with Lucette's fatal identification of herself with Osberg's "Doñores." Both Ada and Demon have cruelly initiated young girls into sex, both are alike in their search for the most voluptuous pleasures and in their indifference to the dreadful consequences of their pleasures, consequences which, Nabokov has suggested, amount to sheer torture.

¹³ Lolita and her name are both conceived during a Mexican honeymoon, a fact which determines the pronunciation of "Lolita": "For the big picnic on Ada's twelfth birthday . . . the child was permitted to wear her lolita (thus dubbed after the little Andalusian gipsy of that name in Osberg's novel and pronounced, incidentally, with a Spanish 't,' not a thick English one)" (77).

Lucette's introduction at Ada's hands to a full sexual coupling, the second stage of her initiation, is homosexual in nature. In this, it repeats a certain bizarre quality of the first stage of her initiation, her repeatedly overlooking Van and Ada making love: as we have seen in the previous chapter, Van makes love to Ada in a quasi-Sodomitical position. In the library chapter, after the digression on Verger's psoriasis, Van describes various books and articles that he and Ada have found in the Ardis collections, items zanily funny at first, but all touching upon Lucette's fate. There is no need now to explain the pertinence to Lucette of a story by Chateaubriand or a chapter on incest "in the opus 'Sex and Lex'" (133). But more freakish finds are no less pertinent:

Another hearty laugh shook Van when he unearthed for entomologically-minded Ada the following passage in a reliable History of Mating Habits. "Some of the perils and ridicule which attend the missionary position adopted for mating purposes by our puritanical intelligentia and so justly derided by the 'primitive' but healthy-minded natives of the Begouri Islands are pointed out by a prominent French orientalist [thick footnote, skipped here] who describes the mating habits of the fly Serromyia amorata Poupart. Copulation takes place with both ventral surfaces pressed together and the mouths touching. When the last throb (frisson) of intercourse is terminated the female sucks out the male's body content through the mouth of her impassioned partner. . . . the titbits . . . which certain male flies (but apparently not the femorata and amorata morons) bring to the female before mating, represent a prudent guarantee against the misplaced voracity of the young lady." (135)

The passage offers a comic monitory example of the dangers of en face sex, but the next paragraph suggests to Van an even more grotesque contraceptive advantage of the rear-entry approach:

Still more amusing was the "message" of a Canadian social worker, Mme de Réan-Fichini, who published her treatise, On Contraceptive

Devices, in Kapuskan patois (to spare the blushes of Estotians and United Statians; while instructing hardier fellow-workers in her special field). "Sole sura metoda," she wrote, "por decevor natura, est por un strong-guy de contino-contino-contino jusque le plesir brimz; et lors, a lultima instanta, svitchera a l'altra gropa [groove]; ma perquoi una femme ardora andor ponderosa ne se retorna kvik enof, la transita e facilitata per positio torovago"; and that term an appended glossary explained in blunt English as "the posture generally adopted in rural communities by all classes, beginning by the country gentry and ending with the lowliest farm animals throughout the United Americas from Patagony to Gasp." Ergo, concluded Van, our missionary goes up in smoke.

"Your vulgarity knows no bounds," said Ada.

"Well, I prefer to burn than to be slurped up alive by the Cheramie--or whatever you call her--and have my widow lay a lot of tiny green eggs on top of it!" (135-36)

This, then, is the basis for Van and Ada's regularly employing the rear-entry method until during their 1892 reunion Van tells Ada he has learnt he is "absolutely sterile despite his prowesses" (394).

Before Van's advent, Ada had had a rather befuddled notion of sex, a notion founded on "Pig Pigment"'s obsession with little girls' bottoms. It is not surprising that curious Lucette should arrive at a similar confusion:

She would advance up to the center of the weedy playground in front of the pavilion, and there, with an air of dreamy innocence, start to jiggle the board of an old swing that hung from the long and lofty limb of Baldy, a partly leafless but still healthy old oak (which appeared--oh, I remember, Van!--in a century-old lithograph of Ardis, by Peter de Rast, as a young colossus . . .). . . . She increased her momentum so cannily that Ada and her cavalier . . . never once witnessed the instant when the round rosy face . . . swooped up and two green eyes leveled at the astounding tandem.

(212-13)

Lucette's frequent sightings of the astounding tandem are enough to make her equate sodomy and coitus, as the lithograph by Peter de Rast ("pederast") hints--or enough, at least, to make her think of inter-

course as involving contact between the male genitalia and the female bottom. It is no wonder then that after her little bottom sits on Van's lap on the way back from the picnic in 1888 Lucette should want to know "could a boy bee impregnate a girl flower through something . . .?" (289).

The association of Lucette's virginity and her double initiation (Van and Ada's rear-entry coitus, Ada's homosexual manipulations) is repeated in a particularly grisly paragraph from the Villa Venus chapter, in the most wretched reflection of the harmfulness of the Veens' pursuit of sexual satisfaction:

Cherry, the only lad in our next (American) floramor, a little Salopian of eleven or twelve, looked so amusing with his copper curls, dreamy eyes and elfin cheekbones that two exceptionally sportive courtesans, entertaining Van, prevailed upon him one night to try the boy. Their joint efforts failed, however, to arouse the pretty catamite, who had been exhausted by too many recent engagements. His girlish crupper proved sadly defaced by the varicolored imprints of bestial clawings and flesh-twistings; but worst of all, the little fellow could not disguise a state of acute indigestion, marked by unappetizing dysenteric symptoms that coated his lover's shaft with mustard and blood, the result, no doubt, of eating too many green apples. Eventually, he had to be destroyed or given away. (355)

"Cherry" here combines the slang sense of "cherry" ("hymen," "virginity") with the "Cheramie" fly that convinces Van of the advantage of rear-entry sex. Copper-haired Cherry is thus closely linked with copper-haired Lucette's virginity and her confused and tragic sexual initiation in this appalling image of bestial indifference to the fates of others. If this transformation of the damage done to Lucette makes the horror of that damage all the starker, Lucette's fate in turn makes more poignant the fate of young Cherry and makes more dreadful (because we know so well

the reality of Lucette's life) the savage cruelty of behaviour of those who can aim at a self-satisfaction that ignores the needs of others.

But Aqua, too, is evoked in this paragraph. Cherry is a "lad . . . a little Salopian": a Salopian is a person from Shropshire, and the allusion is to A. E. Housman's wistful preoccupation with "lads" in A Shropshire Lad (1896). The only other allusion to Housman in Ada occurs in an account of Aqua's madness, of her hearing tap water talk to her in the form of "a liquid soliloquy in a tedious play, or Van's lovely voice, or a bit of poetry heard at a lecture, my lad, my pretty, my love, take pity" (23). These last words are a paraphrase of a line from the fifth poem ("Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers") in A Shropshire Lad: "Be kind, have pity, my own, my pretty." By recalling Aqua here, the Cherry paragraph gruesomely unites Van and Ada and Demon and indicts them all for their ruthless indifference towards their sexual partners and their brutal inconsiderateness towards those near to them, their passionate self-absorption that allows no thought for the needs of others.

3. Ardent Violence: Outside Ardis

By concentrating on "Edenic" Ardis and its reflections in Radugalet, in Villa Venus, in the inverse Venus and Cupid of Blanche de la Tourberie and her blind child, we have discerned the relationship between the cruelty of indifference Demon exhibits towards Aqua and his women and the inconsiderateness Van exhibits towards Lucette and the sexual partners he expects to be at his disposal. Let us now focus on Van's

behaviour outside Ardis, on the manner in which this too is always compared to his treatment of Lucette and aligned with the example his father has set.

i. Brownhill

When Van leaves Ardis in 1884 he sets out "for Ladoga, N.A., to spend a fortnight there with his father and three tutors before returning to school in cold Luga, Mayne" (156). Demon assumes Van must be fed up with Marina's "two little girls" (163), and presses his son to join him at a cocktail party

given by the excellent widow of an obscure Major de Prey. . . . that excellent and influential lady who wishes to help a friend of mine" (clearing his throat) "has, I'm told, a daughter of fifteen summers, called Cordula, who is sure to recompense you for playing Blindman's Buff all summer with the babes of Ardis Wood."

"We played mostly Scrabble and Snap," said Van. "Is the needy friend also in my age group?"

"She's a budding Duse," replied Demon austerely, "and the party is strictly a 'prof push.' You'll stick to Cordula de Prey, I, to Cordelia O'Leary."

"D'accord," said Van. (163-64)

Van pays little attention to Cordula de Prey, "round-faced, small, \ dumpy, in a turtle-neck sweater of dark-red wool" (164), but later that evening he runs into her at a bookstore, where Cordula informs him that she is Ada's schoolmate, and that Ada's first letter from Ardis had gushed

"about how sweet, clever, unusual, irresistible--"

"Silly girl. When was that?"

"In June, I imagine. She wrote again later, but her reply-- because I was quite jealous of you--really I was!--and had fired back lots of questions--well, her reply was evasive, and practically void of Van." (164)

The "quite jealous of you" prompts Van to wonder whether Cordula might be the lesbian Ada had implied when farewelling Van at Forest Fork.

His reply dismisses the suggestion Cordula has been making:

"My cousin Ada," said Van, "is a little girl of eleven or twelve, and much too young to fall in love with anybody, except people in books. Yes, I too found her sweet. A trifle on the blue-stockingside, perhaps, and, at the same time, impudent and capricious—but, yes, sweet."

"I wonder," murmured Cordula, with such a nice nuance of pensive tone that Van could not tell whether she meant to close the subject, or leave it ajar, or open a new one.

"How could I get in touch with you?" he asked. "Would you come to Riverlane? Are you a virgin?" (165)

Van treats Cordula crudely here, almost as a whore; indeed, when next he sees her, as Ada's chaperone at Brownhill College, it strikes Van "that the dumpy little Countess resembled his first whorelet" (168).

This first whorelet is described in the chapter immediately preceding Ardis the First. Pt.1 Ch.4 depicts Van's first amorous affairs before coming to Ardis, during his first year at Riverlane, an English "public school" in Luga, Mayne. A few blocks from the school-grounds a widow, Mrs Tapirov, runs a shop of objets d'art and antiques which Van visits:

Crystal vases with crimson roses and golden-brown asters were set here and there in the fore part of the shop--on a giltwood console, on a lacquered chest, on the shelf of a cabinet, or simply along the carpeted steps leading to the next floor where great wardrobes and flashy dressers semi-encircled a singular company of harps. He satisfied himself that those flowers were artificial and thought it puzzling that such imitations always pander so exclusively to the eye instead of also copying the damp fat feel of live petal and leaf. When he called next day for the object (unremembered now, eighty years later) that he wanted repaired or duplicated, it was not ready or had not been obtained. In passing, he touched a half-opened rose and was cheated of the sterile texture his fingertips had expected when cool life kissed them with pouting lips. "My

daughter," said Mrs Tapirov, who saw his surprise, "always puts a bunch of real ones among the fake pour attraper le client. You drew the joker." As he was leaving she came in, a school-girl in a gray coat with brown shoulder-length ringlets and a pretty face. On another occasion (for a certain part of the thing--a frame, perhaps--took an infinite time to heal or else the entire article proved to be unobtainable after all) he saw her curled up with her schoolbooks in an armchair--a domestic item among those for sale. He never spoke to her. He loved her madly. It must have lasted at least one term. (31-32)

With a superb sense of contrast, Van continues:

That was love, normal and mysterious. Less mysterious and considerably more grotesque were the passions which several generations of schoolmasters had failed to eradicate, and which as late as 1883 still enjoyed an unparalleled vogue at Riverlane. Every dormitory had its catamite. One hysterical lad from Upsala, cross-eyed, loose-lipped, with almost abnormally awkward limbs, but with a wonderfully tender skin texture and the round creamy charms of Bronzino's Cupid (the big one, whom a delighted satyr discovers in a lady's bower), was much prized and tortured by a group of foreign boys, mostly Greek and English, led by Cheshire, the rugby ace; and partly out of bravado, partly out of curiosity, Van surmounted his disgust and coldly watched their rough orgies. (32)

But Van notes that he soon "abandoned this surrogate for a more natural though equally heartless divertissement" (32):

The aging woman who sold barley sugar and Lucky Louse magazines in the corner shop, which by tradition was not strictly out of bounds, happened to hire a young helper, and Cheshire, the son of a thrifty lord, quickly ascertained that this fat little wench could be had for a Russian green dollar. Van was one of the first to avail himself of her favors. These were granted in semi-darkness, among crates and sacks at the back of the shop after hours. The fact of his having told her he was sixteen and a libertine instead of fourteen and a virgin proved a source of embarrassment to our hell-raker when he tried to bluster his inexperience into quick action but only succeeded in spilling on the welcome mat what she would have gladly helped him take indoors. Things went better six minutes later, after Cheshire and Zographos were through; but only at the next mating party did Van really begin to enjoy her gentleness, her soft sweet grip and hearty joggle. He knew she was nothing but a fussy pig-pink whorelet. . . .

Mrs Tapirov's daughter and the "whorelet" are paired in order to be contrasted: both are encountered amidst shop items, both are associated with a lone older woman, but one is Van's "true love" and the other is a whore. The contrast of the two girls prefigures the contrast between Ada (who in her flower paintings mixes real flowers and fakes, combining "one species with another (unrecorded but possible)" [99]) and Cordula de Prey (whom Van accosts in a bookstore, who explicitly reminds him of "his first whorelet"). Both girls are the daughters of actresses, but one indeed is Van's true love, and one is treated as coarsely as if she were a whore. And, moreover, just as a homosexual episode provides the transition from true love to whorelet in the earlier chapter, so Van shifts from Ardis's Ada to Cordula de Prey amidst overt and insistent suspicions of homosexuality.

If Van's schoolmates have set him an example in the callous treatment of others, even this is in a sense Demon's doing. For Demon knew exactly the ethos of the school he sent his son to, and even encouraged Van to excel on the school's own terms:

Two years earlier, when about to begin his first prison term at the fashionable and brutal boarding school, to which other Veens had gone before him . . . Van had resolved to study some striking stunt that would give him an immediate and brilliant ascendancy. Accordingly, after a conference with Demon, King Wing, the latter's wrestling master, taught the strong lad to walk on his hands by means of a special play of the shoulder muscles. . . . (81)

Van proudly records that four years later, thanks to King Wing's coaching, he "could stun a man with one blow of either elbow" (82) and indeed he boasts of "knocking out the biggest bully on his first day at Riverlane School" (184). At the party thrown by Cordula's mother to which

Demon brings his son, the handwalking lessons are recalled when

Cordula's mother . . . introduced Van to a Turkish acrobat with tawny hairs on his beautiful orang-utan hands and the fiery eyes of a charlatan--which he was not, being a great artist in his circular field. Van was so taken up by his talk, by the training tips he lavished on the eager boy, and by envy, ambition, respect and other youthful emotions, that he had little time for Cordula. . . . (164)

By recalling Demon's wrestling master, King Wing, the acrobat serves as a subtle reminder of the influence of Demon behind Van's cold and cruel self-assurance, behind the assumption of the rights of power and privilege that has been fostered in him at Riverlane, behind the coarseness of his treating Cordula de Prey almost as a whore--which of course is also in more direct and immediate emulation of Demon with his new mistress at the Countess de Prey's party.

When he comes to Brownhill College to meet Ada, chaperoned, according to the school's absurdly strict etiquette, by Cordula de Prey, Van starts to seethe with jealousy towards the innocent chaperone. When earlier Ada had hinted at a lesbian lover, Van had replied: "The girls don't matter . . . it's the fellows I'll kill," and even now he thinks he is not jealous of Cordula because he is aroused by the thought of her and Ada's making love: "On the contrary: a private picture of their fondling each other kept pricking him with perverse gratification. Before his inner bloodshot eye Ada was duplicated and enriched, twinned by entwinement, giving what he gave, taking what he took: Corada, Adula." (168) In fact of course despite his arousal Van is furiously jealous, and he taunts Cordula and Ada by referring to Proust:

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." (168-69)¹⁴

The association of Proust and fiery jealousy reveals another link between Van and his father, for as we have seen in Chapter 3, Demon discovers his rival for Marina's love through a Parmigianino picture "suggested" by Proust, and the structural role of his jealousy is equated with the anticipation of Marcel's jealousy by that of Swann.

Having found the milk bar approved by Brownhill College to be too crowded, Van, Ada and Cordula walk toward the railway station café.

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

¹⁴ The cheeks of Albertine are indeed absurdly emphasized in the Balbec section of "À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs," and Albertine has been derived from both an Albert Nahmias and an Albert Le Cuziat in Proust's life. See George D. Painter, Proust: The Later Years (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), pp. 208, 271, for discussions of these identifications.

migraines, because she did not want him to see her in the rôle of a moribund Romeo.

(On fait son grand Joyce after doing one's pétit Proust. In Ada's lovely hand.) (169)¹⁵

The "moribund Romeo," as we saw in Chapter 1, echoes Van's wild jealousy without object at the end of Ardis the First. But even as his jealousy is rising again here, Van thinks he recognizes a harlot from Toulouse (not far from Ardis according to Antiterrian geography). This collocation, a microcosm of the whole chapter's contrast between Van's treating Cordula as a whore and his intense jealousy of what he supposes (quite wrongly) to be a lesbian relationship between her and Ada, reveals the purity of Van's hypocrisy, and will help to disclose that like his sexual brutality and his flaring jealousy Van's hypocrisy derives to a considerable degree from the precedent set by his father.

At the end of Pt.1 Ch.1., in the Cockloft scene, the herbarium lists a "Petal of orchid, one of 99 orchids, if you please, mailed to me yesterday, Special Delivery, c'est bien le cas de le dire, from Villa Armina, Alpes Maritimes. Have laid aside ten for Aqua to be taken to her at her Home." (7-8) This of course is Demon's congratulatory tribute to Marina on the birth of Van, who on discovering the herbarium

¹⁵ The grand Joyce is this: "tonic bar," seen as a double pun on the musical terms, recalls Ch.12 of Ulysses (Sirens), where music dominates both the scene, in the bar of the Ormond Hotel, and the mode of narration; Nabokov's style, on the other hand, recalls the deliberate and wonderful stylistic clumsiness of Joyce's Ch.16, set in the Cabman's shelter, a small coffeehouse under the overhead railway lines by Dublin's Custom House. The awkwardness of "Our damp trio . . . undid their rain-coats," the limpness of "a nice corner table," the repetition that shows a lack of forethought ("but she did not, because she had cut her hair because of dreadful migraines, because . . .") all resemble the stylistic flaws so brilliantly arrayed in the "Eumaeus" chapter.

fourteen years later deduces "that the orchids came from Demon who preferred to stay by the sea, his dark-blue great-grandmother" (8).

After Ada outdoes Van's deductions, Van adds, as narrator:

Re the "dark-blue" allusion, left hanging:

A former viceroy of Estoty, Prince Ivan Temmosiniy, father of the children's great-great-grandmother, Princess Sofia Zemski (1755-1809), and a direct descendant of the Yaroslav rulers of pre-Tartar times, had a millenium-old name that meant in Russian "dark blue." . . . In later years he had never been able to reread Proust . . . without a roll-wave of surfeit and a rasp of gravelly heartburn; yet his favorite purple passage remained the one concerning the name "Guermantes," with whose hue his adjacent ultramarine merged in the prism of his mind, pleasantly teasing Van's artistic vanity. (9)¹⁶

But in fact the "'dark-blue' allusion, left hanging" ("the sea, his dark-blue great-grandmother") is a specific allusion to Ulysses, where Buck Mulligan says to Stephen: "Isn't the sea . . . a grey sweet mother? . . . oinopa ponton [the wine-dark sea--B. B.]. . . our great sweet mother" (U 7). The orchids from Villa Armina which signal that Demon and Marina are lovers once again, at the cost of the anguish of Aqua's feelings, indicate Demon's absurd hypocrisy: he is wildly jealous of Marina, and marries Aqua as if to spite her sister. Almost immediately he proceeds to be unfaithful towards Aqua, for whose pain--and it is the anguish caused by Demon's unfaithfulness that drives her to her first sanatorium at Ex--Demon takes no thought whatever. The pairing of the Joyce and Proust allusions here signals, when it is seen with the paired Proust and Joyce allusions in the Brownhill chapter, that the

¹⁶ The purple passage is at the beginning of "Lecôté de Guermantes." The Guermantes hue is "ce mauve si doux, trop brillant, trop neuf" (II, 12).

same monstrous self-centredness which gives rise to Demon's hypocrisy is present in his son, so brutally forward to Cordula, so seethingly jealous of her possible involvement with Ada.

ii. Kalugano

When Van flees Ardis at the end of his second stay there, the ensuing action recalls both the impassioned departure from Ardis the First and the Brownhill chapter we have just considered. Again there appears the same combination of jealousy (now even more obviously violent), readiness to treat women with brutal carnality, and vicious hypocrisy, and once again Van's behaviour is compared with that of his father.

From Ardis Van heads for Kalugano, intending to hunt out Philip Rack, the nearer of his two rivals. He leaves one crammed train and changes into another "even more jerky and crowded" (301). He pushes through the first-class sections and spots Cordula and her mother in a full compartment. Suddenly realizing he might be able to find Percy de Préy's address from his cousin, Van enters the compartment. As the train lurches he steps on the toes of an old man who asks him, not impolitely, to take care. Trembling with the hostility he is feeling towards Rack and Percy de Préy, Van savagely berates the elderly passenger until Cordula's mother intervenes: "Cordula, . . . why don't you go with this angry young demon to the tea-car? I think I'll take my thirty-nine winks now." (302) The "angry young demon" aptly characterizes the Demonic inconsiderateness and self-concentrated romantic fury that Van has displayed.

Van and Cordula find a table "in the very roomy and rococo 'crumpeter,' as Kalugano College students used to call it in the 'Eighties and 'Nineties" (302). (Note how precisely the train's crumpeter and the school slang recall the railway station café at Brownhill School.) Van declares to Cordula that she has "grown lovely and languorous. You are even lovelier now. Cordula is no longer a virgin! Tell me--do you happen to have Percy de Prey's address? I mean we all know he's invading Tartary--but where could a letter reach him?" (303) After Cordula tells him she will try to find Percy's address, Van says:

"Tell me about your affairs of the heart."

She was not a bright little girl. But she was a loquacious and really quite exciting little girl. He started to caress her under the table, but she gently removed his hand, whispering "womenses," as whimsically as another girl had done in some other dream. He cleared his throat loudly and ordered half-a-bottle of cognac, having the waiter open it in his presence as Demon advised. She talked on and on, and he lost the thread of her discourse, or rather it got enmeshed in the rapid landscape, which his gaze followed over her shoulder, with a sudden ravine recording what Jack said when his wife 'phoned, or a lone tree in a clover field impersonating abandoned John, or a romantic stream running down a cliff and reflecting her brief bright affair with Marquis Quizz Quisana.

A pine forest fizzled out and factory chimneys replaced it. The train clattered past a roundhouse, and slowed down, groaning. A hideous station darkened the day.

"Good Lord," cried Van, "that's my stop."

He put money on the table, kissed Cordula's willing lips and made for the exit. (303-04)

The sudden departure from the train's crumpeter inverts yet closely re-enacts Van's sudden departure from the Brownhill café as he heard an incoming train and suddenly fled the intolerable strain of the situation. At the same time there is a superb double irony: Van is making advances to Cordula in a carriage that recalls the scene of his being jealous of Cordula's relations with Ada four years earlier, and he is making

advances to a girl from whom he has just sought the address of a rival he intends to destroy. Deftly tucked in, too, is Demon's advice on drinking etiquette: masquerading as a mere detail of style, this in fact points out that Van's coarseness and hypocrisy are based on the parental model.

As Van rushes for the exit, he crashes

into somebody who had stooped to pick up a bag: "On n'est pas foujat à ce point," observed the latter: a burly military man with a reddish mustache and a staff captain's insignia.

Van brushed past him, and when both had come down on the platform, glove-slapped him smartly across the face. (304)

Like Dr. Hlatonov, the invalid on whose foot Van had stepped, Captain Tapper has nothing to do with the real cause of Van's fury¹⁷ yet is nevertheless the object Van seizes on to vent his hostility. Van and the soldier exchange cards: "'Demon's son?' grunted Captain Tapper, of Wild Violet Lodge, Kalugano. 'Correct,' said Van. 'I'll put up, I guess, at the Majestic; if not, a note will be left for your second or seconds. You'll have to get me one, I can't very well ask the concierge to do it.'" (304-05) Van books in at the Majestic and sets off looking for a music store, where he might be able to find the address of piano-teacher Rack. On the way he buys his second cane, having left the previous one at the Maidenhair station. He suddenly remembers he has not left a message for Tapper's seconds, so he returns to the hotel:

He found them sitting in the lounge and requested them to settle matters rapidly—he had more important business than that. "Ne

¹⁷ This is emphasized by the fact of Tapper's blatant homosexuality—which simultaneously associates Tapper with Cordula as the object of Van's rage in Pt.1 Ch.27.

grubit' sekundantam" (never be rude to seconds), said Demon's voice in his mind. (306)

One of the two seconds (who are also both homosexual) explains that

The merest adumbration of an apology on Baron Veen's part would clinch the matter with a token of gracious finality.

"If," said Van, "the good Captain expects that, he can go and stick his pistol up his gracious anality." (306)

Van in his anger ignores his father's precept, but his whole attitude towards duelling is patently a reflection of his father's own enthusiasm for the code.

By the time Van returns to the music shop, it is closed:

He stared for a moment at the harps and the guitars and the flowers in silver vases on consoles receding in the dusk of looking-glasses, and recalled the schoolgirl whom he had longed for so keenly half a dozen years ago--Rose? Roza? Was that her name? Would he have been happier with her than with his pale fatal sister?

He walked for a while along Main Street--one of a million Main Streets--and then, with a surge of healthy hunger, entered a passably attractive restaurant. He ordered a beefsteak with roast potatoes, apple pie and claret. At the far end of the room, on one of the red stools of the burning bar, a graceful harlot in black--tight bodice, wide skirt, long black gloves, black-velvet picture hat--was sucking a golden drink through a straw. In the mirror behind the bar, amid colored glints, he caught a blurred glimpse of her russety blond beauty; he thought he might sample her later on, but when he glanced again she had gone. (307)

The pairing of Ada and Mrs. Tapirov's daughter here and the second vision of a harlot in a bar remind us of the cocotte from Toulouse in the bar at Brownhill and the association Van made between Cordula and his first whorelet. Just as then Van was hypocrite enough to treat Cordula as a whore and to be wildly jealous of her relations with Ada, so now he caresses Cordula under the table as he seeks from her the address of one rival and thinks of accosting a whore while looking out for the other rival he hopes to destroy.

At the beginning of this duel chapter, Van writes:

Aqua used to say that only a very cruel or very stupid person, or innocent infants, could be happy on Demonica, our splendid planet. Van felt that for him to survive on this terrible Antiterra, in the multi-colored and evil world into which he was born, he had to destroy or at least maim for life, two men. He had to find them immediately; delay itself might impair his power of survival. (301)

It is a telling irony that in invoking Aqua to confirm the reality and intensity of human anguish Van calls on an example of Demon's hypocrisy at its worst and points, though he cannot see it, right at the model for his own blind self-concentration. No sooner had Demon found Marina unfaithful than he pursued his rival and tried to castrate him in the ensuing duel; but almost immediately on marrying Aqua, he had begun to be unfaithful to her, totally ignoring the pain his infidelity might cause her frail mind. With exactly the same perfect hypocrisy, Van races after his rivals, so full of his own grief he cannot spare a thought for anyone else's pain--the pain his violence of temper unleashes on an incidental Platonov or would unleash on an out-of-range Percy de Prey--and yet so unwilling to consider the feelings of anyone but himself that he does not think of the lasting pain the satisfaction of a momentary sexual urge might cause the woman he loves.

iii. Paris

After his separation from Ada at the end of their Manhattan reunion in 1893 the first full scene in which Van appears is in Paris in 1901:

On a bleak morning between the spring and summer of 1901, in Paris, as Van . . . upswinging a furled English umbrella, strode past a particularly unattractive sidewalk café among the many

lining the Avenue Guillaume Pitt, a chubby bald man in a rumpled brown suit with a watch-chained waistcoat stood up and hailed him.

Van considered for a moment those red round cheeks, that black goatee.

"Ne uznayosh' (You don't recognize me)?"

"Greg! Grigoriy Akimovich!" cried Van tearing off his glove.

"I grew a regular vollbart last summer. You'd never have known me then. Beer? Wonder what you do to look so boyish, Van."

"Diet of champagne, not beer," said Professor Veen, putting on his spectacles and signaling to a waiter with the crook of his 'umber.' (453)

As Van says, he has not seen Greg Erminin since 1888, since the picnic at Ardis the Second:

"I last saw you thirteen years ago, riding a black pony--no, a black Silentium. Bozhe moy!"

"Yes--Bozhe moy, you can well say that. Those lovely, lovely agonies in lovely, lovely Ardis! Oh, I was absolyutno bezumno (madly) in love with your cousin!"

"You mean Miss Veen? I did not know it. How long--"

"Neither did she. I was terribly--"

"How long are you staying--"

"--terribly shy, because, of course, I realized that I could not compete with her numerous boy friends." (454)

Note the lightning-quick flaring of Van's jealousy, the coldness of "Miss Veen? I did not know it," the speed with which Van finds an alternative continuation when Greg's next remark reveals that in fact he has never been a serious rival. But that Van's rapid jealousy would have led to something else--a duel, indeed--is made subtly certain. Greg's black pony (see above, pp. 95-98) marked the triumph of Van over any "rivalry" from Greg when on the day after her 1884 birthday picnic Ada showed no interest in Greg's offer of his pony. The pony is recalled in black Morio, the steed Van gallops away on from Forest Fork. Van is filled with bitter rage at the mere possibility of rivalry, even though by recalling Greg's pony the black steed suggests Van can have nothing to fear. But the motorcycle Van rides to Forest Fork for his next meeting

with Ada foreshadows the new black Silentium Greg brings to the 1888 picnic, and, more immediately ominous, the new convertible in which Percy de Prey arrives. But what if Van had been wrong at the picnic in seeing only Percy as a rival, "in believing that Ada remained unaffected by Greg's devotion" (268)? The answer is contained in the furled umbrella which Van has by his side as he sits with Greg in the Parisian café. The umbrella and its crook recall the three canes Van acquires during his hunting down of Philip Rack at the end of Ardis the Second and the riding crop at the end of Ardis the First: had Van's swift jealousy not been dissipated at once by Greg's "Neither did she" it would indubitably have led to a duel on the first pretext that could be found.

Van and Greg part and

A moment later, as happens so often in farces and foreign cities, Van ran into another friend. With a surge of delight he saw Cordula in a tight scarlet skirt bending with baby words of comfort over two unhappy poodlets attached to the waiting-post of a sausage shop. Van stroked her with his fingertips, and . . . she straightened up indignantly and turned around (indignation instantly replaced by gay recognition). . . . (456)

Van notes that fashions have revolved back to what they were a dozen years ago, when he last saw Cordula--so time has been recaptured, as the eager rake points out to Cordula:

She plunged into a torrent of polite questions--but he had a more important matter to settle at once--while the flame still flickered.

"Let's not squander," he said, "the tumescence of retrieved time on the gush of small talk. I'm bursting with energy, if that's what you want to know. Now look; it may sound silly and insolent but I have an urgent request. Will you cooperate with me in cornuting your husband? It's a must!"

"Really, Van!" exclaimed angry Cordula. "You go a bit far.

I'm a happy wife. My Tobachok adores me. We'd have ten children by now if I'd not been careful with him and others."
(456-57)

But Van's persistence wears down Cordula's resistance, and they cross the street to a drab little hotel where "Their brisk nub and its repetition lasted fifteen minutes in all" (457). Cordula has to rush off to lunch with the Goals (the Viceroy of France is named after de Gaulle), and as she does she declares: "You're a very bad boy and I'm a very bad girl. But it was fun--even though you've been speaking to me not as you would to a lady friend but as you probably do to little whores." (458)

When Van treats Cordula purely as a whore and insists on his sexual gratification, his crassness (of a piece with his treatment of Cordula in Ladoga--"Are you a virgin?"--and on the Kalugano train) remains unsavoury despite Cordula's compliance and enjoyment. No less unattractive is this new manifestation of his hypocrisy: he is still ready, even if only for a moment, to wreak vengeance upon Greg Erminin for being one of Ada's lovers yet within half an hour has twice made love to Cordula, of whom he had also once been jealous.

Just before parting with Van, Greg had told him that he had heard from Tobak, Cordula's husband, that Lucette was in town, at the Alphonse Four. When Van runs into Cordula, he confirms the address, and heads for the hotel. Lucette is not in, so Van crosses the street to Ovenman's:

Upon entering, he stopped for a moment to surrender his coat; but he kept his black fedora and stick-slim umbrella as he had seen his father do in that sort of bawdy, albeit smart, place which decent women did not frequent--at least, unescorted. He . . . made out . . . the girl whose silhouette he recalled having seen now and then . . . ever since his pubescence, passing

alone, drinking alone, like Blök's Incognita. It was a queer feeling--as of something replayed by mistake, part of a sentence misplaced on the proof sheet, a scene run prematurely, a repeated blemish, a wrong turn of time. (460)

It is no wonder that Van should feel this a wrong turn of time, for Lucette at the bar in black, wearing a picture hat and mimicking the Toulouse-Lautrec poster bizarrely recalls the "cocotte from Toulouse" in the railway station café where Van sat, frustrated, with Ada and Cordula, and the "harlot in black" in a "black velvet picture hat" Van sees at the bar in a Kalugano restaurant shortly after leaving Cordula and her train.

It is important, as we shall see in the next two chapters, that it should be Lucette who is involved in this strange twisting of time, but for the moment let us focus attention on two details of the opening lines above: a "stick-slim umbrella" that calls to mind Demon's earlier "slim umbrella" (433), and a hint of Demonic style. Demon's treatment of others as means to his own sexual ends is by now firmly associated with Van's own sexual exploitativeness, and Lucette, by means of the Brownhill cocotte and the Kalugano harlot and by virtue of the locale, "that sort of bawdy . . . place which decent women did not frequent," is emphatically placed in the position of one of the whores Van so freely uses. Yet Van will not make love to Lucette, despite her adoration and eagerness and beauty: he shows himself capable of a restraint beyond what his father could find even if the restraint is tragically overdue.

Van shows restraint and considerateness towards Lucette in turning down her imploring invitations because he knows he could never

love her as he does Ada, because he refuses "to wreck her life with a brief affair" (491); yet these very virtues serve to point out the limitations of his moral vision. In Part 4 Van describes the past as "a constant accumulation of images. . . . a generous chaos out of which the genius of total recall . . . can pick anything he pleases: . . . a russet black-hatted beauty at a Parisian bar in '1901; a humid red rose among artificial ones in 1883" (545). There is no "chaos" in this juxtaposition of Lucette at the bar and the real rose placed among artificial ones by Mrs Tapirov's daughter, not is it accidental that just before the first appearance of a black-hatted whore, Van remembers his "first whorelet" (168), or that just before the second harlot in black he thinks of "the schoolgirl whom he had longed for so keenly half a dozen years ago--Rose? Roza?" (307).

Van thinks of that girl as Rose or Roza because he recollects the real roses she puts among the imitations:

In passing, he touched a half-opened rose and was cheated of the sterile texture his fingertips had expected when cool life kissed them with pouting lips. "My daughter . . . always puts a bunch of real ones among the fake pour attraper le client." (32)

"On another occasion," Van records, "he saw her curled up with her schoolbooks in an armchair--a domestic item among those for sale" (32). Lucette for Van is a real rose among the fakes, a domestic item among those for sale. Not only is she real in comparison with the art of Toulouse-Lautrec, she is real in comparison with the whores who offer a simulacrum of love; she is a domestic item, the little girl he has known too well, among the whores she is linked with in time (Brownhill, Kalugano) and space (the not quite reputable Ovenman's bar).

Van can see that Lucette is not someone with whom he can just engage in sex without considering the rest of her life: she is simply too real for him. Yet he cannot see that others, too, whom he uses merely as whores, are equally real, have lives that extend beyond his need for them, lives that must be affected by their contact with his life. The women whom he uses may be conditioned by such use into an indifference towards themselves akin to that shown them by Van and his like. They may be degraded into accepting their being used as means, but nevertheless they too are real, and though Van is at least better than his father in not continuing to ignore Lucette's needs as Demon has Aqua's, though he recognizes the reality of Lucette's life, it is an appalling failure of his imagination that he can still treat all other women as if, almost, they had no life beyond their existence as a means to fulfilling his "needs."

iv. Lucette and the Rivals

In Ovenman's bar Van, still wearing his hat and carrying his stick-slim umbrella, stands ogling Lucette with "the crook of his silk-swathed cane lifted in profile almost up to his mouth" (460). If Van's canes are so emphatically the emblem and instrument of his violence, and if indeed this very "silk-swathed cane" has been significantly present as Van's jealousy momentarily flared towards Greg Erminin, is it not awkward to stress the umbrella here, as Van looks at Lucette?

No, not at all. Indeed, the cane here is the culmination of another unexpected but necessary pattern.

The picture-hatted girls at the bar have before been associated

with Van's violent jealousy. In the Brownhill railway café, the cocotte from Toulouse appears just when Ada as "moribund Romeo" serves to recollect Van's whirling riding crop in the earlier Morio-Moore passage. It is just before he sees the "graceful harlot in black" at the bar of a Kalugano restaurant that Van acquires "his second walking stick. . . . a rude, stout article with a convenient grip and an alpenstockish point capable of gouging out translucent bulging eyes" (305).

Lucette too has before--many times, indeed--been associated with the fury of Van's jealousy, the brute violence of his intended revenges upon Percy de Prey, Philip Rack, Andrey Vinelander and others. When Lucette visits Van at Kingston and tells him of her having made love with Ada, Van does not react with horror to Lucette's disclosure:

"Are you horrified, Van? Do you loathe us?"

"On the contrary," replied Van, bringing off a passable imitation of bawdy mirth. "Had I not been a heterosexual male, I would have been a Lesbian." (382)

But just as at Brownhill, where an imagined picture of Ada and Cordula's "fondling each other kept pricking him with perverse gratification" (168), a sexual titillation in envisaging Ada's involvement with another girl is not incompatible in Van with an intense jealousy, and he has earlier reacted to Lucette's disclosure by "quivering with evil sarcasm, boiling with mysterious rage" (378).

Lucette concludes her story:

"She abandoned me. . . . Yes, she started a rather sad little affair with Johnny, a young star from Fuerteventura . . . her exact odnoletok (coeval), practically her twin in appearance, born the same year, the same day, the same instant--" (380)

Pierced by the thought of this hitherto unknown affair, Van replies to

the "twin . . . born . . . the same instant" with a controlled outburst on the impossibility of simultaneous twins: as he notes later, he is apt to relieve a pang of anger by pedantic diatribes, "bombastic and arcane utterances" (530) like his remarks on Proust at Brownhill. But the idea of simultaneous twins makes Ada and the young star Johnny parallels to Ada and Lucette. For Lucette has told Van:

She kissed my krestik while I kissed hers, our heads clamped in such odd combinations that Brigitte, a little chambermaid who blundered in with her candle, thought for a moment, though naughty herself, that we were giving birth simultaneously to baby girls, your Ada bringing out une rousse, and no one's Lucette, une brune." (375)

This second set of simultaneous births establishes a close similarity between Lucette and one of Ada's male lovers, and Van is acutely jealous of both.

After Van has declaimed against the possibility of simultaneous twins, Lucette continues:

"I only meant . . . that he was a handsome Hispano-Irish boy, dark and pale, and people mistook them for twins. I did not say they were really twins. Or 'driplets.'"

Driplets? Driplets? Now who pronounced it that way? Who? Who? A dripping ewes-dropper in a dream? Did the orphans live? But we must listen to Lucette.

"After a year or so she found out that an old pederast kept him and she dismissed him, and he shot himself on a beach at high tide but surfers and surgeons saved him, and now his brain is damaged; he will never be able to speak."

"One can always fall back on mutes," said Van gloomily. "He could act the speechless eunuch in 'Stambul, my bulbul' or the stable boy disguised as a kennel girl who brings a letter." (381)

This passage is rich in references to Philip Rack and Percy de Prey.

"Driplets" recalls Rack, who at the beginning of Ardis the Second has

"to return to Kalugano with his Elsie, who Doc Ecksreher thought 'would

present him with driplets in dry weeks" (202). When Van after his duel with Tapper is wounded and taken to the Lakeview Hospital in Kalugano, he finds that Rack is there too because "a poison had seeped into his system. . . . administered . . . by . . . his wife who . . . had just had a complicated miscarriage in the maternity ward. Yes, triplets--how did he guess?" (313) Just as Van does not attack Rack only because he finds him on the verge of death, so, it is implied, Van does not chase after Johnny only because this potential rival is almost destroyed by his suicide attempt.

But the "dripping ewes-dropper" refers not only to Rack's wife and her triplets, but also to a parodic account of inbreeding in a discussion of incest in the library chapter at Ardis: "orgies of indiscriminate inbreeding (somewhere in Tartary fifty generations of ever woollier and woollier sheep had recently ended abruptly in one hairless, five-legged, impotent little lamb . . .)" (134). Incest in Ada as we have seen in the last chapter always touches upon the entangling of Lucette in Van and Ada's lives. But Lucette is much more directly implied in the "ewes-dropper," for the word recalls "that stray ardilla daintily leavesdropping" which is so exactly equated with Lucette (see above, pp. 443-44).

Van's gloomy response to Lucette's account of Johnny's attempted suicide and his loss of speech deftly evokes Percy de Prey. The "stable boy disguised as a kennel girl" recalls the day after the second Ardis picnic and Van's fight with Percy. A messenger, a boyish-looking girl or girlish-looking boy, delivers to Van a note from Percy de Prey offering to meet for a duel if Van wishes it. Percy does not want his

departure for the Crimean War to be misconstrued as a desertion of a more personal call on his honour, but Van, not knowing yet that Percy is Ada's lover, sees no need for combat. After telling this to the pretty messenger, he adds: "I would be interested to know--this could be decided in a jiffy behind that tree--what you are, stable boy or kennel girl?" (284).

"Stambul, my bulbul" points to Percy de Prey by means of the "Turkish" motif¹⁸ (here, Istanbul) and especially by the nightingale (bulbul) associated with his death. In Chapter 1 (see above, pp. 78-80) we noted the connection between Percy's death, as imagined by Van ("I'm alive--who's that?--civilian--sympathy--thirsty--daughter with pitcher--that's my damned gun--don't . . . an invaluable detail in that strip of thought would have been--perhaps, next to the pitcher peri--a glint, a shadow, a stab of Ardis" [320]) and the incident of Van's throwing a cone at a woman of marble bending over a stamnos and his frightening a hawfinch. The concatenation of "Stambul, my bulbul" and "stable boy disguised as a kennel girl" stresses that Percy's death in the war alone prevented Van from duelling his rival, and confirms once more that Johnny would also have been fought had he not virtually disposed of himself.

But the very passage that links Percy's death most strongly with the conethrowing incident, the one that brings into this complex Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and an imagined "Ode to Florence Nightingale," also surrounds Lucette:

¹⁸ See above, pp. 359-60.

"Zdraste, Ivan Dementievich," said Van, greeting his fourteen-year-old self, shirtless, in shorts, aiming a conical missile at the marble fore-image of a Crimean girl doomed to offer an everlasting draught of marble water to a dying marine from her bullet-chipped jar.

Skip Lucette skipping rope.

Ah, the famous first finch.

"No, that's a kitayskaya punochka (Chinese Wall Bunting)." (399)

Lucette is tied in other ways too to Percy's death. One instance: as Mascodagama, Van concludes his number with "a Crimean cabaret dancer. . . . Fragile, red-haired 'Rita' . . . from Chufut Kale, where, she nostalgically said, the Crimean cornel . . . bloomed yellow among the arid rocks, bore an odd resemblance to Lucette." (185) These lines are echoed and Lucette is yoked again with de Prey when Percy's death-- after he has been shot in "a skirmish with Khazar guerillas in a ravine near Chew-Foot-Calais, as the American troops pronounced 'Chufutkale'" (319)--is witnessed by a fellow soldier from a "ditch overgrown with cornel and medlar" (319).

But let us go back to Lucette's telling Van about Ada's affair with "Johnny, a young star from Fuerteventura." By the controlled oblique fury of Van's diatribe on simultaneous twins, by the "Driblets" and the "Stambul, my bulbul," Johnny is associated with Van's other potential victims in a way that makes it plain he too would have been pursued by Van had he not suffered brain damage and become a mute after his suicide attempt. But Johnny is also particularly closely associated with Lucette: because his and Lucette's relationships with Ada come to Van's attention at the same time; because both are linked with Ada by means of "simultaneous births"; because, most obviously, Johnny tries to commit suicide on a beach and is picked up by the high tide before being

saved by "surfers" and surgeons" (381).

Nabokov also unites Johnny and Lucette by identifying both with birds. Johnny is "a young star from Fuerteventura," one of the Canary Islands; his name is properly John Starling (430), and in the version of Four Sisters in which Ada plays Irina he is cast as Skvortsov (a genuine character in Chekhov's play), whose name comes from Russian "skvorets," "starling."

Lucette is time and again associated with birds, such as, above, the "nightingale" of the "Ode to Florence Nightingale" and the ensuing "kitayskaya punochka (Chinese Wall Bunting)." As noted in Chapter 6 (see above, p. 401), Lucette is also associated with Andrey Vineland (and with the cane motif, and Van's plans to eliminate another rival) when Van decides "to kill two finches with one fircone" (414). On his first night on the Tobakoff Van dreams of the sunset he has watched ("the low sun's ardency [broke] into green-golden eye-spots") which becomes the "dream image of an aquatic peacock, slowly sinking before somersaulting like a diving grebe" (474). The sinking and diving obviously foreshadow Lucette's diving from the Tobakoff, and when years later Van sees a diving grebe he is sharply reminded of Lucette (526).

In Van's letter to Lucette after the debauch, he addresses her as "darling firebird" (421). The previous night, at the Ursus restaurant, Lucette has come closest to the pure avian, when she wears her "black furs" (367) and a very short evening gown in "a lustrous ~~cantharid~~ green"¹⁹.

¹⁹ "Cantharid luster" is a "green metallic luster resembling the Spanish fly in color" (W2).

and has her eyes "made up in a 'surprised bird-of paradise' style" (410). In this attire she exactly resembles the Superb bird of paradise (Lophorina superba) in display, with its lustrous green breast shield, the lustrous green above its eyes, and the furry-looking black cape flared around its head. (See Plate 2b, following p. 374.)

The manifold identification of Lucette with birds serves a purpose beyond strengthening the relationship between Lucette and Johnny Starling. Immediately after Lucette has told Van about Starling's attempted suicide, Van muses: "that was really not bad: bringing down three in as many years--besides winging a fourth. Jolly good shot--Adiana! Wonder whom she'll bag next." (381-82) The answer of course is Lucette, but the image of Ada as huntress sends us back to a strange passage in the first chapter of *Ardis the First*. After Van's arrival at Ardis, he goes for a walk around the gardens, where he meets Lucette and Mlle Larivière. As he strolls back to the manor, he sees Marina and Ada alighting from the coach and suddenly remembers having seen Marina before:

Some ten years ago, not long before or after his fourth birthday, and toward the end of his mother's long stay in a sanatorium, "Aunt" Marina had swooped upon him in a public park where there were pheasants in a big cage. She advised his nurse to mind her own business and took him to a booth near the band shell where she bought him an emerald stick of peppermint candy and told him that if his father wished she would replace his mother and that you could not feed the birds without Lady Amherst's permission, or so he understood.

They now had tea in a prettily furnished corner of the otherwise very austere central hall. . . . Price, the mournful old footman who brought the cream for the strawberries, resembled Van's teacher of history, "Jeejee" Jones.

"He resembles my teacher of history," said Van when the man had gone.

"I used to love history," said Marina, "I loved to identify myself with famous women. There's a ladybird on your plate, Ivan.

Especially with famous beauties--Lincoln's second wife or Queen Josephine."

"Yes, I've noticed--it's beautifully done. We've got a similar set at home."

.....
 Marina's portrait, a rather good oil by Tresham, hanging above her on the wall, showed her wearing the picture hat she had used for the rehearsal of a Hunting Scene ten years ago, romantically brimmed, with a rainbow wing and a great drooping plume of black-banded silver; and Van, as he recalled the cage in the park and his mother somewhere in a cage of her own, experienced an odd sense of mystery as if the commentators of his destiny had gone into a huddle. Marina's face was now made up to imitate her former looks, but fashions had changed, her cotton dress was a rustic print, her auburn locks were bleached and no longer tumbled down her temples, and nothing in her attire or adornments echoed the dash of her riding crop in the picture and the regular pattern of her brilliant plumage which Tresham had rendered with ornithological skill. (37-39)

Van's recollection of his encountering "Aunt" Marina when he was four childishly distorts the name of the pheasants, Lady Amherst's pheasants, in the cage in a park. When Marina says "I loved to identify myself with famous women. There's a ladybird on your plate" (meaning a painted ladybird, like the painted marsh marigold that launches a now-familiar mealtime conversation), she indicates unwittingly that she is being linked with Lady Amherst and the pheasant named after her. The portrait on the wall by "Tresham," an anagram of Amherst, shows Marina in a picture hat whose "rainbow wing and . . . great drooping plume of black-banded silver" are exactly those of Lady Amherst's pheasant's wing- and tail-feathers. The huntress Marina represents foreshadows Ada as Adiana, and the bird and the combination of picture hat and riding crop designate Lucette as the one shot down.

But Van recalls "the cage in the park and his mother somewhere in a cage of her own": Aqua too is associated with the pheasant, and Marina is charged with responsibility for Aqua's being encaged and

driven to her death. Marina's disregard for consequences, in resuming her affair with Demon, in substituting Van for Aqua's still-born child, is matched with Ada's disregard for consequences in initiating Lucette into ambiguous intimacies with Van under the sealyham cedar, or in later initiating her into a full lesbian relationship. Both mother and daughter are deadly to their sisters.

The riding crop the portrayed huntress holds connects her to the riding crop/cane motif and the concomitant rages of Van's jealous violence. The strategic importance of this first avatar of Van's instrument of vengeance depends upon the whole context, on the fact that the cage in the park and Marina's "I loved to identify myself with famous women. . . . Lincoln's second wife" are echoed in what seems to be Marina's "incidental" recollection of Demon "in Lincoln Park, indicating an indigo-buttocked ape with his cane and not saluting her, according to the rules of the beau monde, because he was with a courtesan" (253). Demon's cane and Van's cane, the violence of Demon's revenge and the violence his son is so quickly inflamed to commit, Demon's courtesans and poor Aqua's fate, Van and Ada's indifference in their sexual excitement to the needs of doomed little Lucette--all are linked by the Lady Amherst-Tresham passage and its reverberations.

It should be noted especially that behind Van's and Demon's vengeful violence and behind their inconsiderate neglect of frail sister and frail wife there lies the same passionate egotism, the same intense self-concentration. As Demon and Van block out consideration for others in the eager satisfaction of their sexual passions, so they block out consideration for the pain of their victims in satisfying their own

wounded pride and soothing their own damaged happiness.

During the account of Lucette's last night Nabokov insists with particular force on the relationship between Van's brutal indifference to his victims and his inconsiderateness towards and neglect of Lucette, the two gravest consequences of his egotistic concentration. When Van and Lucette come out of the restaurant that fatal night on the Tobakoff, they examine "without much interest the objects of pleasure in a display window. Lucette sneered at a gold-threaded swimsuit. The presence of a riding crop and a pickax puzzled Van." (486) A riding crop and a pickax on an ocean liner--with fields to ride in and mountains to climb many miles away--indeed make an odd combination, but we can see the connection which Nabokov wants to stress. A few minutes later Van and Lucette are watching Don Juan's Last Fling and its farcical indebtedness to Don Quixote:

The Don rides past three windmills, whirling black against an ominous sunset, and saves her from the miller who accuses her of stealing a fistful of flour and tears her thin dress. Wheezy but still game, Juan carries her across a brook. . . . Now they stand facing each other. She fingers voluptuously the jeweled pommel of his sword, she rubs her firm girl belly against his embroidered tights, and all at once the grimace of a premature spasm writhes across the poor Don's expressive face. He angrily disentangles himself and staggers back to his steed. (489)

But behind the parody and the absurdity there is a demanding seriousness.

"The Don rides past three windmills" recasts Van's whirling fury with the riding crop at the end of Ardis the First, and his not killing Rack or Percy de Prey at the end of Ardis the Second. After having ridden past three windmills, Juan/Van is involved in a real struggle. The section "whirling black against an ominous sunset, and saves her from

the millar who accuses her of stealing a fistful of flour" (my italics) evokes the blackmailer, Kim, whose being blinded by Van, partly as a substitute for his being unable to attack Andrey Vineland, we hear of during a digression on that other blackmailer, "Black Miller" (440-41).

It is just after this portion of the movie, just after the spasm Dolores elicits from Juan, that the sight of Ada makes Van rush out and leave Lucette to her doom. Once again Van's concentration on the intensity of his own emotions makes him suddenly abandon Lucette, just as in the intensity of his passionate rage Van takes no thought for the pain and the appalling injury he inflicts on Kim Beauharnais or the repulsive injustice of his using Kim as a substitute for exercising the violence of his jealousy on Andrey Vineland.

4. Looking On

Because the case of Kim Beauharnais is the culmination of Van's ugly viciousness it is closely allied with Van's worst inconsiderateness, his neglect of Lucette. In spite of, and partly because of, their differences--unlike poor Lucette, Kim is anything but sympathetic--Van's two victims are related by far more than Don Juan's Last Fling.

Kim is associated with Van's various possible victims and with Lucette herself through the cane motif. But there is another verbal chain linking them all together. Lucette is grouped with the objects of Van's jealousy through images of pederasty, homosexuality, fear-entry intercourse. This is doubly apt, of course: on the one hand, Van is jealous even of Lucette's lesbian relationship with Ada; on the other, the

damage done to Lucette (the second factor relating her to Van's intended victims) begins when she watches Van and Ada and their re-entry lovemaking. As we have seen, the association between Lucette and pederasty is made explicit when Van describes Lucette's spying on the "astounding tandem" as she swings from an "old oak (which appeared . . . in a century-old lithograph of Ardis, by Peter de Rast, as a young colossus protecting four cows and a lad in rags, one shoulder bare)" (212). The closest to Lucette among the various potential victims is Johnny Starling, the actor kept by "an old pederast" (381) who is later named as the "fat ballet master, Dangleleaf" (430), alias Diaghilev. Pedro, the star of Les Enfants Maudits and for one sullen afternoon the object of Van's concentrated and unwarranted jealousy, is, like "Johnny, a young star from Fuerteventura" (380), of Spanish origin. There is another curiously close relationship between the two: at one point in that grim afternoon at Ardis Pedro reconstructs his crotch, as Van's vengeful narrative puts it, and beats Ada to the pool "with a Nurjinski leap" (199).²⁰ Percy de Prey is expelled from Riverlane for his part in a "pseudo-homosexual row" (168), while Philip Rack's surname means in vulgar Russian ("rak") the copulatory position in which the woman kneels down with her buttocks towards her lover (the position described in The Perfumed Garden as "begouri").²¹ Note the uncanny inventive

²⁰ Nijinski is one of homosexual Gaston Godin's gallery of inverts (Lolita 183-84).

²¹ Nabokov alludes to "begouri" (Perfumed Garden, p. 132, n. 79) in the library chapter of Ardis (135). See Proffer 262 for "rak."

skill which allows Peter de Rast's name not only to pun on one relationship between those who provoke Van's jealousy at Ardis but also to combine elements of all their names: Percy de Prey, Pedro the star, Philip Rack.

But the Peter de Rast lithograph also involves Kim Beauharnais. This lithograph of Ardis (which itself foreshadows the many photographs by which Kim will commemorate manor and park) depicts an oak, "a young colossus protecting four cows and a lad in rags, one shoulder bare." Despite its being Arcadian, Ardis seems to have no cattle or sheep. Yet it does have one "herdsman," Kim Beauharnais (the lad is also "a dusky colossus" [396] by 1892). During Demon's dinner at Ardis, Marina is frightened by a flash outside. Van suggests it is sheet lightning, Demon that it is a photographer:

Ada ran to the window. From under the anxious magnolias a white-faced boy flanked by two gaping handmaids stood aiming a camera at the harmless, gay family group. But it was only a nocturnal mirage, not unusual in July. Nobody was taking pictures except Perun, the unmentionable god of thunder. In expectation of the rumble, Marina started to count under her breath, as if she were praying or checking the pulse of a very sick person. One heart-beat was supposed to span one mile of black night between the living heart and a doomed herdsman, felled somewhere--oh, very far--on the top of a mountain. The rumble came--but sounded rather subdued. A second flash revealed the structure of the French window. (258)

In fact, the flashes are from Kim's camera, and as we shall see shortly, he will again be referred to as an "eavesdropping" herdsman.

It is important that the Peter de Rast lithograph yokes Lucette and Kim together in the middle of a description of Lucette's spying on Van and Ada. For the essential similarity between the two is that both are spies, perpetual visual eavesdroppers on ~~Ada~~ and Van, though one is

fussily in the way of the ardent siblings and the other too sly to be noticed. Indeed it is precisely because both are "eavesdroppers" on Van and Ada that they are hurt: it is because Lucette gapes at her brother and sister that she suffers the shock of a too-early initiation, and because Kim has snooped on them that Van retaliates so viciously.

If Lucette is identified with "that stray ardilla daintily leavesdropping" while Van and Ada are in the Tree of Eden, Kim, too, has observed the Shattal Tree. One of his album's photographs is this: "Ada's very-much-exposed white thighs (her birthday skirt had got entangled with twigs and leaves) straddling a black limb of the tree of Eden" (401). "Leavesdropping" is associated with Lucette and the colours of autumn-leaves (themselves often associated with Lucette)²² in the translation of Coppée:

Their fall is gentle. The leavesdropper
Can follow each of them and know
The oak tree by its leaf of copper,
The maple by its blood-red glow. (247)

These very leaves reappear when Kim brings Ada the album: "During her dreary stay at Ardis, a considerably changed and enlarged Kim Beauharnais called upon her. . . . Uncle Dan, who just then was being wheeled out by his handsome and haughty nurse into the garden where coppery and blood-red leaves were falling, clamored to be given the big book, but Kim said 'Perhaps later,' and joined Ada in the reception corner of the hall." (396) As Van and Ada are looking through the photographs

²² Cf. for instance: "Mont Roux, our little rousse is dead. . . . Mount Russet, the forested hill behind the town, lived up to its name and autumnal reputation, with a warm glow of curly chestnut trees" (509).

together, Van asks for Kim's exact address. Knowing why he wants the information, Ada replies: "You shall not slaughter him. . . . He is subnormal, he is, perhaps, blackmailerish, but. . . . this page is the only really naughty one. And let's not forget that a copperhead of eight was also ambushed in the brush." (406) Lucette too has spied on us, Ada says, implying also: "and we wouldn't wish her any harm, would we?"

In fact of course Lucette in 1884 and 1888 was treated as an obstacle to Van and Ada's happiness just as Kim is when he is blinded in 1893. The want of consideration in the one case is almost as bad as the deliberate brutality in the other, and indeed is worse in its ultimate effects. Van is both passionately and calculatedly self-centred, in making torrid love to Ada while Lucette is close by or in deliberately playing upon Lucette's devotion, in furiously attacking Kim and yet in coolly using him to release his other fury against Andrey Vineland. Van feels his own emotions, his own happiness and his own pain, intensely, but he considers neither what he is doing to another's chance of happiness nor what might be the reality of another's pain.

Van's comment on the photograph album is this: "That ape has vulgarized our own mind-pictures. I will either horsewhip his eyes out or redeem our childhood by making a book of it: Ardis, a family chronicle." (406) But nothing can redeem the viciousness of Van's attack on Kim or the companion cruelty of his indifference to Lucette. Van decides not to write his "Ardis, a family chronicle," but there is someone else who does compose the story of Ardis, someone who sees nothing that needs to be redeemed. Having, one infers, mentally decided

on the other alternative ("I will . . . horsewhip his eyes out"), Van says that "On second thoughts, I will not write that Family Chronicle. By the way, where is my poor little Blanche now?" (408) It is at this point that Ada tells Van Blanche has married and has a blind child, and carries on:

"Oh yes, hopelessly blind. But speaking of love and its myths, do you realize--because I never did before talking to her a couple of years ago--that the people around our affair had very good eyes indeed? Forget Kim, he's only the necessary clown--but do you realize that a veritable legend was growing around you and me while we played and made love?"

She had never realized, she said again and again (as if intent to reclaim the past from the matter-of-fact triviality of the album), that their first summer in the orchards and orchidariums of Ardis had become a sacred secret and a creed, throughout the countryside. Romantically inclined handmaids, whose reading consisted of Gwen de Vere and Klara Mertvago, adored Van, adored Ada, adored Ardis's ardors in arbors. Their swains, plucking ballads on their seven-stringed Russian lyres under the racemosa in bloom or in old rose gardens (while the windows went out one by one in the castle), added freshly composed lines--naive, lackey-daisical, but heartfelt--to cyclic folk songs. Eccentric police officers grew enamored with the glamour of incest. Gardeners paraphrased iridescent Persian poems about irrigation and the Four Arrows of Love. Nightwatchmen fought insomnia and the fire of the clap with the weapons of Vaniada's Adventures. Herdsmen, spared by thunderbolts on remote hillsides, used their huge "moaning horns" as ear trumpets to catch the lilts of Lodore. Virgin châtelaines in marble-floored manors fondled their lone flames fanned by Van's romance. (408-09)

It is from romantic Blanche that Ada learns the romantic legend that has flourished around Ardis, and one can see that it is in fact from Blanche, from all that she has witnessed of Van and Ada's passion, that the legend has spread.

Despite the wild parodic fancy of the passage above, everything in it has a precise referent within Ardis and especially within the long chapter depicting the night of Demon's dinner, in which ogling and

admiring Blanche plays such a large role. "Romantically inclined handmaids, whose reading consisted of . . . Klara Mertvago, adored Van, adored Ada": Blanche is an absurdly romantic handmaid, who on the first morning of Van's first stay at Ardis and the last morning of his last stay addresses Van in a comically romanesque manner: "C'est ma dernière nuit au château. . . . T'is my last night with thee." (292) When Van and Ada discover Blanche's tortoiseshell comb in the toolroom, Ada adds: "That tattered chapbook must also belong to her; Les Amours du Docteur Mertvago, a mystical romance by a pastor" (53).²³ "Their swains, plucking ballads on their . . . Russian lyres under the racemosa in bloom or in old rose gardens (while the windows went out one by one in the castle)": this sentence alludes to the end of the chapter describing Demon's dinner at Ardis. After Demon has gone Van and Ada meet "in a corner of the latticed gallery waiting for the lights in the windows to go out" (263), and Van recites to Ada one of the most clichéd of Russian sentimental ballads (romansi). "Eccentric police officers grew enamored with the glamour of incest": Jones, a footman at Ardis in 1888, who however is seen only once at Ardis, when he serves at "Demon's" dinner, becomes a police officer and helps Van track down Kim Beauharnais. "Nightwatchmen fought insomnia and the fire of the clap": Blanche's lover throughout Ardis the Second is old Sore, the Burgundian nightwatchman, who does contract Blanche's gonorrhea. "Herdsmen, spared by thunderbolts . . . used their huge 'moaning horns' as ear trumpets to

²³ "Mertvago means 'dead' (Old Russian spelling)--thus The Loves of Doctor Dead, a parody of Doctor Zhivago (Zhivago means 'alive,' 'living,') and its religious concerns" (Proffer 257).

catch the lilts of Ladore": this parody of the whole "eavesdropping" theme refers to Kim's flashing camera, mistaken for lightning, outside the window of the room in which Demon is dining with Marina, Ada and Van. With Kim outside, as Ada sees, are Blanche and her sister, eagerly looking on. "Virgin châtelaines in marble-floored manors fondled their lone flames fanned by Van's romance": virginal Lucette, who becomes châtelaine of Ardis after her mother's death, does have to fondle her lone flame, and is fanned by the romance of Van and Ada's relationship, and does have her head turned by their passionate devotion.

It is no accident that the parodic popular romance of Van and Ada's love begins with Blanche and ends with Kim and Lucette. Nor is it accidental that the "sacred secret and creed" is expressed particularly in terms of the chapter which connects Blanche and Kim as eavesdroppers or onlookers (Blanche is outside with Kim when his flash illuminates the dining room window, and she seems to have been eavesdropping when Van recites to Ada that romantic ballad) and in which though Lucette is absent her eavesdropping role is particularly stressed: it is here that Van recites to Demon, as an example of Ada's skill at translation, that version of Coppée's "Matin d'Octobre" which begins "Their fall is gentle. The leavesdropper . . ." (247) and which alludes to Lucette's very first "leavesdropping" (98).

Each of the three onlookers is significantly paired with each of the others. Let us trace these relationships. First, Blanche and Lucette:

Whenever not supervised by her schizophrenic governess, whenever not being read to, or walked, or put to bed, Lucette was now a pest. At nightfall . . . the lovers could steal out into the

deeper darkness and stay there until the nocturna--a keen midnight breeze--came tumbling the foliage "troussant la raimée," as Sore, the ribald night watchman, expressed it. Once, with his emerald lantern, he had stumbled upon them and several times a phantom Blanche had crept past them, laughing softly, to mate in some humbler nook with the robust and securely bribed old glowworm. But waiting all day for a propitious night was too much for our impatient lovers. More often than not they had worn themselves out well before dinnertime, just as they used to in the past; Lucette, however, seemed to lurk behind every screen, to peep out of every mirror. (211)

Apart from directly pairing together Blanche and Lucette as onlookers; this passage also establishes a connection between Blanche as witness to Van and Ada's frolics and Blanche the carrier of venereal disease: Sore is the nightwatchman to whom she gives "the fire of the clap."

If Van celebrates the eroticism of Ardis, Blanche contributes eagerly in her own way to both the eroticism and the celebration. But in fact just as her parodic romance burlesques Van's account of Ardis so does her life ironize Van's exaltation. Blanche is herself closely associated with "Rose" of Radugalet, and the name of Sore, the lover she has infected, is an anagram of "Eros," the blindfolded little god with bow and arrow evoked in the name of Ardis but grimly parodied in her blind child. Hence Blanche thoroughly and bizarrely undermines Van's lyric motif, "Eros, the sore and the rose."

For Van the "sore" in this motif refers to the pain of his separation from Ada, the jealousy that brought Ardis to a halt. His fiercely romantic regrets and his rhapsodic laments for Ardis are both seen to exclude the real cause he should have for regret, the damage caused to the other little onlooker whose needs he has ignored. When Van is waiting for the important message (Ada's letter) Lucette is

bringing him in 1892,

he kept fighting Ardis and its orchards and orchids, bracing himself for the ordeal, wondering if he should not cancel her visit, or have his man convey his apologies for the suddenness of an unavoidable departure, but knowing all the time that he would go through with it. With Lucette herself, he was only obliquely concerned. . . . He . . . somehow missed the sound of her high heels on the stairs (or did not distinguish them from his heartbeats) while he was in the middle of his twentieth trudge "Back to the ardors and arbors! Eros qui prend son essor! Arts that our marblery harbors: Eros the rose and the sore." (366-67)

For all Van's celebration of the ardors he and Ada shared in the arbors of Ardis, he cannot disguise the fact that the sexual life of Ardis, based on blind satisfaction, on passionate inconsiderateness, has begun to wreck the life of a child with whom "he was only obliquely concerned."

Lucette and Kim are also paired as onlookers. Shortly after the passage interweaving Lucette's and Blanche's diurnal and nocturnal espials of Van and Ada comes this sentence:

The three of them cuddled and cosseted so frequently and so thoroughly that at last one afternoon on the long-suffering black divan he and Ada could no longer restrain their amorous excitement, and under the absurd pretext of a hide-and-seek game they locked up Lucette in a closet used for storing bound volumes of The Kaluga Waters and The Lugano Sun, and frantically made love, while the child knocked and called and kicked until the key fell out and the keyhole turned an angry green. (213)

The stored newspapers here take us right back to the opening chapter of the novel, to the discoveries in the attic, to the first mention--significantly, together--of both Lucette and Kim. Van and Ada find a newspaper photograph of Dan and Marina's wedding, which is dated differently (December 16, 1871) from the same photograph in a frame in the library and thus proves that Ada was conceived out of wedlock:

A girl was born on July 21, 1872, at Ardis, her putative father's seat in Ladore County, and for some obscure mnemonic reason was registered as Adelaida. Another daughter, this time Dan's very own, followed on January 3, 1876.

Besides that old illustrated section of the still existing but rather gaga Kaluga Gazette, our frolicsome Pimpernel and Nicolette found in the same attic a reel box containing what turned out to be (according to Kim, the kitchen boy, as will be understood later). . . . (6)

The "Kim . . . kitchen boy . . . understood" and the idea of Kim as a technical expert are later repeated exactly, now connecting Kim and Blanche, in a context that contains no reference to eavesdropping but is at the beginning of the "Demon's dinner" chapter:

"Where are the drinks? They were promised me by a passing angel."
(Passing angel?)

Van pulled a green bell-cord which sent a melodious message pantryward and caused the old-fashioned, bronze-framed little aquarium, with its lone convict cichlid, to bubble antiphonally in a corner of the music room (an eerie, perhaps self-aerating reaction, which only Kim Beauharnais, the kitchen boy, understood).
(239)

Blanche and Kim remain paired throughout the dinner chapter, as when they look on through the dining room window, or when Demon complains that Jones, the footman, who will later help Van to blind Kim, wheezes over the soup:

"You are cruel, Demon. I can't tell him 'ne pïkhtite,' as I can't tell Kim, the kitchen boy, not to take photographs on the sly--he's a regular snap-shooting fiend, that Kim, though otherwise an adorable, gentle, honest boy; nor can I tell my little French maid to stop getting invitations, as she somehow succeeds in doing, to the most exclusive bals masqués in Ladore." (255)

Lucette, Blanche and Kim then are all spies or leavesdroppers, and are related by the irony of their fates: the eyewitness motif that unites them ends in Kim's being blinded, is connected with the blinding of Blanche's child, and leads to the extinguishing of Lucette's "light,"

her life.

For Lucette and Kim, their being witnesses of Van and Ada's ardour leads to horrible consequences. But though they are cruelly damaged by the romantic intensity of Van's love and his anger, Blanche finds being a "leavesdropper" on this romantic hero to be pure charm: "Romantically inclined handmaids, whose reading consisted of . . . Klara Mertvago, adored Van, adored Ada" (409). The "Klara Mertvago" is not gratuitous: Blanche, an avid reader of Les Amours du Docteur Mertvago, is in fact part of a parody of that "mystical romance" (53). In an interview published in December 1966, when he had been working steadily on Ada for less than a year, Nabokov offered this criticism of Pasternak's novel: "Doctor Zhivago is false, melodramatic, badly written. . . . There are some absolutely ridiculous scenes. Scenes of eavesdropping, for instance. You know about eavesdropping. If it is not brought in as parody it is almost Philistine. It is the mark of the amateur in literature. And that marvellous scene where he had to get rid of the little girl to let the characters make love, and he sends her out skating.²⁴ In Siberia. To keep her warm they give her her mother's scarf. And then she sleeps deeply in a hut while there is all this going on. Obviously Pasternak just didn't know what to do with her."²⁵ Nabokov's sense of the awkwardness (to Lara and Zhivago and their lovemaking) of little Katya's presence at Varykino seems closely

²⁴ Nabokov seems to be thinking of Ch.14 Sec.9, where Katya is tobogganing rather than skating.

²⁵ "Nabokov," Vogue, December 1966, p. 279.

akin to his invention of little Lucette as the hindrance to Van and Ada's ardour.

In Ada Nabokov parodies what he has called "the recurrent eavesdropping device in nineteenth-century Russian fiction" (SO 68) by having three "eavesdroppers" constantly in action. Each eavesdropper has plausible occasions for his or her spying, not only because Van and Ada so frequently make love but also for reasons at once psychologically convincing within Ada's world and charmingly improbable within nineteenth-century manor and roman. One "secret" witness is absurdly intrusive, a curious and innocent girl watching incest and the most ardent eroticism on the family estate. Another is a far less innocent young kitchen boy, with blackmail in mind, who takes action and even colour shots, in 1884 and 1888, of the same ardent incest. The third is a fey maid who chances upon our lovers on the way to or from her trysts, who thrills to a love affair as romantic as something in her Klara Mertvago, and who indeed starts up an absurd popular romance both naturally and comically built upon the eavesdropping device:

Nightwatchmen fought insomnia and the fire of the clap with the weapons of Vaniada's Adventures. Herdsmen, spared by thunderbolts on remote hillsides, used their huge "moaning horns" as ear trumpets to catch the lilts of Ladore. Virgin châtelaines in marble-floored manors fondled their lone flames fanned by Van's romance. (409)

But the gonorrhea that fires the nightwatchman, the blindness that awaits "herdsman" Kim, the suicide that ends the life of the "virgin châtelaine" make the "romance" much different from what Blanche's naive enthusiasm can discern. Blanche's romance is a parodic version of the "Ardis, a family chronicle" that Van thinks of writing to "redeem our

childhood" (406). But it is, too, a parodic version of the reader's initial reaction to the radiant intensity of Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle, to the pure glow of Van and Ada's love. When at last we recognize the cruelties and potential destructiveness this intensity at first renders invisible, we are shocked into realizing the appalling dangers of even the most attractive self-concentration. We are forced to admit the wretched ease with which we have accepted Van's family chronicle as an exhilarating romance--a romance that in fact could never redeem what we had not even perceived needed to be redeemed in Van's life. Van has brilliantly exalted the splendid intensity of individual emotion and sensation, but he has not acknowledged that this intensity can at the same time blind one to any consideration for others. Nabokov beguiles us into accepting Van's celebration without his own accompanying caution, for only by making us recognize how easily we can shut out consideration for others can he encourage us to exercise the demanding and circumspect consideration that he insists should accompany the intensity of human emotion.

5. Adultery

This chapter has explored both the relationship between Demon's conduct and Van's (their irresponsibility towards Aqua and towards Lucette, their sexual exploitativeness, their hypocritical jealousy, their violence) and the relationship between each of the moral weaknesses Van shares with his father and the hurtful irresponsibility of his behaviour towards Lucette. The double exploration will continue as we

consider the obvious similarities between Demon's adultery and the adulteries of Van and Ada and the far from obvious similarity between the inconsiderateness with which Van and Ada treat Lucette and the lack of concern they show to the victims of their adulterous affairs. But at the same time we shall see the two routes of our investigation converge on a battlefield where the "Demonic" principle of indifference to the feelings of others confronts the kindness of Lucette, her recognition of the reality of another's needs.

In the chapter that follows the account of Lucette's death there is an exchange of letters occasioned by the tragedy: Van's letter to Ada by way of Demon, Demon's cruelly unconcerned reply, a brief letter from Ada to Van on behalf of herself and Andrey Vineland. The very next chapter describes Demon's death and quite explicitly associates it with Lucette's:

Furnished Space, *l'espace meublé* . . . is mostly watery so far as this globe is concerned. In that form it destroyed Lucette. Another variety, more or less atmospheric, but no less gravitational and loathsome, destroyed Demon. (504)

The circumstances surrounding the two deaths, too, signal that an especially close relationship is being made between "Dark" Veen and Lucette. One dies in the sea, one over the sea. Van imagines Lucette at her death swimming "like a dilettante Tobakoff in a circle of brief panic and merciful torpor" (494), a recollection of Lucette's question the afternoon before:

"*Mezhdu prochim* (by the way), is it true that a sailor in Tobakoff's day was not taught to swim so he wouldn't die a nervous wreck if the ship went down?"

"A common sailor, perhaps," said Van. "When . . . Tobakoff himself got shipwrecked off Gavaille, he swam around comfortably

for hours, frightening away sharks with snatches of old songs.
 . . ."

Demon, she said, had told her, last year at [Marina's] funeral, that he was buying an island in the Gavailles ("incorrigible dreamer," drawled Van). (480)

Demon dies (appropriately for a son of Dedalus Veen) when "a gigantic flying machine had inexplicably disintegrated at fifteen thousand feet above the Pacific between Lisiansky and Laysanov Islands in the Gavaille region". (504). ("Gavaille" is "Hawaii" transliterated into Russian, "Gavaii," then retransliterated into French.) The deaths of two homosexual psychiatrists are associated with Lucette's end (475), the disappearance of two homosexual philosophers with Demon's (506). Double versions of T. S. Eliot, the versifying banker Kithaf Sween and the real-estate magnate Milton Eliot, surround Van's last meeting with Lucette before the fatal voyage (in Paris) and are present when Van last sees his father (in Manhattan).

In the chapter immediately after Demon's death, Van and Ada are together for their adulterous reunion at Mont Roux. Mont Roux's very name incorporates Lucette and Demon: "Ardis, Manhattan, Mont Roux, our little rousse is dead. Vrubel's wonderful picture of Father, those demented diamonds staring at me, painted into me" (509). The "roux" in Mont Roux is naturally associated with Lucette, "our little rousse," and equally naturally her death brings to mind Demon's recent demise. But because Demon Veen is almost a new avatar of Lermontov's Demon, who flies over the red mountains of the Caucasus, Demon is himself associated with a Mont Roux: the Mount Kasbek of Lermontov's poem appears with Demon earlier in Ada as "kasbek rouge" (180) and in the painting alluded to in

the quotation above²⁶ as the mountain behind Demon's head (see Plate 3b, following p. 414).

Let us turn back to one earlier reference to Lermontov's and Vrubel's Demon. After his brief rendezvous with Ada at Forest Fork in 1886, Van has to

catch the same boat back to England--and join a circus tour which involved people he could not let down.

His father saw him off. Demon had dyed his hair a blacker black. He wore a diamond ring blazing like a Caucasian ridge. His long, black, blue-ocellated wings trailed and quivered in the ocean breeze. . . . A temporary Tamara, all kohl, kasbek rouge, and flamingo-boas, could not decide what would please her daemon lover more--just moaning and ignoring his handsome son or acknowledging bluebeard's virility as reflected in morose Van, who could not stand her Caucasian perfume, Granial Maza, seven dollars a bottle. (180)

The "temporary Tamara" who feels she should perhaps acknowledge "bluebeard's virility" emphasizes the relationship between Aqua's suicide and the wife-murdering heartlessness of Demon's infidelities. But the scene also anticipates the death of Lucette. The location by the sea, the transatlantic liner crossing, and particularly Demon's "long, black, blue-ocellated wings," the peacock-feather wings of Vrubel's great "Demon poverzhenniy" ("Demon Downcast," 1902, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; see Plate 2c, following p. 374) foreshadow that dream Van has on the eve of his last day with Lucette, a dream which itself foreshadows Lucette's death:

A tempest went into convulsions around midnight, but despite the lunging and creaking (Tobakoff was an embittered old vessel) Van managed to sleep soundly, the only reaction on the part of his

²⁶ "Golova Demona" ("Head of Demon") (1890-1891), by Mikhail Vrubel' (1856-1910), in the Kiev Museum of Russian Art.

dormant mind being the dream image of an aquatic peacock, slowly sinking before somersaulting like a diving grebe. (474)

In the scene in which Demon sees his son off across the Atlantic, the "circus tour" for which Van must return is the first mention of his Mascodagama role, significantly tied here to Demon at his most "Demonic," his closest to the winged Demon of Lermontov's poem and Vrubel's paintings. The peacock ocellations of Demon's wings reappear in Van's concluding remarks on Mascodagama:

Neither was the sheer physical pleasure of maniambulation a negligible factor, and the peacock blotches with which the carpet stained the palms of his hands during his gloveless dance routine seemed to be the reflections of a richly colored nether world that he had been the first to discover. For the tango, which completed his number on his last tour, he was given a partner, a Crimean cabaret dancer in a very short scintillating frock cut very low on the back. She sang the tango tune in Russian. . . .

Fragile, red-haired "Rita" (he never learned her real name) . . . bore an odd resemblance to Lucette as she was to look ten years later. During their dance, all Van saw of her were her silver slippers turning and marching nimbly in rhythm with the soles of his hands. He recouped himself at rehearsals, and one night asked her for an assignation. She indignantly refused, saying she adored her husband (the make-up fellow) and loathed England. (185)

Lucette is here quite explicitly associated with Van's attempt to start an adulterous affair. Later, when Demon comes to dinner at Ardis, he tells Van he is impressed by pretty Blanche and asks:

"Do you like the type, Van--the bowed little head, the bare neck, the high heels, the trot, the wiggle, you do, don't you?"

"Well, sir--"

(Tell him I'm the youngest Venutian? Does he belong, too? Show the sign? Better not. Invent.)

"--Well, I'm resting after my torrid affair, in London, with my tango-partner whom you saw me dance with when you flew over for that last show--remember?" (244)

Van lies to please his father, inventing an adulterous affair that

Lucette-like Rita's simple faithfulness in fact never allowed to begin.

The adultery theme in Ada is most concentrated in Part 3, where it is interwoven with the deaths of all those in the way of Van and Ada's final free reunion, Marina, Lucette, Demon and Andrey Vineland. Marina's death is depicted in Pt.3 Ch.1:

Van, a lucid soul, considered himself less brave morally than physically. He was always (meaning well into the nineteen-sixties) to recollect with reluctance, as if wishing to suppress in his mind a petty, timorous, and stupid deed (for, actually, who knows, the later antlers might have been set right then, with green lamps greening green growths before the hotel where the Vinelanders stayed) his reacting from Kingston to Lucette's cable from Nice ("Mother died this morning the funeral dash cremation dash is to be held after tomorrow at sundown") with the request to advise him ("please advise") who else would be there, and upon getting her prompt reply that Demon had already arrived with Andrey and Ada, his cabling back: "Désolé de ne pouvoir être avec vous." (452)

Though "Van, a lucid soul," considers it an act of moral cowardice not to have rejoined Ada and cuckolded Andrey Vineland, Nabokov himself thinks differently indeed, despite the ubiquitous and ready acceptance of adultery throughout Ada. When less than a page of the novel has elapsed, Van notes that Dolly Durmanov

had inherited her mother's beauty and temper but also an older ancestral strain of whimsical, and not seldom deplorable taste, well reflected, for instance, in the names she gave her daughters: Aqua and Marina ("Why not Tofana?" wondered the good and sur-royally antlered general with a controlled belly laugh, followed by a small closing cough of feigned detachment--he dreaded his wife's flares). (4)

The comic whimsy of the narrative itself (General Durmanov never appears again) makes us accept this as all a little unreal, less than serious, and "sur-royally antlered" (fully antlered, with a fourth level of prongs) is an amusingly technical exaggeration of the cuckold's horns.

But Aqua tofana is a poison with which "a Sicilian woman named Tofana, in the middle of the 17th century, . . . is said to have poisoned more than 600 persons" (W2), and when we realize that Aqua has poisoned herself because of Demon's adulteries, especially because of his affair with Marina, the fact of even the good general's antlers seems much less facetious. The "antlers" which in the first chapter of Part 3 Van seems to think he and Ada have a moral duty to bestow on Andrey Vinelander (the duty is required of them, Van romantically believes, by the intensity of their love) seem themselves much less comical than Van has made them appear.

The second chapter of Part 3 contains Van's meetings with Greg Erminin and Cordula de Prey (now Cordula Tobak). Greg and Van are both noticeably plumper than when they last met, and Van wonders:

"What about Grace, I can't imagine her getting fat?"
 "Once twins, always twins. My wife is pretty portly, too."
 "Tak ti zhenat (so you are married)? Didn't know it. How long?"
 "About two years."
 "To whom?"
 "Maude Sween."
 "The daughter of the poet?"
 "No, no, her mother is a Brougham."
 Might have replied "Ada Veen," had Mr. Vinelander not been a quicker suitor. I think I met a Broom somewhere. Drop the subject. Probably a dreary union: hefty, high-handed wife, he more of a bore than ever. (454)

The lines from "so you are married" to "Brougham" allude to a passage in the last chapter of Eugene Onegin and indeed follow the Eugene Onegin stanza form exactly (iambic tetrameter, the first four lines with feminine and masculine rhymes abab). Here is Nabokov's interlinear translation of Pushkin's verses:

--"Tak tĩ zhenát! ne znál ya ráne!"
 "So you're married! I did not know before!"
 Davnó li?"--"Ókolo dvuh lét."
 How long?" "About two years."
 --"Na kóm?"--"Na Lárinoy."--"Tat'yáne!"
 "To whom?" "The Larin girl." "Tatiana!"
 --"Tĩ éy znakóm?"--"Ya ímsoséd."
 "You to her are known?" "I'm their neighbour."
 (EO.3.184; VIII.xviii.1-4)

After returning from long travels, Eugene Onegin is surprised to find at a society ball that the radiant young woman who has just reminded him of the Tatiana who had once written him a letter of passionate adoration is indeed Tatiana, and the wife of his old friend Prince N. Onegin writes her a letter as passionate as that she had written him years earlier. Receiving no reply, he languishes for months until one day he suddenly and impetuously dashes to Prince N.'s home and finds Tatiana alone, "pale, reading some letter or another," and softly weeping. Though she admits to caring little for her fashionable life, she tells Onegin firmly:

"I married. You must,
 I pray you, leave me;
 I know: in your heart are
 both pride and genuine honor.
 I love you (why dissimulate?);
 but to another I've been given away:
 to him I shall be faithful all my life."
 (EO.1.307; VIII.xlvii.8-14)

In a rare observation on character and morality in Eugene Onegin, Nabokov remarks:

Tatiana, if anything, is now a much better person than the romantic adolescent who (in Three) drinks the philter of erotic longings and, in secret, sends a love letter to a young man whom she has seen only once. Although she may be said to have sacrificed certain impassioned ideals of youth when yielding to the sobs of her mother, it is also obvious that her newly acquired

exquisite simplicity, her mature calm, and her uncompromising constancy are ample compensations, morally speaking, for whatever naïveté she has lost with the rather morbid and definitely sensuous reveries that romances had formerly developed in her.

(EO.3.235-36)

Nabokov takes very seriously the virtues of Tatiana's faithfulness. Just after the lines uttered above, Tatiana sweeps away from the kneeling Onegin and Pushkin declares that now he will leave his hero and the reader: the poem closes. This situation is affectionately alluded to in Nabokov's only other attempt to incorporate the Eugene Onegin stanza into prose--at the end of The Gift (as Julian Moynahan calls it, "that great wedding song"²⁷), just after Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev and Zina Mertz have committed themselves tenderly to a life together:

Good-by, my book! Like mortal eyes, imagined ones must close some day. Onegin from his knees will rise--but his creator strolls away. And yet the ear cannot right now part with the music and allow the tale to fade; the chords of fate itself continue to vibrate; and no obstruction for the sage exists where I have put The End: the shadows of my world extend beyond the skyline of the page, blue as tomorrow's morning haze--nor does this terminate the phrase. (Gift 378)

In the Foreword to The Gift, Nabokov asks: "I wonder how far the imagination of the reader will follow the young lovers after they have been dismissed." He himself has looked far forward, for while writing Ada he remarked: "Fyodor in The Gift is blessed with a faithful love."²⁸

²⁷ "Lolita and related memories," Appel and Newman, p. 251.

²⁸ "The Strong Opinions of Vladimir Nabokov--as imparted to Nicholas Garnham," The Listener, October 10, 1968; rpt. SO 119.

The Eugene Onegin allusion in Van's conversation with Greg Erminin indicates, then, how very seriously Nabokov takes the faithfulness of love, how very different his own attitude is from Van's sense that he has almost a moral obligation to cuckold Andrey Vineland. Just after Greg has told Van of his marriage, the conversation continues:

"I last saw you thirteen years ago, riding a black pony-- no, a black Silentium. Bozhe-moy!"

"Yes--Bozhe moy, you can well say that. Those lovely, lovely agonies in lovely Ardis! Oh, I was absolyutno bezumno (madly) in love with your cousin!"

"You mean Miss Veen? I did not know it. How long--"

"Neither did she. I was terribly--"

"How long are you staying--" (454)

In that split second of jealousy ("I did not know it. How long--") when Van thinks Greg may have been one of Ada's lovers, his own words repeat Pushkin's lines, as if his hurt was the pain of a husband, his momentary jealousy the anguish of one who would hope to trust the faithfulness of his beloved. In Pt.1 Ch.2, we recall, Demon's fiery jealousy of Baron d'Onsky--a metamorphosis of the Baron d'O. (Onegin) in the play in which Marina has been Tatiana--is, too, that of a deceived husband, as if he is the Prince N. to d'Onsky's Onegin and to Marina's weak-willed Tatiana. Of course it is natural that Demon and Van should be so bitterly hurt by the unfaithfulness of their mistresses, but this should only make them more aware of the anguish their own later adulteries will cause others. Yet neither can consider the pain of another.

As he leaves Greg, Van bumps into Cordula de Prey, now Cordula Tobak:

With a surge of delight he saw Cordula in a tight scarlet skirt bending with baby words of comfort over two unhappy poodlets attached to the waiting-post of a sausage shop. Van stroked her

with his fingertips, and as she straightened up indignantly and turned around (indignation instantly replaced by gay recognition), he quoted the stale but appropriate lines he had known since the days his schoolmates annoyed him with them:

The Veens speak only to Tobaks
But Tobaks speak only to dogs. (456)²⁹

He does not have to ~~persist~~ for long before Cordula agrees to cooperate with him "in cornuting your husband" (456). We noted before the absurdity of Van's hypocrisy, that he should feel intensely jealous towards Greg yet should at the next moment be ready to take other sexual partners as he cannot bear Ada to do. No less hypocritical is the inconsistency between his own acute awareness of the pain Ada's unfaithfulness causes himself and his readiness to encourage Cordula's prompt infidelity to her Tobak.

That Van's double standard repeats that of his father is made clear by the two lines he quotes to Cordula, which are reworkings of the well-known "On the Aristocracy of Harvard," by John Collins Bossidy (1860-1928):

And this is good old Boston,
The home of the bean and the cod,
Where the Lowells talk to the Cabots,
And the Cabots talk only to God.³⁰

Both Veens and Tobaks are Boston aristocrats: Cordula's husband is called "Backbay Tobakovich" (436) by Demon, and this Baron Veen is himself seen

²⁹ As Proffer notes (p. 276) the two lines would rhyme in Russian: s Tobakymi, s sobakami.

³⁰ Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), p. 79.

easily wielding influence at "Aardvark," where he secures a job for the Bohemian lady who is about to appear. If Demon is associated with Boston, so too are the man who seduces his mistress and men whose wives he himself seduces. Demon is wildly, violently jealous of Boston's Baron d'Onsky, whom he tries to castrate, with the result that d'Onsky dies.

not "of his wounds" (as it was viciously rumored) but of a gangrenous afterthought on the part of the least of them, possibly self-inflicted, a sting in the groin, which caused circulatory trouble, notwithstanding quite a few surgical interventions during two or three years of protracted stays at the Aardvark Hospital in Boston--a city where, incidentally, he married in 1869 our friend the Bohemian lady, now keeper of Glass Biota at the local museum. (15)

But though he has himself suffered the pain of infidelity Demon proceeds to cause others the same suffering, quite unconcerned not only about what his unfaithfulness does to Aqua but also about the distress he might cause the men he proudly cuckolds, distress that now, from the other side of the infidelity, he finds only amusing: "At the races, the other day, I was talking to a woman I preyed upon years ago, oh long before Moses de Vere cuckolded her husband in my absence and shot him dead in my presence" (242). The woman Demon "preyed upon" is Praskovie de Prey, Percy's mother, whose husband's death is recalled by Demon before he introduces Van to Percy's second cousin Cordula:

come with me to a cocktail party. . . . given by the excellent widow of an obscure Major de Prey--obscurely related to our late neighbor, a fine shot but the light was bad on the Common, and a meddlesome garbage collector hollered at the wrong moment. (163)

The Boston Common here links this duel, involving a man whom Demon has himself cuckolded, with the duel Demon has with the Bostonian d'Onsky,

after Marina's unfaithfulness causes him a pain "I shall not forget and will not forgive" (16)--but a pain, also, he cannot imagine in others.

The Boston implicit in the lines Van so appropriately quotes to Cordula, then, points tellingly to the relationship between Demon's hypocrisy in adultery and that his son no less suavely displays.

After "cornuting" Ivan Tobak, Van says to Cordula:

"We shall do it again some day. Tomorrow I have to be in London and on the third my favorite liner, Admiral Tobakoff, will take me to Manhattan. Au revoir. Tell him to look out for low lintels. Antlers can be very sensitive when new. Greg Erminin tells me that Lucette is at the Alphonse Four?"

"That's right. And where's the other?"

"I think we'll part here." (457-58)

It is significant not only that these "antlers" recall the ones Van wishes at the beginning of Part 3 he had given Andrey Vinelanders five years before the actual adultery, but also that Lucette is mentioned here in conjunction with Tobak's antlers as she had been in conjunction with Vinelanders'. Andrey Vinelanders and Ivan Tobak, the two men with whose wives (Ada and Cordula) Van commits adultery in Part 3, are yoked closely together. When Demon comes in upon Van at his Manhattan apartment, left him by Cordula after her marriage, Van says:

"I beg you, sir, . . . go down, and I'll join you in the bar as soon as I'm dressed. I'm in a delicate situation."

"Come, come," retorted Demon, dropping and replacing his monocle. "Cordula won't mind."

"It's another, much more impressionable girl"--(yet another awful fumble!). "Damn Cordula! Cordula is now Mrs. Tobak."

"Oh, of course!" cried Demon. "How stupid of me! I remember Ada's fiancé telling me--he and young Tobak worked for a while in the same Phoenix bank. Of course. Splendid broad-shouldered, blue-eyed, blond chap. Backbay Tobakovich!"

The two men are related, too, by the "wine" in "Vineland" and the "tobacco" in "Tobak," by the geographical names Vineland and Tobago, and especially by the fact that both are descendants of explorers. Andrey Vineland is described as "an Arizonian cattle-breeder whose fabulous ancestor discovered our country" (588), or as Van also puts it, "Vingolfer, no, Vineland—first Russki to taste the labruska grape" (417). To Lucette Van explains in 1892 that "Cordula is now Mrs. Ivan G. Tobak. . . . His ancestor . . . was the famous or fameux Russian admiral who had an épée duel with Jean Nicot and after whom the Tobago Islands, or the Tobakoff Island, are named, I forget which." (382-83)

When Cordula confirms for him that Lucette is at the Alphonse Four Van tracks down his sister and tells her as he has Cordula that he is sailing on the Admiral Tobakoff (named after Tobak's ancestor and owned by his family). Lucette rings up Cordula and wangles the Tobak suite "in one minute flat" (477). On board the ship Lucette is repeatedly associated with both Tobak and Vineland. The voyage of the Tobakoff towards America itself retraces the routes of the imagined Russian admiral and, especially of Vineland's discoverer, Leif Ericsson. The Norwegian sailor landed somewhere on North America after being taken off his course towards Greenland, a fact comically evoked when Van and Lucette, entering the cinema hall where Don Juan's Last Fling will be playing, come in "at the beginning of an introductory picture, featuring a cruise to Greenland, with heavy seas in gaudy technicolor. It was a rather irrelevant trip since their Tobakoff did not contemplate calling at Godhavn." (487)

The depiction of Lucette's drowning is particularly insistent upon the relationship between Lucette and the "explorers" Vinelander and Tobak:

She did not see her whole life flash before her as we all were, afraid she might have done; . . . but she did see a few odds and ends as she swam like a dilettante Tobakoff in a circle of brief panic and merciful torpor. . . . she saw Van wiping his mouth before answering, and then, still withholding the answer, throwing his napkin on the table as they both got up; and she saw a girl with long black hair quickly bend in passing to clap her hands over a dackel in a half-torn wreath. (494)

Van writes that Lucette "swam like a dilettante Tobakoff" in memory of an earlier exchange:

"You're a divine diver. . . ."

"But you swim faster," she complained. . . . ". . . is it true that a sailor in Tobakoff's day was not taught to swim . . .?"

"A common sailor, perhaps," said Van. "When . . . Tobakoff himself got shipwrecked . . . he swam around comfortably for hours . . . until a fishing boat rescued him. . . ." (480)

Van's "She did not see her whole life flash before her . . . but she did see a few odds and ends" and his "dackel in a half-torn wreath" recall

Greg Erminin's recent eagerness about Ada: "Did she marry Christopher Vinelander or his brother? . . . Somebody told me she's a movie actress.

. . . Oh, that would be terrible . . . to switch on the dorotelly, and

suddenly see her. Like a drowning man seeing his whole past, and the

trees, and the flowers, and the wreathed dachshund." (455) "Christopher"

here, of course, hints at Columbus. The vision that flashes through

drowning Lucette's mind of Van rising from the table before answering

her recalls the evening at the Ursus restaurant. While Ada is out of

the room, Lucette implores Van:

"please, don't let me swill . . . champagne any more, not only because I will jump into Goodson River if I can't hope to have you. . . ."

Here Van stood up again, as Ada, black fan in elegant motion, came back followed by a thousand eyes. . . . (411)

The Goodson (Hudson) river evokes yet another explorer who ties Lucette, Andrey and Tobak together³¹ and sets them against Van, who as Masco-dagama (Vasco da Gama explored in the opposite direction) asks a girl who looks like Lucette for an adulterous assignation.

The most pointed connections of all are made as Lucette prepares for her death:

Having cradled the nacred receiver she changed into black slacks and a lemon shirt (planned for tomorrow morning); looked in vain for a bit of plain notepaper without caravelle or crest; ripped out the flyleaf of Herb's Journal, and tried to think up something amusing, harmless, and scintillating to say in a suicide note. (492)

The black and yellow clothes link Lucette up with Aqua (who wore the same colours on the day of her suicide) and with the repeated infidelities that ensured poor Aqua's end. But on Van's last day at Ardis, Ada had also appeared in black and yellow: Ada's unfaithfulness, which caused Van such grief, is thus about to be arrayed with the infidelities Van so easily expects women to engage in for him. The "caravelle or crest" Lucette wants to avoid is the official insignia on the Tobak and Admiral Tobakoff notepaper, closely related to the traditional emblem of the cuckold. Just after Van suggests to Cordula that she tell Tobak

³¹ Later it is imagined that we might be able to "see our own past (Goodson discovering the Goodson and that sort of thing)" (560).

"to look out for low lintels. Antlers can be very sensitive when new," Cordula calls: "'Wait. Here's a top secret address where you can always'--(fumbling in her handbag)--'reach me'--(finding a card with her husband's crest and scribbling a postal cryptograph)'" (458). But the "caravelle or crest" also refers to Andrey Vineland. In Van's concluding summary of the novel, he writes that its "principal part is staged in a dream-bright America--for are not our childhood memories comparable to Vineland-born caravelles . . . ?" (588). When Van and Ada are lunching by the side of Lade Geneva, they notice

Small grebes and big ones, with crests. . . . They had, she said, wonderful nuptial rituals. . . .

"I asked you about Andrey's rituals."

"Ach, Andrey is so excited to see all those European birds! . . . that big chomga [grebe] there is hohlushka [crested], he says." (525)

The accumulated inconsiderateness of Van and Ada towards Lucette, which drives her to suicide, is associated, then, with the unending inconsiderateness of Demon's infidelities, with Van's own experience of the pain unfaithfulness can cause, with the infidelities in which he so lightly engages Cordula and so passionately engages Ada.

After leading up to his first ecstatic reunion with Ada in his hotel room in Mont Roux, Van sums up "the duration of adultery" (521):

That morning, and the nine that followed, constituted the highest ridge of their twenty-one-year-old love: its complicated, dangerous, ineffably radiant coming of age. The somewhat Italianate style of the apartment, its elaborate wall lamps with ornaments of pale caramel glass, its white knobs that produced indiscriminately light or maids, the slat-stayed, veiled, heavily curtained windows which made the morning as difficult to disrobe as a crinolined prude, the convex sliding doors of the huge white "Nuremberg Virgin"-like closet in the hallway of their suite, and even the tinted engraving by Randon . . . --in a word, the alberghian atmosphere of those new trysts added a novelistic touch (Aleksey and Anna may have

asterisked here!) which Ada welcomed as a frame, as a form, something supporting and guarding life, otherwise unprovided on Desdemonia, where artists are the only gods. (521)

Even as Van describes the reunion as "ineffably radiant," Nabokov ensures that his words contain the strongest of denunciations not only of Van and Ada's present indifference to Andrey Vineland but also of their past inconsiderateness towards Lucette and of Demon's continual thoughtlessness towards Aqua.

Let us begin with the last of these. The "Desdemonia" in the passage above evokes both Othello and Demon to stress Demon's experience of the acute pangs of jealousy. But it also recalls these lines once more: "Aqua used to say that only a very cruel or a very stupid person, or innocent infants, could be happy on Demonia, our splendid planet" (301). As "Desdemonia" hints at Demon's pained jealousy the word also commemorates the lasting suffering inflicted on Aqua by Demon's own unfaithfulness.

The night before his first morning tryst with Ada at Mont Roux, Van meets Mr and Mrs Vineland and Andrey's sister Dasha at the Bellevue Hotel. The conversation among the four is rendered as a parody of Chehovian style:

ANDREY: Adochka, dushka (darling), raskazhi zhe pro rancho, pro skot (tell about the ranch, the cattle), emu zhe lyubopitno (it cannot fail to interest him).

ADA (as if coming out of a trance): O chyom ti (you were saying something)?

.....

IVAN (to Andrey): I know nothing about farming but thanks all the same.

(A pause.)

IVAN (not quite knowing what to add): (516-17)

But the scene the next morning has shifted from Chehov to Tolstoy, to the Italianate phase of the adultery of Anna and Vronsky. In Pt.2 Ch.8 there is also an extended parody of Chehov and a shift to Tolstoy. After the delights of Four Sisters, Van announces:

But let us shift to the didactic metaphorism of Chehov's friend, Count Tolstoy.

We all know those old wardrobes in old hotels in the Old World subalpine zone. At first one opens them with the utmost care, very slowly, in the vain hope of hushing the excruciating creak, the growing groan that the door emits midway. Before long one discovers, however, that if it is opened or closed with celerity, in one resolute sweep, the hellish hinge is taken by surprise, and triumphant silence achieved. Van and Ada, for all the exquisite and powerful bliss that engulfed and repleted them (and we do not mean here the rose sore of Eros alone), knew that certain memories had to be left closed, lest they wrench every nerve of the soul with their monstrous moan. But if the operation is performed quickly, if indelible evils are mentioned between two quick quips, there is a chance that the anesthetic of life itself may allay unforgettable agony in the process of swinging its door. (430-31)

Van is thinking here of the "indelible evils," the "monstrous moan" of the pain of Ada's unfaithfulness. But the Chehov-Tolstoy shift and the "old wardrobes in old hotels in the Old World subalpine zone" point to the later passage set in an old, subalpine, Old World hotel where Van and Ada are depicted as Vronsky and Anna and have in their suite a "'Nuremberg Virgin'-like closet." Now the combination of "virgin" here and the earlier "Tolstoyan" image of shutting a closet call to mind one of Van and Ada's stratagems for keeping Lucette out of the way: "under the absurd pretext of a hide-and-seek game they locked up Lucette in a closet . . . and frantically made love, while the child knocked and called and kicked until the key fell out and the keyhole turned an angry

green" (213).

The "'Nuremberg Virgin'-like closet" associated with "Aleksey and Anna" and Tolstoy's "didactic metaphorism" is thus associated with Lucette. But what is the "Nuremberg Virgin"? The "Iron Virgin" or "Iron Maiden" of Nuremberg

was a terror-inspiring instrument of torture, and was made of strong wood, bound with iron bands. The front consisted of two doors which opened to allow the prisoner to be placed inside. The whole interior was fitted with long, sharp, iron spikes, so that, when the doors were closed, these sharp prongs forced their way into various portions of the victim's body. Two entered his eyes, others pierced his back, his chest, and, in fact, impaled him alive in such a manner that he lingered in the most agonising torture. When death relieved the poor wretch from his agonies, perhaps after days, a trapdoor in the base was pulled open and the body was allowed to fall into the water below.³²

The image of Lucette as virgin and martyr, of the torment to which she is subjected as Van and Ada pursue their own pleasure, has returned in its most horrific form.

Earlier in this chapter, we noted the connection Nabokov draws between Ada and Demon in their indifference to the consequences of their search for sexual satisfaction (see above, pp. 468-71). It was explained that the "'sign of the cross' for protesting against which . . . so many Russians had been burnt" (259) linked the whole passage with the verbal and manual playing upon Lucette's "krestik," her "little cross." But Aqua in the madness precipitated by Demon's cruel selfishness is also associated with images of burning and torture: "Two or three centuries earlier she might have been just another consumable witch"

³² John Swain, The Pleasures of the Torture Chamber (London: Noel Douglas, 1931), pp. 139-40.

(21); "Her disintegration went down a shaft of phases, every one more racking than the last; for the human brain can become the best torture house of all those it has invented, established and used in millions of years, in millions of lands, on millions of howling creatures" (22).

Van uses all his verbal power here to render the agony of the woman he thought of as mother until his fifteenth year. Yet Andrey Vinelander, for whom Van shows nothing but restrained contempt, is also subtly made part of this same network of images. As Andrey, Dashá, Ada and Van sit down at the Bellevue, Andrey makes "a thready 'sign of the cross' over his un-unbuttonable abdomen" (513). The gesture is perfectly in keeping with Andrey's Russianness and what Van deems to be his automatism,³³ but it also allies him with Lucette and the burnings of "so many Russians . . . by other Russians." And of course the "'Nuremberg Virgin'-like closet," associated in the Tolstoyan "didactic metaphor" with the anguish of unfaithfulness, is part of the furniture of the scene of Van and Ada's adultery, of their cuckolding Andrey Vinelander.

Nabokov records the human capacity to disregard the needs of others, even of those for whom one is immediately responsible, and he insists on acknowledging not only the dreadful pain people can inflict on each other but also the grim fact that even people of great intelligence and sensitivity who are acutely familiar with their own pain may

³³ "An allusion to the preprandial rapid little sign of the cross that a Russian makes with bunched fingers over the breastbone at the very moment he sinks into his chair (which the footman behind him slips under him). The movement is mechanical, no heads are inclined, no grace is said; it is little more than a checked button." (EO.2.531)

not be prepared to act as if the pain of others were real.

The "scapegoatling, naive Lucette," (378) is at the heart of all the novel's images of suffering. Yet though she is identified repeatedly as "martyr" and virgin, she is not idealized, not a resolute saint but a poor frail girl who being dominated by her strong-willed and talented siblings succumbs in part to their ways. It is one of the most poignant ironies of the novel that Lucette's innocence and kindness are partly corrupted by the example of Ada and Van.

Unlike Ada, Lucette can manage some degree of sexual restraint, and it is of course a great part of her tragedy that Ada has awakened in her a sexual desire that she cannot ignore and that yet she will allow none but Van to fulfil. As she tells Van, she is still a virgin, despite the awful desperation of her need: "Oh, to be sure, it was not easy! . . . thrusts had to be parried, advances fought off! And only last winter . . . there was a youngster of fourteen or fifteen, an awfully precocious but terribly shy and neurotic young violinist. . . . Well, for almost three months . . . I had him touch me, and I reciprocated, and after that I could sleep at last without pills, but otherwise I haven't once kissed male epithelia . . ." (371). But being accustomed to Ada's ruthless pursuit of sexual pleasure and Ada's conviction that sexual excitements are free, without cost to others, Lucette like Van and Ada fails to consider how another person might be hurt:

"Kak-to noch'yu (one night), when Andrey was away having his tonsils removed or something, dear watchful Dorochka went to investigate a suspicious noise in my maid's room and found poor Brigitte fallen asleep in the rocker and Ada and me tryahnuvshih starinoy (reshaking old times) on the bed. That's when I told Dora I would not stand her attitude, and immediately left for Monarch Bay." (463)

Indeed, Lucette's relations with Dorothy and Andrey Vineland show her at her worst, and at her most Van-like. Ada complains to Van that

Lucette

put me in a most embarrassing situation. "I can quite understand her being mad at Dorothy . . . but that was no reason for Lucette to look up Andrey in town and tell him she was great friends with the man I had loved before my marriage. He didn't dare annoy me with his revived curiosity, but he complained to Dorothy of Lucette's neopravdannaya zhestokost' (unjustified cruelty). (526)

Lucette's reasons for saying what she does to Andrey repeat and subtly twist Van's motives for his worst deed, his blinding Kim. Lucette is jealous of Andrey Vineland, on Van's behalf (even here of course she demonstrates the significant difference between herself and Van) and she resents the activity of Dorothy, "a born blackmailer" (466) (whom Ada, we remember, had said was exactly "pretty Miss 'Kim' Blackrent"'s type [503]). As Van had punished a blackmailer while also using him as a vent for his jealous rage against someone else, so Lucette hurts Andrey Vineland on behalf of Van's jealousy and in order to punish blackmailer Dorothy.

Lucette, then, has imitated in much milder form the cruel inconsiderateness of Van and Ada's behaviour. Yet despite this when Andrey Vineland is discovered to be gravely ill Mont Roux becomes a sort of battleground between what was best in the spirit of Lucette and the "Demonian" nature of Van and Ada, between Lucette's kindness and compassion, her readiness to attend to the interests of others, her readiness to tend the sick, and Van's fiery and Demonic concentration on the importance of his own passions and needs.

Throughout Van and Ada's adultery at Mont Roux there are so

many pointed references to Lucette that it is as if she has been hovering over them, a reminder--though not to Van and Ada themselves--of the pain they have already caused one person whose life was entangled with theirs. After Andrey Vineland leaves dinner at the Bellevue early and goes up to his room, Dorothy dominates an empty conversation for more than an hour until Ada, despairing of merely outlasting her sister-in-law, gets up to go. As she and Dasha near the elevator, she makes sure Van notices she has "forgotten" her handbag. He waits for her,

knowing that in a moment she would say to her accursed companion (by now revising, no doubt, her views on the "beau ténébreux") as the lift's eye turned red under a quick thumb: "Akh, sumochku zabila (forgot my bag)!"--and instantly flitting back, like Vere's Ninon, she would be in his arms.

Their open mouths met in tender fury, and then he pounced upon her new, young, divine, Japanese neck which he had been coveting like a veritable Jupiter Olorinus throughout the evening.

"We'll vroom straight to my place as soon as you wake up, don't bother to bathe, jump into your lenclose--" and, with the burning sap brimming, he again devoured her, until (Dorothy must have reached the sky!) she danced three fingers on his wet lips--and escaped.

"Wipe your neck!" he called after her in a rapid whisper (who, and where in this tale, in this life, had also attempted a whispered cry?) (520)

"Vere's Ninon" and "lenclose" refer to the clothes of Ninon de Lenclos, "the courtesan," as Nabokov notes, "in Vere de Vere's novel" (Darkbloom 476), but these phrases also recall Lucette on the night of her death, when Van admires "the length of her legs in ninon stockings" (486).

"Vere de Vere's novel" sends us back to the novel "Gwen de Vere" (409), which alludes both to Guy de Vere in Poe's "Lenore" (1831), which as we shall see in the next chapter is used to prefigure Lucette's death (see

below, pp. 598-99), and particularly to the romantic adultress Guinevere: Van crosses the Atlantic in the Queen Guinevere and recalls this as he sails on the Tobakoff (476). On his 1891 transatlantic crossing he corrects the typescript of Letters from Terra: "This he disfigured again during his voyage back to America on board the Queen Guinevere. And in Manhattan the galleys had to be reset twice . . ." (342). As we shall find in Chapter 9, Letters from Terra's plot centres around Lucette and the adultery theme, and the novel, in which Van borrows "what his greatest forerunners (Counterstone, for example) had imagined in the way of a manned capsule's propulsion" (339), is recalled on the Tobakoff where Van "attempted to read in bed the proofs of an essay he was contributing to a festschrift on the occasion of Professor Counterstone's eightieth birthday" (474). "Vere's Ninon," then, refers in several ways at once to Lucette's last fatal voyage.

Ada's "new, young, divine Japanese neck" in the passage above ("Japanese" in that it has the elongate grace of a woman's neck in, say, an Utamaro print) of course suggests Lucette in the "Divan Japonais" poster pose. For the first time Van is seeing Ada with her hair "drawn back and up into a glossy chignon, and the Lucette line of her exposed neck, slender and straight, came as a heartrending surprise" (511).

The "whispered cry" above, finally, recalls Lucette's desperate attempt to call Van back as he leaves her Paris suite: "'I apollo, I love you,' she whispered frantically, trying to cry after him in a whisper because the corridor was all door and ears" (467).³⁴

The next paragraph after the Mont. Roux passage quoted above almost simultaneously re-enacts Van's last day with Lucette (with an admixture of that 'dangerous game in which Ada invites Lucette to help her cram a flower down Van's swim trunks after they leave the side of the Ardis swimming pool) and begins the adultery proper:

That night, in a post-Moët dream, he sat on the talc of a tropical beach full of sun-baskers, and one moment was rubbing the red, irritated shaft of a writhing boy, and the next was looking through dark glasses at the symmetrical shading on either side of a shining spine with fainter shading between the ribs belonging to Lucette or Ada sitting on a towel at some distance from him. Presently, she turned and lay prone, and she, too, wore sunglasses, and neither he nor she could perceive the exact direction of each other's gaze through the black amber, yet he knew by the dimple of a faint smile that she was looking at his (it had been his all the time) raw scarlet. Somebody said, wheeling a table nearby: "It's one of the Vane sisters," and he awoke murmuring with professional appreciation the oneiric word-play combining his name and surname, and plucked out the wax plugs, and, in a marvelous act of rehabilitation and link-up, the breakfast table clanked from the corridor across the threshold of the adjacent room, and, already munching and honey-crumbed, Ada entered his bedchamber. It was only a quarter to eight! (521)

Two lines later comes the start of that weighty paragraph which describes the scene of the adultery, invokes Vronsky and Anna's Italian palazzo and lists, apparently as a mere piece of furniture, the "'Nuremberg Virgin'-like" closet. The paragraph concludes:

When after three or four hours of frenetic love Van and Mrs. Vinelander would abandon their sumptuous retreat for the blue haze of an extraordinary October which kept dreamy and warm throughout the duration of adultery, they had the feeling of still being under the protection of those painted Priapi that the Romans once used to set up in the arbors of Rufomonticulus. (522)

wrote to Lucette after the debauch scene: "That sort of game will never be played again with you, darling firebird. We apollo [apologize]" (421: brackets in original). Van's words to Lucette are too precious for her to let them be forgotten.

"Rufomonticulus" re-emphasizes the "russet" in "Mont Roux" to signal again that Lucette is implicated here, but the painted Priapi which Van intends as corroboration of the erotic splendour and passionate delight of his and Ada's "frenetic love" undercut the two lovers. When Ada is painting on that memorable July afternoon in 1884, she says to Van:

"'Now run along, . . . quick, quick, I'm busy,' and as he lagged like an idiot, she anointed his flushed forehead with her paintbrush in the semblance of an ancient Estotian 'sign of the cross'" (101). This passage is recalled, and the Romans' painted Priapi foreshadowed, when Van pretends he does not know that by "krestik" Lucette means clitoris:

Come, come, Lucette, it means 'little cross' in Russian, that's all, what else? . . . Is it something you wear, . . . a small acorn of coral, the glandulella of vestals in ancient Rome? . . . Of course, I remember now. A foul taint in the singular can be a sacred mark in the plural. You are referring of course to the stigmata between the eyebrows of pure sickly young nuns whom priests had over-anointed there and elsewhere with cross-like strokes of the myrrherabol brush. (378)

What Van thinks of as "protection," then, calls up a painted sign of the cross and the miniature priapus in Lucette's russet mount, calls up, indeed, as the rest of the paragraph has, those images of the torture (here the "'sign of the cross' for protesting against which . . . so many Russians had been burnt" [259]) inflicted upon Lucette by the inconsiderateness of Van and Ada.

When Andrey Vineland is found to have advanced tuberculosis of the left lung, Ada decides to remain with him until he is well enough to bear the news of her desertion. Van implores her to come with him:

"Yes, the old story--the flute player whose impotence has to be treated, the reckless ensign who may never return from a distant war!"

"Ne ricane pas!" exclaimed Ada. "The poor, poor little man! How dare you sneer?"

As had been peculiar to his nature even in the days of his youth, Van was apt to relieve a passion of anger and disappointment by means of bombastic and arcane utterances which hurt like a jagged fingernail caught in satin, the lining of Hell.

"Castle True, Castle Bright!" he now cried, "Helen of Troy, Ada of Ardis! You have betrayed the Tree and the Moth!"

"Perestagne (stop, cesse)!"

"Ardis the First, Ardis the Second, Tanned Man in a Hat, and now Mount Russet--"

"Perestagne!" repeated Ada (like a fool dealing with an epileptic).

"Oh! Qui me rendra mon Hélène--"

"Ach, perestagne!"

"--et le phalène."

"Je t'emplie ('prie' and 'supplie'), stop, Van. Tu sais que j'en vais mourir."

"But, but, but"--(slapping every time his forehead)--"to be on the very brink of, of, of--and then have that idiot turn Keats!" (530)

Van's verbal sallies are indeed arcane. What is immediately plain (apart from the bitterness of his despair) is that he is accusing Ada of being a betrayer like Helen of Troy, of abandoning her childhood lover and all the memories summed up in the theme song of their love at Ardis, "Oh! Qui me rendra mon Hélène." But why does Van list Ardis the First among the betrayals? Why the Moth (et le phalène)?

"Tanned Man in a Hat" is clearly a play on "Manhattan," but it is also a much more specific barb. While at Manhattan, Van looks over Kim's photograph album with Ada, and sees for the first time Ada's lepidopterological ally, Dr Krolik:

"Ah, a new character, the inscription says: Dr. Krolik."

". . . Yes, that's my poor nature teacher."

Knickerbockered, panama-hatted, lusting for his babochka (Russian for "lepidopteron"). A passion, a sickness. What could Diana know about that chase?

"How curious--in the state Kim mounted him here, he looks much less furry and fat than I imagined. In fact, darling, he's a big, strong, handsome old March Hare! Explain!"

"There's nothing to explain. I asked Kim one day to help me carry some boxes there and back, and here's the visual proof. Besides, that's not my Krolik but his brother, Karol, or Karapars, Krolik. A doctor of philosophy, born in Turkey."

"I love the way your eyes narrow when you tell a lie. The remote mirage in Effrontery Minor."

"I'm not lying!"--(with lovely dignity): "He is a doctor of philosophy." (403-04)

If "panama-hatted" is a partial anagram of "Manhattan" and if Krolik is a "tanned man in a hat," a "Knickerbocker" is also a New Yorker--and New York in Antiterra is known only as Manhattan. Moreover, Van calls Krolik "a handsome old March Hare" because "krolik" is Russian for "rabbit" and because the expression "mad as a March hare" on which Lewis Carroll drew "alludes to the frenzied capers of the male hare during March, its rutting season."³⁵ Van has earlier alluded to "the 'Mad-hatters' (as the inhabitants of New Amsterdam were once called)" (222).

"Tanned Man in a Hat" then refers to Krolik and the "Moth" of Van's "the Tree and the Moth" will refer chiefly to Krolik's "lusting for his babochka" (butterfly or moth). But tree and moth also refer to the larva web Van claimed he came into contact with in the Shattal Tree, "the Tree of Knowledge . . . imported last summer . . . from the Eden National Park where Dr. Krolik's son is a ranger and breeder" (95). As Van recalls, he and Ada fall so that his face lands between her legs and he removes "a silk thread of larva web from his lip" (95). Van had thought of this incident as only a fortunate fall. Now however that

³⁵ Martin Gardner, ed., The Annotated Alice, by Lewis Carroll (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1960), p. 90.

good fortune seems less pure, for the Tree of Eden brings to mind Dr. Krolik, whom since that photograph seen in Manhattan Van suspects to have been one of Ada's lovers: the tree seems to tinge even Ardis the First with the faint hue of betrayal.³⁶ Van's imploration of Ada at Mont Roux is full of hints of the one deception for which he has not previously reproached her. By expressing his anger so obscurely he does not mar the note of desperate entreaty yet finds relief for his welling sense of having been betrayed.

Van's sense of betrayal is expressed most plainly in his comparing Ada with Helen of Troy. Yet if Ada is Helen, Van is identified as the adulterous seducer Paris rather than as the betrayed Menelaus. Ada cries to Van "Perestagne," the Russian for "stop" ("perestan'") accurately rendered in a French transliteration, but also a precise echo of the much earlier phrase "Paris and Tagne" (106).

That phrase occurs, fittingly, in a passage that alludes to Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage" ("Mon enfant, ma soeur, / Songe à la douceur / D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble") but the whole context of the phrase must be seen:

During the last week of July, there emerged . . . the female of Chateaubriand's mosquito. Chateaubriand (Charles) . . . was not related to the great poet and memoirist born between Paris and Tagne. . . .

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à l'épaisseur

³⁶ In fact although Ada was seeing Krolik regularly in 1884 it seems probable that they did not become lovers until at least the next year--or perhaps the year after, when Dr Krolik "died . . . of a heart attack in his garden" (219).

Du grand chêne à Tagne;

Songe à la douceur--

--of scraping with one's claws or nails the spots visited by that fluffy-footed insect characterized by an insatiable and reckless appetite for Ada's and Ardelia's, Lucette's and Lucile's . . . blood. (106)

Through its Chateaubriand references and through the description of the insect itself the passage subtly insists on the inevitable intermixture of Ada's and Lucette's lives, on the responsibility and consideration that should arise from such relationship--judgements obviously not inappropriate to Van's attempts to persuade Ada to leave her ailing husband.

Lucette, indeed, is subtly implied throughout Van's entreaty. The "Tree and the Moth" refers to the Shattal Tree incident, but if Van intends to evoke both the felicity of that fall and a slight shimmer of betrayal, he also calls to the reader's mind the real and lamentable loss of innocence in this scene, the occasion of Lucette's first becoming alerted to the strange goings-on between her cousin and sister.

"Oh! Qui me rendra . . ." is a motif that for Van is a celebration of his past happiness with Ada but that becomes charged, as we have seen in Chapter 6, with the fact of Lucette's death. Ada's "Tu sais que j'en vais mourir" echoes exactly words Lucette has used on the last day of her life: "You deceived me many, many times when I was a little girl. If you're doing it now tu sais que j'en vais mourir." (483)³⁷ Van's

³⁷ Both girls are alluding to what in Nabokov's "Spring in Fialta" is described as "a sobbing ballad which often used to be sung by an old maiden aunt of mine. . . .: On dit que tu te maries, / tu sais que j'en vais mourir" (ND 22).

reference to Keats, finally, should bring to mind the novel's one other allusion to Keats, the combination of "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" that grows out of Van's throwing a pine cone at a stammos and scaring off a bird: "the marble fore-image of a Crimean girl doomed to offer an everlasting draught of marble water to a dying marine from her bullet-chipped jar" (399). Now not only is Lucette a nurse to Marina at the beginning of Part 3 but she also appears immediately after the "Florence Nightingale" just alluded to: "Skip Lucette skipping rope" (399). On the very next page, Lucette is also associated with Florence (the city) and Peacock moths (another, oblique, "bird" reference hovering around Lucette). When he sees Kim's photograph of two Peacock moths, Van is reminded

of you, sweet Marco d'Andrea, or you, red-haired Domenico Benci, or you, dark and broody Giovanni del Brina (who thought they were bats) or the one I dare not mention (because it is Lucette's scholarly contribution--so easily botched after the scholar's death) who likewise might have picked up . . . on a May morning in 1542, near Florence, a pair of the Pear Peacock in copula, the male with the feathery antennae, the female with the plain threads, to depict them faithfully (among wretched, unvisualized insects) on one side of a fenestral niche in the so-called "Elements Room" of the Palazzo Vecchio. (400)

And if Lucette is partially identified with Florence Nightingale, the photograph of Van "aiming a conical missile at the marble fore-image of a Crimean girl" not only alludes to Keats but also forms the centre of the cone-and-bird motif. Given the immediate context of Van's "Keats" remark at Mont Roux, one must think of his decision to "kill two finches with one fircone" (414) which so neatly couples Andrey and Lucette together.

Throughout the lines in which Van implores Ada to leave her

husband Lucette is present, then, both as one whose suffering from Van and Ada's inconsiderateness is compared with Andrey Vineland's potential anguish and as one (Florence Nightingale) who strove to relieve the suffering of others. But if Lucette is present, so too is Demon.

"Tanned Man in a Hat" refers not merely to Van and Ada's stay in Manhattan but specifically to Van's discovery there that Dr Krolik has probably been one of Ada's lovers. But the words also point towards Demon, who, of course, broke up Van and Ada's Manhattan ménage. When Demon visits Ardis in 1888, Van asks him: "I suppose you have not been much in Manhattan lately--where did you get its last syllable?" (239),

Van implores Ada one last time to abandon Andrey Vineland:

"Stay with me, girl," said Van, forgetting everything--pride, rage, the convention of everyday pity.

For an instant she seemed to waver--or at least to consider wavering; but a resonant voice reached them from the drive and there stood Dorothy, gray-caped and mannish-hatted, energetically beckoning with her unfurled umbrella.

"I can't, I can't, I'll write you," murmured my poor love in tears.

Van kissed her leaf-cold hand and, letting the Bellevue worry about his car, letting all Swans worry about his effects and Mme Scarlet worry about Eveline's skin trouble, he walked some ten kilometers along soggy roads to Rennaz and thence flew to Nice, Biskra, the Cape, Nairobi, the Basset range--

And o'er the summits of the Basset-- (530-31)

When Van depicts Dorothy Vineland as "gray-caped and mannish-hatted," he chooses his words to recall the often-caped Demon as he was on the morning when he separated Van and Ada: "The dragon drug had worn off: its aftereffects are not pleasant, combining as they do physical fatigue with a certain starkness of thought as if all color were drained from the mind. Now clad in a gray dressing gown, Demon lay on a gray couch . . ." (439). By pairing Dasha Vineland and Demon Van intends to

associate the pain of his previous separation from Ada with his present grief. In the last line in the inset quotation above, he modifies an earlier variation on Lermontov's Demon:

And o'er the summits of the Tacit
He, banned from Paradise, flew on. (502)

This first variation too had referred to the edict of separation coming between himself and Ada, but whereas Van intends by his second variation to compare the misery of one separation with that of another, Nabokov suggests that instead it confirms that Van is a true son of Demon: he wants to find his "Paradise" in another's pain.

Van has not persuaded Ada to ignore the gravely ill Andrey Vinelander as Demon had ignored Aqua's dreadful illness in pursuing the pleasures of his adultery. It is as if Lucette, who in the opening chapter of Part 3 tends to the dying Marina, has won when in the final chapter of Part 3 Ada decides not to add to the pain of the failing Andrey Vinelander. Ada's new-found sense of responsibility and considerateness entails no slight sacrifice of her own happiness--the next seventeen years are a period of bleak separation--but at least Andrey will not be tortured as Aqua was by her husband's adultery or as Lucette was, in her different way, by the inconsiderateness Ada and Van displayed in their delighted pursuit of their own pleasure.

By being so scrupulously associated with Lucette, Andrey Vinelander is shown to matter, like so many other characters in the novel whom Van has dismissed as irrelevant to the triumphant love of "a unique super-imperial couple" (71). Van's lyric exaltation and the sheer joy of his and Ada's enduring love powerfully focus interest on the central

characters alone. We cannot but be fascinated by the radiant intensity of their passion, and it comes as a stern lesson to realize what we have done in so thoroughly accepting Van and Ada's own magnificently enchanted sense of their loves and lives. When we see the final very delicate but profoundly just connections Nabokov has established between one character and another and one action and another we are compelled to recognize how easily our individual perspectives can make us discount the pain of others, how unceasing is the need for true considerateness, how demanding it is to achieve such compassionate circumspectness.

VIII

THE TEXTURE OF TIME

1. Direction and Texture

As we observed in Chapter 5, Van minimizes the importance of his career. On a "thetic" reading of Ada we hardly notice the career theme in our eagerness to see Van and Ada's next reunion. The only exception is Part 4, Van's thirty-page treatise, The Texture of Time, which, however, is not only one of his philosophical tracts but is also an account of his journey towards and his last, enduring, reunion with Ada. On an "antithetic" reading we are aware in advance of the desolate gaps the "separation" chapters cover and we grant these significant stretches of Van's life an attention of their own: we view each aspect of Van's career as his meagre compensation for the loss of Ada. Despite whatever creative satisfactions they bring to fill the emptiness of his life, Van's various occupations remain inadequate recompense for his having lost "a condition of being" (574). But on a "synthetic" reading we can appreciate some odd and, it would seem, deeply rewarding unities in Van's career, unities that extend even into his love for Ada and his composing Ada itself. The constancy of Van's philosophic concerns suggests that his career has had a fascination he has deliberately underplayed in the romantic posturing of his impassioned autobiography.

The idea of direction runs throughout Van's work: direction as

a feature of pure space (orientation) and as a feature of time-and-space (the direction of gravity, of motion, of growth). It appears sometimes abstrusely, sometimes farcically, often obliquely, with Nabokov brilliantly camouflaging the essential unity by having the same concept recur in a rich variety of guises and circumstances. Even less obtrusive than direction itself is its constant and peculiar corollary throughout Ada, the notion of "texture."

Let us look first at direction treated seriously, as the focus of Van's philosophical thought. Even here, in the example we are about to consider, the tumble of Van's images, the obliqueness of the reference and the dominance of the dramatic context do not encourage us to discern the philosophical seriousness of Van's rapid ruminations. When Lucette comes to visit Van in his rooms at Kingston in 1892, she tries to remind him of an incident that took place in the Ardis library. A little embarrassed by the subject she is broaching, she delays by elaborately setting the scene, but her and Van's memories of the library's furniture do not coincide:

"Van, Vanichka, we are straying from the main point. The point is that the writing desk or if you like, secretaire--"

"I hate both, but it stood at the opposite end of the black divan."

Now mentioned for the first time--though both had been tacitly using it as an orientator or as a right hand painted on a transparent signboard that a philosopher's orbitless eye, a peeled hard-boiled egg cruising free, but sensing which of its ends is proximal to an imaginary nose, sees hanging in infinite space; whereupon, with Germanic grace, the free eye sails around the glass sign and sees a left hand shining through--that's the solution! (Bernard said six-thirty but I may be a little late.) The mental in Van always rimmed the sensuous: unforgettable, roughish, villous, Villaviciosa velour. (373)

The excitement of "that's the solution! (Bernard said six-thirty

but I may be a little late)" implies that Van's bizarre imagery has led to the solution of some intellectual problem--as indeed it has. In Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics (1783), Kant argues that space is intuitional, part of the structure of sensibility and not a concept derived from experience. In illustration of his point he avers that it is only by intuition and not by conceptual thinking that we can appreciate the directional difference between left- and righthandedness.

Those who cannot yet rid themselves of the notion that space and time are actual qualities inhering in things in themselves, may exercise their acumen on the following paradox. When they have in vain attempted its solution, and are free from prejudices at least for a few moments, they will suspect that the degradation of space and of time to mere forms of our sensuous intuition may perhaps be well founded.

.....
 What can be more similar in every respect and in every part more alike to my hand and to my ear, than their images in a mirror? And yet I cannot put such a hand as is seen in the glass in the place of its archetype; for if this is a right hand, that in the glass is a left one, and the image or reflexion of the right ear is a left one which can never serve as a substitute for the other. There are in this case no internal differences which our understanding could determine by thinking alone. Yet the differences are internal as the senses teach, for notwithstanding their complete equality and similarity, the left hand cannot be enclosed in the same bounds as the right one (they are not congruent); the glove of one hand cannot be used for the other. What is the solution? . . . the difference between similar and equal things, which are yet not congruent . . . cannot be made intelligible by any concept, but only by the relation to the right and the left hands which immediately refers to intuition.¹

Kant's problem touches on two topics of interest to Van in his investigation of directionality: the reversal of direction in reflections and the relation between the one-way direction of growth and other kinds

¹ Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics . . . , trans. Paul Carus (1902; rpt. Chicago: Open Court, 1949), pp. 38-40).

of direction (gravity, motion).

The problem of the reversal of direction in reflection is not as simple as it seems. Why, for instance, does a mirror reverse left and right, but not up and down? The apparent reversal of left and right in a mirror reflection is the result of the overall bilateral symmetry of our bodies; as Martin Gardner explains:

Why does a mirror reverse left and right but not up and down?

Curiously, the answer depends on the fact that our bodies, like the bodies of most animals, have only one plane of symmetry. It passes, of course, vertically through the center of the body, dividing the body into mirror-image halves. . . . When we look into a mirror we see a duplicate of ourself, inside a room that duplicates the room in which we are standing. When we move our right hand, we see our twin move his left. We describe the reversal as a left-right one because it is the most convenient terminology for distinguishing a bilaterally symmetric figure from its enantiomorph. . . .

. . . In a strict mathematical sense the mirror has left unchanged the up-down axis and the east-west axis, but has reversed the front-back axis. It is only because you imagine yourself standing behind the glass, facing the other way, that you speak of it as a left-right reversal.²

If the apparent reversal of left-right direction in reflections is a consequence of our bilateral symmetry, that bilateral symmetry--the fact that our bodies have one and only one plane of symmetry--is a consequence of the direction of gravity and of motion. Gardner suggests that most animals on any planet would be bilaterally symmetrical:

if there are animals on another planet . . . it is likely that they, too, will have bilateral symmetry. On another planet, as on earth, the same factors would operate to produce such symmetry. Gravity would provide a fundamental difference between up and down. Locomotion would create a fundamental difference

² The Ambidextrous Universe (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 22-23.

between front and back. The lack of any fundamental asymmetry in the environment would allow the left-right symmetry of bodies to remain unaltered. (Pp. 58-59)

It would be unlikely that Nabokov had these aspects of direction in mind were it not virtually certain that he borrowed from Gardner when he posed and had Van solve Kant's problem. In The Texture of Time, Van writes: "'Space is a swarming in the eyes, and Time a singing in the ears,' says John Shade, a modern poet, as quoted by an invented philosopher ('Martin Gardiner') in The Ambidextrous Universe, page 165" (542). The joke is this: in The Ambidextrous Universe, Gardner had indeed quoted these two lines from Nabokov's invented poet John Francis Shade, and attributed the lines to Shade rather than to Nabokov; an amused Nabokov here returns the compliment. But in the chapter in which Gardner quotes "Shade" he also quotes Kant's problem--to which he had earlier provided the answer. That answer is appropriated by Nabokov and now reassigned to Van in a much more condensed and imagistic form.

Van's answer to Kant's problem is this: "the free eye sails around the glass sign and sees a left hand shining through--that's the solution!" Or, to explain it conceptually: the silhouettes of right and left hand are two-dimensional figures, and within a (two-dimensional) plane there is no way of explaining how the hands can be similar and equal but not congruent; but if one takes one of the figures off the plane surface and revolves it in three dimensions, one can then place it on the other figure. The figures are now congruent; the problem of asymmetry or left-right directionality can be explained conceptually, in terms of a revolution through a higher space.

How is one to interpret the remark Van makes immediately after

finding this solution ("The mental in Van always rimmed the sensuous: unforgettable, roughish, villous, Villaviciosa velour")? Van is thinking of the divan in the library with which his chain of images somehow began. In recounting the Night of the Burning Barn, he had described its rough surface thus: "the shag of the couch was as tickly as the star-dusted sky" (121). The idea of texture here accompanies--and is certainly subordinate to--the Kantian problem in direction.

But why is the divan mentioned here? The question should be, rather, why did Van leap from the divan "as an orientator or as a right hand" to the image of the eye sailing around the other side of the glass? He is in fact remembering the Night of the Burning Barn, when he was kneeling on the divan and thought he saw Ada, through the glass window, moving along the lawn; the apparent image of Ada looking towards the window from outside had in fact been the reflection of Ada standing behind him. Here in his rooms at Kingston the memory of Ada imagined momentarily to be physically on the other side of the glass triggers off the image which helps Van solve Kant's problem.

In the case just described, direction and texture appear in an explicitly philosophical environment, and as part of Van's cogitations. But they can also appear in what seems to be simple narrative:


He liked composing his works . . . in mountain refuges, and in the drawing rooms of great expresses, and on the sun decks of white ships, and on the stone tables of Latin public parks. He would uncurl out of an indefinitely lengthy trance, and note with wonder that the ship was going the other way or that the order of his left-hand fingers was reversed, now beginning, clockwise, with his thumb as on his right hand, or that the marble Mercury that had been looking over his shoulder had been transformed into an attentive arborvitae. (450)

It is marvelously apt that what is the image of Van's concentration should also be the subject of his attention: he concentrates so hard on problems of direction and texture that he fails to notice that the environment has changed, that directions (ship, hand) or textures (the smoothness of the marble statue, the tough scaliness of the tree) have been replaced by their opposites.

Even less like philosophy but just as pertinent to Van's concern with problems of direction and texture is his Mascodagama routine:

The stage would be empty when the curtain went up; then, after five heartbeats of theatrical suspense, something swept out of the wings, enormous and black, to the accompaniment of dervish drums. The shock of his powerful and precipitous entry affected so deeply the children in the audience that for a long time later, in the dark of sobbing insomnias, in the glare of violent nightmares, nervous little boys and girls relived, with private accretions, something similar to the "primordial qualm," a shapeless nastiness, the swoosh of nameless wings, the unendurable dilation of fever which came in a cavern draft from the uncanny stage. Into the harsh light of its gaudily carpeted space a masked giant, fully eight feet tall, erupted, running strongly in the kind of soft boots worn by Cossack dancers. A voluminous, black shaggy cloak of the burka type enveloped his silhouette inquiétante (according to a female Sorbonne correspondent--we've kept all those cuttings) from neck to knee or what appeared to be those sections of his body. A Karakul cap surmounted his top. A black mask covered the upper part of his heavily bearded face. The unpleasant colossus kept strutting up and down the stage for a while, then the strut changed to the restless walk of a caged madman; then he whirled, and to a clash of cymbals in the orchestra and a cry of terror (perhaps faked) in the gallery, Mascodagama turned over in the air and stood on his head.

In this weird position, with his cap acting as a pseudopodal pad, he jumped up and down, pogo-stick fashion--and suddenly came apart. Van's face, shining with sweat, grinned between the legs of the boots that still shod his rigidly raised arms. Simultaneously his real feet kicked off and away the false head with its crumpled cap and bearded mask. The magical reversal "made the house gasp." Frantic ("deafening," "delirious," "a veritable tempest of") applause followed the gasp. He bounded offstage--and next moment was back, now sheathed in black tights, dancing a jig on his hands. (183-84)



Van's handwalking is an oblique expression of his intellectual interest in the relationship between the directions of growth (a one-way process in time) and gravity (a one-way force in space which encouraged top-bottom specialization in animals). Van's routine both emphasizes the difference between top and bottom and overcomes it, as if he were an example of top-bottom symmetry--which would have evolved in nature only if gravity did not exist. Or one could look at it another way: in reversing the top-bottom specialization that gravity has encouraged evolution to follow, Van seems to stand the one-way process of evolution on its head, which, as he notes in Part 4, cannot be done: "We are told that if a creature loses its teeth and becomes a bird, the best the latter can do when needing teeth again is to evolve a serrated beak, never the real dentition it once possessed" (539).

Van's Mascodagama frolics appear, too, to defy gravity and thus, almost, to defy time. Because gravity always works in one direction (we are speaking in everyday, geocentric terms), because an object will be closer to the ground at a later moment than at an earlier one (if no other forces or bodies intervene), to defy gravity is also to defy time (as one feels when watching the film of a diver run backwards). Van puts it thus: "It was the standing of a metaphor on its head . . . to perceive an ascending waterfall or a sunrise in reverse: a triumph, in a sense, over the ardis of time" (184-85). The "ardis of time" indicates, as we noted in Chapter 4, that Van's handwalking powers are associated with the blissful confidence he has drawn from Ardis, where he feels he has triumphed over time, where at Ardis's most magic moments he seems to have found gravity suspended. When he discovers Ada's

unfaithfulness and realizes that he and his sister have not succeeded in repeating the past, in reversing the ardis of time, he also loses his gift of maniambulation.

Before we leave Mascodagama we should note the quiet but resolute emphasis on texture. When Van first bounds on stage, he seems "a shapeless nastiness." The ominous blur consolidates into ruffled, roughish textures: a "voluminous, black shaggy cloak," a Karakul cap (made from the tight, knobbly black curls of the coat of the Karakul lamb), a "heavily bearded face." When he reverses himself (and thus turns right way up) and disappears, he returns, reversed again, and with the roughness replaced by the sleek finish of his black tights.

Van's briefly-noted, uncompleted "philosophic fable" (502) Reflections in Sidra seems to confirm his own implicit evaluation of his career as a sorry compensation for the loss of Ada. Here as elsewhere Nabokov disguises Van's philosophical concerns by making the expression of those concerns seem hardly a part of Van's career at all. Not only is Reflections in Sidra unfinished, but its title appears to be a nonce name designed to show that Van is brooding (or "reflecting") on the loss of Ardis (reversed in "Sidra"). The one quotation from Van's unfinished novella seems to confirm this notion: "'The lost shafts of every man's destiny remain scattered all around him,' etc. (Reflections in Sidra)" (505). Van would seem to be lamenting here the fact that the shafts of destiny which contained the promise of continued Ardisiac happiness are lost. This is certainly the meaning Ada finds in Van's phrase. She writes:

The "lost shafts of destiny" and other poetical touches reminded me of the two or three times you had tea and muffins at our place in the country about twenty years ago. I was . . . a petite fille modèle practicing archery near a vase and a parapet and you were a shy schoolboy . . . who dutifully picked up the arrows I lost in the lost shrubbery of the lost castle of poor Lucette's and happy, happy Adette's childhood. (503)

Yet Nabokov has ensured that Reflections in Sidra has real significance of its own and as part of the definite unity of Van's career, despite there being so little information on the novel and that little's being presented only piecemeal. This paucity of detail, indeed, is Nabokov's second strategy for helping Van give short shrift to the career his creator is at the same time carefully composing, and it is quite delightful to deduce the nature of Van's book from the minimal information he provides (a twelve-word quotation, a two-line summary).

Reflections in Sidra is a consideration of direction in space, pure space: the reversal of direction in the reflection of light. At the beginning of Part 3 Van records some motley recollections of his travels between 1893 and 1922. This is one: "From a hotel balcony in Sidra his attention was drawn by the manager to the wake of an orange sunset that turned the ripples of a lavender sea into goldfish scales" (449). "Sidra" is a real place (a bay in Libya), and Van's "reflections" are not just a lover's melancholy broodings, but musings on the reversal of direction ("ardis," reversed in "sidra," means an arrowhead, the conventional symbol of direction) in reflected images. One should note, too, that reflections depend not only on the direction of light meeting the reflective surface but also on the smoothness, the texture, of that surface.

But Van's novella, had it been completed, would have been

chiefly a consideration of the way space infects time, the way it imposes its crude directionality on what Van defines in The Texture of Time as the non-directional nature of "real," individual human time. Van declares that Reflections in Sidra formed, "in rear vision, a preface to his Texture of Time" (502). (The implied rear vision mirror here wittily combines the "reflections" of the novella's title with the car in which the later treatise is thought out.) For Van direction is not a significant part of the essence of time, certainly not of consciousness in time, and can have none of the exact meaning in time that it can have in terms of space. Yet space's directions, the downward pull of gravity, the irreversibility of growth, do infect and contaminate time, and Reflections in Sidra reacts to this fact: it is "a 'denunciation of space'" (502). For Van space's fully impinging on the individual world of human time is synonymous with death. When he writes of "space breaking away from time, in the final tragic triumph of human cogitation: I am because I die" (153), Van means that space breaks the individual off from time. Death is the ultimate supremacy of space, gravity, directional time, over the free individual world of human time:

Furnished Space, l'espace meublé (known to us only as furnished and full even if its contents be "absence of substance" . . .), is mostly watery so far as this globe is concerned. In that form it destroyed Lucette. Another variety, more or less atmospheric, but no less gravitational and loathsome, destroyed Demon. (504)

Van has written earlier of "death's total surrender to gravity" (443), and the image is perfectly enacted in Lucette's death. On board the Tobakoff, Van watches Lucette as she gets ready to dive into the

pool on deck, "as she prepared to ardis into the amber" (479) (amber because Van is wearing sunglasses). This is in fact almost a rehearsal for Lucette's death, when the unrelenting ardis, the one-way direction, of gravity becomes inexorably locked with time to plunge Lucette into death, into brute space, space severed from time: "Although Lucette had never . . . dived before . . . from such a height, in such a disorder of shadows and snaking reflections" (493). The "ardis" of Lucette's earlier diving and the "reflections" through which her body plummets make it clear that it is Lucette's death (in 1901) that has prompted Van to begin his Reflections in Sidra (the first part of which appears in January 1904).

Van's "denunciation of space," his protest against Lucette's death, would have been (had he completed it) an exploration of the way space and its direction impose themselves on time. The fact that in space reflection automatically entails reversal demonstrates the rigidity and precision of spatial direction. In time there is no direction, in that "the future" is at "every moment . . . an infinity of branching possibilities" (560-61); if as Van puts it in the one sentence we have from Reflections in Sidra, the "lost shafts of every man's destiny remain scattered all around him" (505), endless other courses have been possible. In consciousness, time becomes even freer, for memory can recall the past and in a sense reverse time as it chooses. But the world of space and matter imposes itself and its absolute directions on one's private time and in the end snaps the individual off from time and its freedoms, admitting of no reflection, no free reversal, in the darkness of brute space.

Ada itself, Van's grandest work, is the last variation on "direction" in his career. The influence of space--of gravity and growth--on the direction of time in Ada seems powerful indeed. During the Ardis sections, time's directional force seems suspended, and all that seems to matter is the texture of repetition, but direction takes over, the novel tilts, beginning a long downward slide through the years, gathering speed and dwindling in size. Each part is about half as long as its predecessor, so that the last part is about one-sixteenth as long as the first, and each part marks a greater lapse in time: while Part 1 deals with a few moments of suspended time, Part 5 collapses through forty-five years. Direction shockingly predominates as one reaches the end of Ada. Never, surely, has there been a work with such drastic asymmetry, such insistent direction. And if one takes this as Van's achievement, one can see that his lifelong fascination with the problem of direction has reached its fullest expression in Ada itself.

2. The Texture of Time

The interest in direction (gravity, growth, motion) and in texture that we have traced throughout Van's career reaches its most concentrated and explicit expression in Van's Texture of Time (1924), which seems to be identical with Part 4 of Ada. Here, Van seeks to minimize if not altogether abolish the concept of the direction of time:

The direction of Time, the ardis of Time, one-way Time, here is something that looks useful to me one moment, but dwindles the next to the level of an illusion obscurely related to the mys-

teries of growth and gravitation. The irreversibility of Time (which is not heading anywhere in the first place) is a very parochial affair: had our organs and orgitrons not been asymmetrical, our view of Time might have been amphitheatric and altogether grand, like ragged night and jagged mountains around a small, twinkling, satisfied hamlet. (538-39)

Van wishes to emphasize not the direction but the texture of time, the feel of time within the present of individual consciousness.

Paradoxically, Van attacks the idea of time as direction while giving his treatise the form of a journey. He is driving speedily and impatiently across Switzerland, eager to reach Ada, whom he has not seen since their adulterous two weeks together in Mont Roux in October 1905; it is now July 14, 1922, and Van is to meet Ada (whose husband has just died) at the same hotel in Mont Roux. Van's thoughts on the texture of time develop as the journey progresses, enchantingly interacting with his driving his car:

In the same sense of individual, perceptual time, I can put my Past in reverse gear. . . . (536)

"Space-Time"--that hideous hybrid whose very hyphen looks phoney. One can be a hater of Space, and a lover of Time.

There are people who can fold a road map. Not this writer. (543)

. . . or are tactile coincidences even more misleading than visual ones? I think I had better back out of this passage. (544)

Van is steadily driving towards a destination in space as time is steadily elapsing, yet his object is to sever time from space, to deny that motion is a significant part of time, to challenge the "direction" of time. Now Van has created exactly this sort of tension between the onward direction of time and forces opposing simple linearity elsewhere in Ada. Indeed the whole novel minimizes the ultimate importance

of direction in time even as its accelerating collapse creates the feeling of the relentless advance towards age and death more vividly than fiction has ever done before. Within Ardis the First we have felt an extraordinary eagerness to keep up with time's hurrying advance, but we are so eager to see young Van and Ada together precisely because we have seen old Van and Ada still together, looking back in time on time's forward motion. Yet another complex play with the direction of time takes place in Ardis the Second: at first we see this section as a rare and absolute triumph over time's direction, but when we read it again with the built-in recollection of the impending discovery, when we are no longer subject to the uncertainty of the future (such a powerful component of direction in time), we see that time in Ardis the Second is gathering steadily towards the dismal disclosure awaiting Van.

In Part 4 too the onward direction of time is intermingled in a complex fashion with other temporal motions. Though Van's evolving thoughts are presented very funnily and provokingly in terms of his journey, they are not the sequence-bound thoughts of a stream of consciousness but shaped impressions and gropings of the mind which have arrested, corrected, developed, refined themselves and their expression against the pressure of time. Both the thinking out and the writing of The Texture of Time have been done on Van's journey:

The Past is changeless, intangible, and "never-to-be-revisited"--terms that do not fit this or that section of Space which I see, for instance, as a white villa and its whiter (newer) garage with seven cypresses of unequal height, tall Sunday and short Monday, watching over the private road that loops past scrub oak and briar down to the public one connecting Sorcière with the highway to Mont Roux (still one hundred miles apart). (544)

Space, the impostor, has already been denounced in these notes (which are now being set down during half a day's break in a crucial journey). . . . (540)

But Van expects the reader to recognize that the whole treatise has been revised many times in the process of composition to give it its sense of immediacy and evolution. He trusts the reader will acknowledge that in the shaping of thought and its written expression the mind resists or ignores time, gives its own products a form and a finality which owe nothing to the sequence of the reflections which gave rise to these finished thoughts.³ Van shows the mind able to range freely, to think itself away from the immediate sequence of its thoughts, to control and shape its creations as it chooses, to maintain as many relations to time as it wants, simultaneously. While appearing to concede what his argument does not wish to concede, the importance of time's direction, Van's journey format shows lone thought arresting time, returning to an old idea, developing itself irrespective of the propulsion of time, even as it is able to recreate the floundering of thought within time.

Van's ideas are complicated by several features of his essay's organization and style. The combination of journey and cogitation creates an apparent lack of structure, in which one idea surfaces in Van's mind and then sinks as another appears, only to resurface later: there is no logical point-by-point development. The delightful multiplication of the implied frames of reference adds to the challenge:

³ Cf. this remark: "It reveals as little relation to essential Time, straight or round, as the fact of my writing from left to right does to the course of my thought" (539).

the details of the journey (which, including Van's missing a turnoff and his making a wrong turn, can be traced out exactly on a Swiss road map); the swerving course of Van's thought, at times following the contours of the journey, at times in momentary parallel, sometimes darting aside, often altogether independent of anything but the pressure of image and idea; the lecture format half-implicit in the essay's opening lines and intermittently throughout, as if the whole work were one of the public lectures on time Van describes in the middle of his argument; and, finally, not only the process of Van's own successive rewriting and rethinking, with its overlapping of many times other than the day of the journey itself, but also the reader's time: "I trust that my reader, who by now is frowning over these lines (but ignoring, at least, his breakfast), will agree with me" (540). A third factor complicating Van's concepts is the lush and deliberately aggressive and tumbling metaphorism of the style, in part a parody of the fact "that Time is a fluid medium for the culture of metaphors" (537).

Despite all these complications of expression--a necessary consequence of Van's insistence on the difficulty of thinking about time within the changing moment--the essay's ideas are quite straightforward. (As one will recall from Chapter 2, they are also fundamentally Nabokov's own.) Van's concern with time is almost always with "individual, perceptual time" (536), with the essence of time as we know it, time in its relation to human consciousness. He has two chief aims: to show that neither Space nor "the Future" is part of Time, and to describe the feel of the Present and the Past, which are real components of Time.

First, the discarding of Space. Van insists that Time and Space

are utterly different--even though "Space itself (like Time) is nothing I can comprehend: a place where motion occurs" (541). In describing the present, he notes that "The sharpest feeling of nowness, in visual terms, is the deliberate possession of a segment of Space collected by the eye. This is Time's only contact with Space." (551) Otherwise, Time and Space are completely distinct: "We reject without qualms the artificial concept of space-tainted, space-parasited time, the space-time of relativist literature" (541).⁴ Choosing a deliberately gross example, Van imagines the full scale model of a town as it was a hundred years ago being built across the river from the present, much-modernized

⁴ Nabokov (Van may be left out here) writes two pages later: "At this point, I suspect, I should say something about my attitude to 'Relativity.' It is not sympathetic. . . . One especially grotesque inference, drawn (I think by Engelwein) from Relativity Theory--and destroying it, if drawn correctly--is that the galactonaut and his domestic animals, after touring the speed spas of Space, would return younger than if they had stayed at home all the time." (543) With typically uninformed and uninquiring captiousness, Douglas Fowler quotes this passage and remarks: "Unfortunately for Nabokov, he can no more dismiss the theory of relatively [sic] by calling Einstein 'Engelwein' than the Inquisition could preserve the Ptolemaic Universe by the burning of Bruno" (Reading Nabokov, p. 200). In fact although "Engelwein" does evoke Einstein the name is a "translation" into German of the surname of Paul Langevin, the French physicist who first concretized the multiple times of Einstein's theory in the space travel parable known as "the clock paradox" in a paper delivered to the Congress of Bologna in 1911. Nabokov is likely to have encountered Langevin first in the pages of Henri Bergson's examination of Einstein, Durée et Simultanéité (1922) (see 2nd ed., Paris: Felix Alcan, 1923, p. 109), for Bergson has been one of Nabokov's "top favorites" (SO 43) since the 1920's. Subsequent quotations from this work will be from the 1965 translation (see below) which has an excellent introduction by the astrophysicist Herbert Dingle, who has been arguing since 1956 that the special theory of relativity is both unproven and self-contradictory (this introduction contains a useful bibliography of Dingle's articles on the subject to 1965). Nabokov's dismissals are notoriously confident, but the confidence in this case may be backed up by Dingle as well as by Bergson.

town:

The space in which the modern town coagulates is immediately real, while that of its retrospective image (as seen apart from material restoration) shimmers in an imaginary space and we cannot use any bridge to walk from the one to the other. . . . the term "one century" does not correspond in any sense to the hundred feet of steel bridge between modern and model towns, and that is what we wished to prove and have now proven. (545)

The measurement of time, the "miserable idea of measurement" (538), is to Van essentially spatial in nature and has little to do with the nature of change, the feel of the present, the reality of duration:

no one shall make me believe that the movement of matter (say, a pointer) across a carved-out area of Space (say, a dial) is by nature identical with the "passing" of time. Movement of matter merely spans an extension of some other palpable matter, against which it is measured, but tells us nothing about the actual structure of impalpable Time. (541)

Timing represents time "in terms of abstract boundaries of arbitrarily marked intervals--not in terms of the lived, concrete intervals of duration itself," as Charles Sheroover writes in summarizing Bergson.⁵

Van attacks the "easy spatial analogies" (544) that disguise the sheer difference of space from time, that do not face the difficulty, the elusiveness, of the notion of time, that hand down confusion and centuries of accumulated laziness of thought. He assaults linear notions

⁵ The Human Experience of Time (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1975), p. 169. Cf. Bergson himself: "The instant is what would terminate a duration if the latter came to a halt. But it does not halt. Real time cannot therefore supply the instant; the latter is born of the mathematical point, that is to say, of space." (Duration and Simultaneity, trans. from the 4th ed. by Leon Jacobson [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965], p. 53.)

of time, time as motion in one irreversible direction. Time is not moving, it "is not heading anywhere in the first place" (538); its one-way direction is "an illusion obscurely related to the mysteries of growth and gravitation" (538), to the fact of "organic decline natural to all things" (535); its irreversibility is not inevitable, but merely the result of the limitations of human consciousness, which has no access to its own past except through memory working within the present: "The irreversibility of Time . . . is a very parochial affair: had our organs and orgitrons not been asymmetrical, our view of Time might have been amphitheatric and altogether grand" (538-39). Spatial analogies are wrong in implying that the present is moving, when it is only the locus of change, when it fills up the universe and has nowhere to move (Van dismisses the relativists' dismissal of cosmic simultaneity), and they are wrong too in implying that the future (whether the analogy is a person moving along a road or a point moving along a line) is as definite as the past, that it is merely not yet reached.⁶

"The 'passage of time,'" Van writes,

is merely a figment of the mind with no objective counterpart, but with easy spatial analogies. It is seen only in rear view, shapes and shades, arollas and larches silently tumbling away: the perpetual disaster of receding time, éboulements, landslides, mountain roads where rocks are always falling and men always working. (544)

Earlier he has offered a spatial analogy that recognizes that the passage of time is "seen only in rear view," that the present is not

⁶ Cf. Bergson, Duration and Simultaneity, p. 62: "we have no way of limiting our spatial representation of elapsed time to the past."

moving, that the future is totally different from what has become. The image is of a person facing backwards, watching the road recede. Van says to Lucette:

"... time itself is motionless and changeless."

"Yes, it's always I in your lap and the receding road. Roads move?"

"Roads move." (482)

Or as it has been phrased earlier: "when the road 'runs out of you'" (279).

Van also criticizes the image, popular since at least Heraclitus ("Those who step into the same river have different waters flowing ever upon them"),⁷ of time as a river or stream or "flow."

The second dismissal is that of an immemorial habit of speech. We regard Time as a kind of stream, having little to do with an actual mountain torrent showing white against a black cliff or a dull-colored great river in a windy valley, but running invariably through our chronographical landscapes. We are so used to that mythical spectacle, so keen upon liquefying every lap of life, that we end up by being unable to speak of Time without speaking of physical motion. (540)

Van commands his imagery to put to flight those who refuse to consider the meaning of the analogies they so readily adopt: "The idea that Time 'flows' as naturally as an apple thuds down on a garden table implies that it flows in and through something else and if we take that 'something' to be Space, then we have only a metaphor flowing along a yard-stick" (540-41).⁸

⁷ Kathleen Freeman, trans., Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 25.

⁸ Bergson, who cannot do without the metaphor of time's flow, tries to solve the problem by dismantling the metaphor's vehicle: "a

Having severed Space from Time, Van can now consider Time itself. But for Van "Time is anything but the popular triptych: a no-longer existing Past, the durationless point of the Present, and a 'not-yet' that may never come. No." (559-60) He denies that the future is "an item of Time" (560): it "has nothing to do with Time and the dim gauze of its physical texture" (560); he argues that the present is not durationless but has a duration, and thus a reality, because consciousness retains "the still-fresh Past" (548); he maintains that the past is not "no-longer-existing," though it may be "intangible, and 'never-to-be-revisited'" (544); it is "a constant accumulation of images" (545) which, though we can no more visit than we can the future, "has at least the taste, the tinge, the tang of our individual being" (560).

The future, Van flatly declares, "is but a quack at the court of Chronos" (560): it is not a "not-yet," for its events "may never come." "At best," he writes, "the 'future' is the idea of a hypothetical present based on our experience of succession, on our faith in logic and habit. . . . At every moment it is an infinity of branching possibilities" (560-61), not a chain of events that are merely "not yet." We cannot say that, because we did not know yesterday but do know now what would happen this morning, then "consequently the Future did exist yesterday and by inference does exist today. This . . . is execrable logic." (560)

Anticipation is an activity of the present, the result of the

flow . . . a self-sufficient flow . . . , the flow not implying a thing that flows . . ." (Duration and Simultaneity, p. 44).

unknowability of "future events" and the mind's capacity to imagine future possibilities:

nor do I believe that the future is transformed into a third panel of Time, even if we do anticipate something or other--a turn of the familiar road or the picturesque rise of two steep hills, one with a castle, the other with a church, for the more lucid the forevision the less prophetic it is apt to be. (550)

Just as Van daringly presents in the form of a journey his dismissal of direction, motion and space as essentials of time, so he situates his dismissal of the future where the shadow of the anticipated reunion with Ada is cast over the essay's whole length--and as we shall see, the reunion only proves that anticipation has nothing to do with "the future."

Having dismissed space and the future, Van can concentrate on describing the present and the past of which time really exists. First, the present. The present is not durationless, for the mind's awareness of the immediate past gives it "duration and, therefore, reality" (560). Van defines "Our modest Present" as "the time span that one is directly and actually aware of, with the lingering freshness of the Past still perceived as part of the nowness" (550). He continues:

Since the Present is but an imaginary point without an awareness of the immediate past, it is necessary to define that awareness. Not for the first time will Space intrude if I say that what we are aware of as "Present" is the constant building up of the Past; its smoothly and relentlessly rising level. How meager! How magic! (551)

Van attempts to determine the limits of the conscious present, and concludes that we have "three or four seconds of what can be felt as nowness" (549) if we include the mind's deliberate attention to time.

One's attention to time is caught by rhythm, Van feels, and here he finds true time, the real sense of becoming, the impalpable "grayish gauze" of time's texture:

Maybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the gray gap between black beats: the Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like true Time lurks. How can I extract it from its soft hollow? The rhythm should be neither too slow nor too fast. One beat per minute is already far beyond my sense of succession and five oscillations per second make a hopeless blur. The ample rhythm causes Time to dissolve, the rapid one crowds it out. Give me, say, three seconds, then I can do both: perceive the rhythm and probe the interval. (538)

Van recognizes the absurdity of trying to "feel" time: "It is a queer enterprise--this attempt to determine the nature of something consisting of phantomic phases" (540). Yet it is because of their very phantomic nature that "the dim intervals between the dark beats have the feel of the texture of Time" (548). But after rhythm starts the mind off attending to time and its texture, it is exceedingly difficult for the mind to keep its concentration on time itself: "I can listen to Time only between stresses, for a brief concave moment warily and worriedly, with the growing realization that I am listening not to Time itself but to the blood current coursing through my brain" (538).

"Why is it so difficult," Van asks, "--so degradingly difficult--to bring the notion of Time into mental focus and keep it there for inspection? What an effort, what fumbling, what irritating fatigue!" (537) He notes that "The Time I am concerned with is only the Time stopped by me and closely attended to by my tense-willed mind" (539). When one tries to apprehend time's essence by "closely attending" to the

time present before consciousness, one sees it fade from consciousness even as one concentrates; then one is close to the nature of time even as one is driven to recognize that to investigate time means "struggling with the octopus of one's own brain" (557), with the very nature of human consciousness. When Van chooses to trace his thoughts along the course of a journey, he does so not because of the journey's forward direction, but to show himself concentrating on the "receding road," on time slipping away from his attention:

To give myself time to time Time I must move my mind in the direction opposite to that in which I am moving, as one does when one is driving past a long row of poplars and wishes to isolate and stop one of them, thus making the green blur reveal and offer, yes, offer, its every leaf. (549)

Above all he shows himself feeling the still-fresh past sliding away, feeling it by the rhythm that is time and not by the beats of the rhythm but by the "dim intervals between the dark beats" (548).

"Physiologically," then, the sense of the present "is a sense of continuous becoming, and if 'becoming' has a voice, the latter might be, not unnaturally, a steady vibration; but for Log's sake, let us not confuse Time with Tinnitus, and the seashell hum of duration with the throb of our blood" (559). Van continues: "Philosophically, on the other hand," the present "is but memory in the making" (559), the process of storing new material to add to the past, which for Van is simply "a storage of Time" (560).

Van insists that the past is not "no-longer-existing" (559), though it is not directly accessible: "The Past is changeless, intangible, and 'never-to-be-revisited'" (544). If the Past is unrevisitable, this

is not because of its "passing away" but because of the limitations of consciousness. Van writes: "I shall now proceed to consider the Past as an accumulation of sensa, not as the dissolution of Time implied by immemorial metaphors picturing transition. The 'passage of time' is merely a figment of the mind with no objective counterpart." (544) The Past is not a passing away, but an accumulation, a building up, "a storage of Time" (560): "what we are aware of as 'Present' is the constant building up of the Past, its smoothly and relentlessly rising level" (551). One's sense of succession is much weaker within that storage-house of the Past, Van emphasizes, than within the Present: "Our perception of the Past is not marked by the link of succession to as strong a degree as is the perception of the Present and of the instants immediately preceding its point of reality" (547). Though the Past can be seen as an "orderly alternation of linked events" (545), as a "coherent reconstruction of elapsed events" (547), Van stresses the immobility of time in the past as in the present. There is a rhythm of coloured event and dim interval in the past that forms a continuum in which succession is less important than the continuum's carpet-like texture:

Reviewing those last steps of the immediate Past involves less physical time than was needed for the clock's mechanism to exhaust its strokes, and it is this mysterious "less" which is a special characteristic of the still-fresh Past into which the Present slipped during that instant inspection of shadow sounds. The "less" indicates that the Past is in no need of clocks and the succession of its events is not clock time, but something more in keeping with the authentic rhythm of Time. We have suggested earlier that the dim intervals between the dark beats have the feel of the texture of Time. The same, more vaguely, applies to the impressions received from perceiving the gaps of unremembered or "neutral" time between vivid events. . . . Because of its situation among dead things, that dim continuum cannot be as

sensually groped for, tasted, harkened to, as Veen's Hollow between rhythmic beats; but it shares with it one remarkable indicium: the immobility of perceptual Time. (547-49)

The Past for Van is "coloured" and specific: it has "the taste, the tinge, the tang of our individual being" (560). It is "an accumulation of sensa" (544), and out of this accumulation, out of "the colored contents of the Past" (547) memory can choose what it likes, and in any order:

The Past, then, is a constant accumulation of images. It can be easily contemplated and listened to, tested and tasted at random, so that it ceases to mean the orderly alternation of linked events that it does in the large theoretical sense. It is now a generous chaos out of which the genius of total recall, summoned on this summer morning in 1922, can pick anything he pleases: . . . a russet black-hatted beauty at a Parisian bar in 1901; a humid red rose among artificial ones in 1883; . . . a little girl, in 1884, licking the breakfast honey off the badly bitten nails of her spread fingers. . . . (545-46).

Direction no longer means anything in the past--and we shall see shortly how important it is that the past's coloured reality can be recalled in any order, that it is not controlled by succession, that one event can be placed beside another in a sudden illuminating collocation.

3. Morning

The best proof of Van's arguments about the future and the past, his conclusion that texture is more significant than direction, are to be found not in the ratiocination but in the narrative of his "novella in the form of a treatise on the Texture of Time" (562-63). When Van arrives in Mont Roux, he books the same hotel rooms as he and Ada had used when they were last together, during those adulterous trysts

seventeen years earlier. He is out on the balcony, watching the sunset, when the phone rings: it is Ada, saying there's been trouble with the luggage, she's incredibly hungry, will he come down? She has "never--never, at least, in adult life--spoken to him by phone" (555) and has done so only once in childhood, in 1886. The freshness, the "girlish glee" (555) of her voice seem to make a magical connection back to 1886, back to their youthful past. But when Van comes down, the shock of change is dreadful: he is fifty-two; she is fifty and changed "in contour as well as in color" (556). Her rich black hair is now "dyed a brilliant bronze" (556), her figure is corseted and buxom. The surprise of age, the unfamiliarity, the lack of physical desire all create a strange awkwardness; their conversation remains unengaged. Suddenly, a chance remark they overhear sets things moving: "Young Van smiled back at young Ada. Oddly, that little exchange at the next table acted as a kind of delicious release." (557) But the relief does not last, the old intimacy does not return, and Ada says she cannot stay, she will have to "go back to Geneva directly after dinner to retrieve my things and maids. . . . I promise to get in touch with you in a day or two, and then we'll go on a cruise to Greece with the Baynards." (558) Van returns to "their" room, alone, takes a sleeping pill and, while waiting for it to work, returns to The Texture of Time --the arguments in which now appear in a much more orderly form, since Van is working at a desk. He falls asleep, dreaming

that he was speaking in the lecturing hall of a transatlantic liner and that a bum resembling the hitch-hiker from Hilden was asking sneeringly how did the lecturer explain that in our dreams we know we shall awake, is that not analogous to the certainty of death and if so, the future--

At daybreak he sat up with an abrupt moan, and trembling: if he did not act now, he would lose her forever!" He decided to drive at once to the Manhattan in Geneva. (561)

He goes out towards the balcony, wondering if it might, "perhaps, be simpler--" (561) just to jump off--and then he sees, "One floor below, and somewhat adjacently, . . . Ada engrossed in the view" (561). She looks up, "beaming, and . . . made the royal-grant gesture of lifting and offering him the mountains, the mist and the lake with three swans" (562). He runs down to the room where he conjectures she must be staying and finds her waiting for him:

When, "a little later," Van, kneeling and clearing his throat, was kissing her dear cold hands, gratefully, gratefully, in full defiance of death, with bad fate routed and her dreamy afterglow bending over him, she asked:

"Did you really think I had gone?"

"Obmanshchitsa (deceiver), obmanshchitsa," Van kept repeating with the fervor and gloat of blissful satiety.

"I told him to turn," she said, "somewhere near Morzhey ("morses" or "walruses," a Russian pun on "Morges"--maybe a mermaid's message). And you slept, you could sleep!" (562)

Part 4 ends with Van telling Ada that his first draft is done, that he has tried

to compose a kind of novella in the form of a treatise on the Texture of Time, an investigation of its veily substance, with illustrative metaphors gradually increasing, very gradually, building up a logical love story, going from past to present, blossoming as a concrete story, and just as gradually reversing analogies and disintegrating again into bland abstraction. (562-63)

Van has said that the future is at every moment "an infinity of branching possibilities" (561). The unexpectedness of Van and Ada's failure to re-establish their relationship at Mont Roux, the appalling shock of their aging, and then the unforeseeable, miraculous reunion the next morning--a reunion that will last until they die--prove Van's

point, that things could have turned out differently at any moment, that the future was open, that the relation of anticipation to what eventually happens is significant for the present but not for the future. Van's narrative has confirmed his views of the future, of the freedom of events in time.

What of the past? This marvelous morning on the balcony is no less a celebration of pattern, of the directionless design of time's gauzy fabric, than it is a confirmation of independence. We must now look back.

Ada's phone call to Van reminds him with singular vividness of their one previous exchange over the telephone, in 1886: "It was the timbre of their past, as if the past had put through that call, a miraculous connection ('Ardis, one eight eight six'--comment? Non, non, pas huitante-huit--huitante-six)" (555). That earlier phone call had been made between Malahar, on the Ladore River, and Ardis, when Van was arranging the tryst with Ada that we saw in Chapter 1, "Forest Fork the Second":

The toilet on the landing was a black hole, with the traces of a fecal explosion, between a squatter's two giant soles. At 7 A.M. on July 25 he called Ardis Hall from the Malahar post office and got connected with Bout who was connected with Blanche and mistook Van's voice for the butler's.

"Dammit, Pa," he said into his bedside dorophone, "I'm busy!"

"I want Blanche, you idiot," growled Van.

"Oh, pardon," cried Bout, "un moment, Monsieur."

A bottle was audibly uncorked (drinking hock at seven in the morning!) and Blanche took over, but scarcely had Van begun to deliver a carefully worded message to be transmitted to Ada, when Ada herself who had been on the qui vive all night answered from the nursery, where the clearest instrument in the house quivered and bubbled under a dead barometer.

"Forest Fork in Forty-Five minutes. Sorry to spit."

"Tower!" replied her sweet ringing voice. . . . (179)

The grotesque (though accurate) description of the toilet is not gratuitous: it is recalled by a similar description on the summer morning of 1922 when Van and Ada have another, much longer-lasting, reunion ahead of them: "Van welcomed the renewal of polished structures after a week of black fudge fouling the bowl slope so high that no amount of flushing could dislodge it" (561).

But before we return to that much later morning, let us look more closely at the morning of Forest Fork the Second. The brief scene above recalls Van's first morning at Ardis in 1884. In Forest Fork the Second Van rings up Ardis and interrupts Bout, who is in bed with Blanche and thinks it is Bouteillan, his father, who has interrupted him. Van hears a bottle being uncorked and is surprised at Bout's "drinking hock at seven in the morning!" (179). On his first morning at Ardis in 1884, Van, rising early, encounters Blanche. Though he is aroused by her pretty features, he is put off by "her strange tragic tone." Their little colloquy is interrupted by Bouteillan's arrival: "Now we have to separate, the sparrow has disappeared, I see, and Monsieur Bouteillan has entered the next room, and can perceive us clearly in that mirror above the sofa behind that silk screen" (49). It soon becomes apparent (when Van finds on the ground, later on what is probably the same morning, the tortoiseshell comb Blanche had had in her hair) that it is in fact Van who has almost interrupted Blanche and Bouteillan. And Bouteillan, like his son--who by that morning in 1886 has long replaced him as Blanche's lover--is also an early drinker: "The butler's hand in the mirror took down a decanter from nowhere and was withdrawn" (49).

That there is a special link between Van's first morning at Ardis and the phone conversation before Forest Fork the Second is confirmed on the way to Forest Fork the First (on the last morning of Ardis the First, and of course specifically recalled in Forest Fork the Second). Bouteillan attempts to warn Van that he must be careful in his affair with Ada: "Monsieur should be prudent" (157). Van feigns to take Bouteillan's warning as a reference to that first morning at Ardis when the butler came in upon Blanche and Van: "'If,' said Van, 'you're thinking of little Blanche, then you'd better quote Delille not to me, but to your son, who'll knock her up any day now'" (157). On the morning of Forest Fork the Second it is indeed Bouteillan's son who is making love to Blanche and who is having an early drink and who is interrupted by Van.

But the first morning at Ardis the First in turn foreshadows the first morning of Ardis the Second. On the first morning of his earlier stay at Ardis, Van is seeking a way out of the château, whose obvious doors are bolted and chained. He is "still unaware that under the stairs an inconspicuous recess concealed an assortment of spare keys . . . and communicated through a toolroom with a secluded part of the garden" (48). As he looks for an obliging window, he comes upon Blanche. Stirred by the young maid's presence, he clasps her wrist and draws closer, "while looking over her head for a suitable couch to take shape in some part of this magical manor--where any place, as in Casanova's remembrances could be dream-changed into a sequestered seraglio nook" (49); as Blanche is talking, Bouteillan appears. On the first night of Ardis the Second, Van and Ada meet in the now-familiar old

toolroom and are making love there when Blanche glides in with her key, "back from a rendezvous with old Sore, the Burgundian night watchman" (191), her latest lover. Van spends a "strenuous 'Casanovanic' night with Ada" (198) on the bench in the toolroom. Early in the morning, they help themselves to a snack breakfast. While they are talking, Ada makes "what she called a warning frog face, because Bouteillan had appeared in the doorway" (195).

The first morning at Ardis the First also foreshadows Van's last morning ever at Ardis, when Blanche makes her dire disclosure. On that first morning at Ardis, Van chances upon Blanche because he does not know he can get out through the toolroom. He accosts her: "What was her name? Blanche--but Mlle Larivière called her 'Cendrillon' because her stockings got so easily laddered, see, and because she broke and mislaid things, and confused flowers" (49). His arousal is evident: "His loose attire revealed his desire; this could not escape a girl's notice, even if color-blind" (49). He imagines the impending seduction scene, but is irked by Blanche's romanesque style: "Monsieur is a nobleman; I am a poor peat-digger's daughter. . . . were I to fall in love with you--I mean really in love--and I might, alas, if you possessed me rien qu'une petite fois--it would be, for me, only grief, and infernal fire, and despair, and even death, Monsieur" (49). On Van's last morning at Ardis, he is awoken from his hammock by Blanche's coming through the creaking toolroom door. Blanche tries to look alluring, but is only a bedraggled and slatternly Cinderella ("no slippers"): "bare armed, in her petticoat, one stocking gartered, the other down to her ankle; no slippers" (292). Her invitation on this morning echoes

antiphonally and in the same romanesque key the demurrer she made on Van's first morning at Ardis: "C'est ma dernière nuit au château," she said softly, and rephrased it in her quaint English, elegiac and stilted, as spoken only in obsolete novels. 'Tis my last night with thee" (292). While Van was aroused and not shy to manifest this in 1884, he is now quite stirless as he enters the toolroom with Blanche and remains unable "to work up the urge which she took for granted and whose total absence he carefully concealed under his tartan cloak" (293). It is at this point the disclosure breaks and Van knows he must flee the enchantment of Ardis.

The morning meeting of Forest Fork, then, recalls the first morning of Ardis the First, which in turn foreshadows the first morning and the last of Ardis the Second. But Forest Fork itself foreshadows both the first and last mornings at Ardis in 1888. The 1886 meeting anticipates Van and Ada's active renewal of their affair in the first night and morning of Ardis the Second merely by virtue of its being their only reunion at Ardis since 1884, their first lovemaking since that separation, their only lovemaking before that long night at Ardis the Second. We have already seen in Chapter 1 (pp. 94-100) how Forest Fork the Second foreshadows the worst of Ardis the Second, the picnic and especially that dreadful last morning, when Van leaves Ardis two years to the day and almost the hour after the feverish love-making of 1886. But Forest Fork foreshadows not only the morning of Van's departure from Ardis but also the morning after that, the morning of Van's duel. Let us quote from the antecedents of the 1886 reunion:

Van rented a room . . . at . . . Malahar . . . on Ladore River. . . . The toilet on the landing was a black hole, with the traces of a fecal explosion, between a squatter's two giant soles. At 7 A.M. on July 25 he called Ardis Hall . . . and got connected with Bout who . . . mistook Van's voice for the butler's.

"Dammit Pa," he said into his bedside dorophone, "I'm busy!" (179)

On the morning of the duel Bouteillan, the Ladore, the dorophone and the unpleasantly vivid fecal imagery recur:

Van was roused by the night porter who put a cup of coffee . . . on his bedside table. . . . He resembled somewhat Bouteillan as the latter had been ten years ago and as he had appeared in a dream, which Van now retrostructed as far as it would go: in it Demon's former valet explained to Van that the "dor" in the name of an adored river equaled the corruption of hydro in "dorophone."

He shaved . . . had a structurally perfect stool, took a quick bath. . . . (309-10)

The brief meeting at Forest Fork in 1886, which at the time seems a triumph for Van and Ada, foreshadows the double doom that closes Ardis the Second, Van's furious departure and his near-fatal wound.

But when Van and Ada are reunited in Manhattan in 1892, the morning of their reunion redeems the doubled wee at the end of Ardis the Second. The recollection of the morning of the duel is quite straightforward: "he began ringing up Ardis Hall--vainly, vainly. He kept it up intermittently till daybreak, gave up, had a structurally perfect stool (its cruciform symmetry reminding him of the morning before his duel)" (389). The "structurally perfect" is a trap for the reviewers (such as Updike, p. 68) and critics (such as Fowler, p. 177) who might disapprove of Nabokov's recurrent fecal imagery without being able to see the structural perfection of which it forms part. The recollection of the last morning of Ardis itself is a little less

obvious but no less precise. . . On that dire last morning, Van had seen Ada on her balcony, "signaling to him. She signaled telegraphically, with expansive linear gestures, indicating the cloudless sky (what a cloudless sky!), the jacaranda summit in bloom (blue! bloom!)" (295). This painful reminder of the joy he must leave, of their first early morning together--when Ada on her balcony was "stickily glistening" (75) with the honey she was eating, when "her tower crumbled in the sweet silent sun" (76) as Van left the balcony--is recalled and reversed on the first morning at Manhattan, when Van waits for Ada "on the roof terrace (now embellished by shrubs of blue spiraea in invincible bloom)" (390: my italics)⁹ and when after making love "our two lovers, now weak-legged and decently robed, sat down to a beautiful breakfast (Ardis' crisp bacon! Ardis' translucent honey!)" (393).

If the first morning of Van and Ada's Manhattan reunion specifically and exactly recalls the end of Ardis the Second, it also, on the other hand, forecasts the end of their Manhattan idyll. On Van and Ada's first morning at Manhattan breakfast is "brought up in the lift by Valerio, a ginger-haired elderly Roman" (393). On their last morning, Demon discovers his children are lovers when he arrives with the breakfast:

Demon hastened to enter the lobby and catch the lift which a ginger-haired waiter had just entered, with breakfast for two

⁹ The "blue spiraea in invincible bloom" stands out particularly sharply as an echo of the earlier "blue! bloom!" because that earlier phrase is remarkable in itself as a distinct echo of Ulysses: "Blew. Blue bloom is on the" (U 252); "Bloom. Old Bloom. Blue Bloom is on the rye" (U 257).

on a wiggle-wheel table and the Manhattan Times among the shining, ever so slightly scratched, silver cupolas. Was his son still living up there, automatically asked Demon, placing a piece of nobler metal among the domes. Si, conceded the grinning imbecile, he had lived there with his lady [whom Demon assumes will be Cordula] all winter. (434)

That last morning at Manhattan, in its turn, is explicitly "redeemed" in the first morning of Van and Ada's next reunion, at Mont Roux in 1905. Van is in the throes of a vivid dream:

yet he knew by the dimple of a faint smile that she was looking at his . . . raw scarlet. Somebody said, wheeling a table nearby: "It's one of the Vane Sisters," and he awoke murmuring with professional appreciation the oneiric word-play combining his name and surname, and plucked out the wax plugs, and, in a marvelous act of rehabilitation and link-up, the breakfast table clanked from the corridor across the threshold of the adjacent room, and, already munching and honey-crumbed, Ada entered his bedchamber. It was only a quarter to eight!

"Smart, girl!" said Van; "but first of all I must go to the petit endroit (W.C.)" (521)

That breakfast table recalls the "breakfast for two on a wiggle-wheel table" (434) which had accompanied Demon on the morning he separated his son and daughter for more than twelve years. The "first of all I must go to the petit endroit," one should note, also recalls the beginning of Van and Ada's previous reunion, when Ada "stopped him, explaining that she must first of all take her morning bath (this, indeed, was a new Ada)" (392).

The pattern of all these morning encounters is crowned by the reunion of Mont Roux in 1922 and that sudden shock of seeing Ada on her balcony in the morning light, in "her flimsy peignoir. . . . Pensively, youngly, voluptuously, she was scratching her thigh at the rise of the right buttock: Ladore's pink signature on vellum at mosquito dusk." (562) This final reunion encompasses the promise and the threat of

Forest Fork the Second, which it recalls directly by the "miraculous connection ('Ardis, one eight eight six' . . .)" (555) and by the toilet image ("black fudge fouling the bowl") which matches the earlier "fecal explosion." The 1922 reunion also overturns the poignant loss at the end of Ardis the Second: "standing on a third-floor balcony and signaling to him. She signaled telegraphically, with expansive linear gestures, indicating the cloudless sky (what a cloudless sky!), the jacaranda summit in bloom (blue! bloom!)" (295). In Mont Roux there is a paulownia "in sumptuous purple-blue bloom" (554); on the magic morning, "under the cloudless turquoise of the sky" (561), Ada on her balcony turns to Van, making "the royal-grant gesture of lifting and offering him the mountains" (562).

The Manhattan morning which so richly redeems the end of Ardis the Second is itself now amply recalled. The fecal imagery, the rooftop terrace scene, the "blue spiraea in invincible bloom" all reappear in the fecal imagery, the balcony, the "purple-blue bloom" of Mont Roux. In 1892, moreover, Ada had chartered a plane to get to Manhattan and Van as quickly as possible; now, in 1922, before he sees Ada, Van wonders how he can catch her: "Should he rent a plane?" (561).

The morning of their reunion in Mont Roux in 1905 is also easily evoked, not only by the fact of the reunion's being again in Mont Roux and in the same hotel (a commemorative gesture on Van and Ada's part, of course), but also by the way that "marvelous act of rehabilitation and link-up" (521) in the 1905 reunion is recollected in the 1922 phone call's "resurrecting the past and linking it up with the present" (556).

The balcony scene in Mont Roux is the key to the elaborate and

exhilarating pattern running delicately through all the mornings that give shape to Van and Ada's lives: the first and last mornings of Ardis the First, their sole meeting near Ardis and their sole love-making ("Forest Fork the Second") in the four years of their earliest separation, the first and last mornings of Ardis the Second, the first and last mornings of their Manhattan sojourn, the first morning of their first reunion in Mont Roux. No less part of the pattern are their first early morning together, "that blue morning on the balcony" (75), the "honey" part of the "hammock and honey" chapter, and their first morning together as lovers, the day after the night of the Burning Barn, where the baguenaudier flowers and the Jolana butterflies let us know how Van and Ada spent their first few days of new happiness in 1922:

Blue butterflies nearly the size of Small Whites, and likewise of European origin, were flitting swiftly around the shrubs and settling on the drooping clusters of yellow flowers. In less complex circumstances, forty years hence, our lovers were to see again, with wonder and joy, the same insect and the same bladder-senna along a forest trail near Susten in the Valais. (128)¹⁰

We can see now how Van's philosophy fits into the much larger structure of Nabokov's own ideas. Van himself has chosen the unexpectedness, the utterly unforeseeable joy of Ada's return and his catching sight of her on the balcony below to cap his argument for the total openness of time, its infinitely branching possibilities, its endless surprise. When Nabokov supports Van's denial of the future, as his

¹⁰ The butterflies are of the sub-genus Jolana, after which Van and Ada name the villa Van calls into on that journey towards Ada in The Texture of Time; the year "our lovers . . . see again . . . the same bladder-senna" has earlier been specified as 1922 ("mused Van, in 1922, when he saw those baguenaudier flowers again" [125]).

narrative does here, he is insisting--as we noted in Chapter 2 he does throughout his work--on the independence of events in time: Van has also argued throughout The Texture of Time that the past is an accumulation of *sensa*, that its coloured contents are not constrained by succession but are free to be selected and savoured by memory. Nabokov too treats the past as a field for inexhaustible reinvestigation which memory can explore without being bound by succession, and as we noted in Chapter 2 he values the past above all as a repository of discoverable pattern. If Nabokov's love of independence is behind that balcony scene over Lake Geneva, so too is his love of pattern. The "morning" pattern woven throughout Ada's narrative, crowned by Van's catching sight of Ada on the balcony at Mont Roux, discoverable when the most minute details of Van and Ada's past are suddenly seen together, convinces us more than any of Van's arguments could that time may be less important as direction than as an accumulation of *sensa* that can be freely arranged in memory.

We have considered on its own only one of the early morning scenes, the "honey" balcony scene of the "hammock and honey" chapter, Pt.1 Ch.12 (see above, pp. 269-74), where we noted the breathtaking freshness and individuality and vitality of that single scene. The same qualities can be found in each of the morning scenes that form part of the grand pattern: in each there is a rare value in the independence of the moment, a sense of the freedom and the worth of each instant that can hardly be matched in literature. But in addition to this magic of local life we find, long afterwards, only after many readings, an astonishing pattern of interlacements.

Nabokov, surely, is asking us this: if within a closed system such as this novel, pattern can be discerned so long after we first encounter the imagined events, even when we are able to return endlessly and exactly to this fictive past, is it not possible that within a system--the whole world of time--that is not closed, where at least for mortal man there is no possibility of endless return, there is pattern of the same eerie complexity?

And is it not possible--though one shudders at the infinity of consciousness such design would require--that every life may be shaped with the care exhibited here, in a way too subtle to allow any mortal memory to see even the patterns of its own past, in a way that would still allow human lives their freedom and their responsibility and would leave time its unqualified openness and independence? If in each of the scenes in his pattern, considered on its own, Nabokov has tenderly preserved the independence of time even as he designs a pattern too subtle to be perceived without many replayings of the fictive past, is it not possible that an infinite care could be allowing us total freedom while weaving its own designs through our free choices, so that even the most trifling or mundane details of our lives could take on imprevisible significance?

Nabokov insists on the mystery of art, on art's appeal "to that secret depth of the human soul where the shadows of other worlds pass like the shadows of nameless and soundless ships" (NG 149). Nowhere is his own art more exact and more mysterious than in the independence and the patternedness of Ada's scenes.

4. A Mermaid's Message

Let us recall a sentence that should by now be familiar, that sentence from the "hammock and honey" chapter in which Van seems to sink into his Uncle Ivan's death, in which he is haunted by the infinite black emptiness of night (which "always remained an ordeal" [73]), in which Van suddenly breaks off from the past about which he is writing to reveal that the time in which he is writing is almost the hour of his death:

His nights in the hammock (where that other poor youth had cursed his blood cough and sunk back into dreams of prowling black spumas . . .) were now haunted not so much by the agony of his desire for Ada, as by that meaningless space overhead, underhead, everywhere, the demon counterpart of divine time, tingling about him and through him, as it was to retingle--with a little more meaning fortunately--in the last nights of a life, which I do not regret, my love. (73-74)

This plangent expression of the themes of night and death will be echoed in the haunting dream of Van's last Villa Venus, which ends just before the promise of a gruesome dawn. But here, within the hammock and honey chapter, night and death are followed immediately by the "resurrection" (74) of the magic "honey" scene, of "that blue morning on the balcony."

The memorable morning in 1922 bears a similar relation to the themes of night and death. The night before, Van falls asleep despondent, knowing his reunion with Ada has ended in failure:

He dreamed that he was speaking in the lecturing hall of a transatlantic liner and that a bum resembling the hitch-hiker from Hilden was asking sneeringly how did the lecturer explain that in our dreams we know we shall awake, is not that analogous to the certainty of death and if so, the future--

At daybreak he sat up with an abrupt moan, and trembling: if he did not act now, he would lose her forever! (561)

The dream garbles together Van's picking up a hitchhiker on his journey towards Mont Roux the previous day, his work on the treatise, which appears here in the form of the lectures on time he has given during his career, and his last moments with Lucette, in the movie theatre of a transatlantic liner. The conjunction of Lucette, "the certainty of death," and waking from dreams is no accident.

When Van and Ada have made love later that morning, "in full defiance of death, with bad fate routed," Ada asks:

"Did you really think I had gone?"

"I told him to turn," she said, "somewhere near Morzhey ('morses' or 'walruses,' a Russian pun on 'Morges'--maybe a mermaid's message). . . ." (562)

Morges is a town about thirty-five kilometres along the road from Montreux (Nabokov's home while writing Ada and the obvious model for Mont Roux) to Geneva (Ada's destination). But pronounced "Morzhey" as Ada pronounces it here, Morges resembles the Russian "morzhey" ("of walruses"). Van glosses it "'morses' or 'walruses.'" "Morse" is indeed an English word meaning "walrus," though it cannot but bring the Morse code to mind: hence the "mermaid's message."

But what does that "mermaid's message" mean? The night before, Van had resorted to the treatise on time to hold his despair at bay. He takes a sleeping tablet,

and, while waiting for it to relieve him of himself, a matter of forty minutes or so, sat down at a lady's bureau to his "lucubratiuncula."

Does the ravage and outrage of age deplored by poets tell the naturalist of Time anything about Time's essence? Very little. Only a novelist's fancy could be caught by this small oval box, once containing Duvet de Ninon (a face powder, with a bird of paradise on the lid), which has been forgotten in a not-quite-

closed drawer of the bureau's arc of triumph--not, however, triumph over Time. The blue-green-orange thing looked as if he were meant to be deceived into thinking it had been waiting there seventeen years for the bemused, smiling finder's dream-slow hand: a shabby trick of feigned restitution, a planted coincidence--and a bad blunder, since it had been Lucette, now a mermaid in the groves of Atlantis (and not Ada, now a stranger somewhere near Morges in a black limousine) who had favored that powder. (559)

The conjunction of Ada and Morges here makes it certain that it is Lucette--dead, at the bottom of the Atlantic--who is the mermaid in mind in the later "mermaid's message." Has the decision Ada makes to turn back to Mont Roux and to Van been inspired somehow by dead Lucette?

In the passage above the face powder "with a bird of paradise on the lid" is not only like Lucette's makeup, it is intimately associated with Lucette herself. We have seen already (pp. 500-01) that on the night of the Ursus outing Lucette with her short green frock and her dark furs and with her "eyes . . . made up in a 'surprised bird of paradise' style" (410) looks just like the Superb bird of paradise (Lophorina superba). After the débauche à trois the morning after the Ursus outing, Lucette flees, leaving a message scrawled in her green eyeshadow. Van pens her a note of apology: "We are sorry you left so soon. We are even sorrier to have inveigled our Esmeralda and mermaid in a naughty prank. . . . We wished to admire and amuse you, BOP (bird of paradise)." (421) Again "mermaid" and "bird of paradise" occur together, in lines Van is prompted to write in response to a note from Lucette: perhaps the later lines Van writes in Mont Roux are in response to a message from Lucette simultaneous with that she might be giving to Ada, whom Van imagines to be near Morges just as he thinks and writes of Lucette as a "mermaid in the groves of Atlantis." That image and the bird of paradise

seem to form a strong double hint that Lucette may have reached immortality after drowning.

Apart from these intimations of immortality and the "mermaid's message" itself, there are numerous indications of Lucette's almost being shadowily present, or at least repeatedly implicated, in the events of that memorable morning of Van and Ada's final reunion. Lucette is implied, first, in "the lecturing hall of a transatlantic liner" in Van's dream. Then when Van wakes up, realizing that he must catch Ada immediately if he is not to lose her forever, he wonders should he ring up her hotel in Geneva before starting, or should he rent a plane?

Or might it, perhaps, be simpler--

The door-folds of his drawing room balcony stood wide open. (561)

Van is tempted to throw himself to his death--and thus to imitate the end Lucette chose in leaping down to her death from the Tobakoff.

While he is still looking through the balcony doors, before he has gone out onto the balcony itself (from where he will at once see Ada), Van hears the traffic below: "Four tremendous trucks thundered by one after another" (561). This recalls Van's observations on Mont Roux's street noise the day before:

The streets had been considerably quieter in the sourdine Past. The old Morris pillar, upon which the present Queen of Portugal figured once as an actress, no longer stood at the corner of Chemin de Mustruz (old corruption of the town's name). Must Trucks roar through Must Rux? (554)

While the connection between these two passages is apparent, Lucette's involvement is certainly not.

The "present Queen of Portugal" is the former actress Lenore Colline, whom Lucette notices while lunching with Van in Paris five days before her death:

a naval officer in the azure uniform of the Gulfstream Guards passed by in the wake of a dark, ivory-pale lady and said: "Hullo, Lucette, hullo, Van."

"Hullo, Alph," said Van, whilst Lucette acknowledged the greeting with an absent smile: over her propped-up entwined hands she was following with mocking eyes the receding lady. Van cleared his throat as he gloomily glanced at his half-sister.

"Must be at least thirty-five," murmured Lucette, "yet still hopes to become his queen."

(His father, Alphonse the First of Portugal, a puppet potentate manipulated by Uncle Victor, had recently abdicated upon Gamaliel's suggestion in favor of a republican regime, but Lucette spoke of fragile beauty, not fickle politics.)

"That was Lenore Colline. What's the matter, Van?"

"Cats don't stare at stars, it's not done. The resemblance is much less close than it used to be--though, of course, I've not kept up with counterpart changes. . . ." (465)

Though she resembles Ada in appearance and though like Ada she is a film actress, Lenore Colline is pointedly though obliquely identified with Lucette. Lenore's name and her becoming a queen derive from Poe's "Lenore" (1831), with its lamentation for "the queenliest dead that ever died so young," for "the innocence that died, and died so young."¹¹ The "Colline" in Lenore's name is chiefly a reflection of the fact that she is Irish (and Van dwells lovingly in the "Divan Japonais" scene on Lucette's "Irish profile" [461]) and of Chateaubriand's lines as modified by Van:

¹¹ These lines are from the much-revised and now standard 1849 version, *The Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Floyd Stovall (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1965), p. 56.

Van had seen the picture [the film of Four Sisters, in which Lenore Colline plays Irina to Marina's Varvara] and had liked it. An Irish girl, the infinitely graceful and melancholy Lenore Colline--

Oh! qui me rendra ma colline
Et le grand chêne and my colleen!

--harrowingly resembled Ada Ardis. . . . (428)

As we have seen, Lucette's loss is at least as strongly implied in the Chateaubriand variations as is Van and Ada's distance from their past:

Oh! qui me rendra mon Aline
Et le grand chêne et ma colline?

.

Oh! qui me rendra ma Lucile. . . . (138-39)

If Lenore Colline is generally to be closely identified with Lucette (and there are other patterns that confirm that she should) "the présent Queen of Portugal" of the "Must Trucks roar through Must Rux" passage is also specifically related to Lucette. Lenore Colline becomes the wife of "Alph," son of Alphonse the First and therefore himself Alphonse the Second. Lucette in Paris is staying "at the Alphonse Four" (458), and Van asks that hotel's concierge, "dubbed by Van in his blazer days 'Alphonse Cinq'" (459), if he knows where Lucette can be found. When Van does find Lucette, she says to him:

Immediately after lunch we'll go to my room, a numb twenty-five, my age. I have a fabulous Japanese divan and lots of orchids just supplied by one of my beaux. Ach, Bozhe moy--it has just occurred to me--I shall have to look into this--maybe they are meant for Brigitte, who is marrying after tomorrow, at three-thirty, a head waiter at the Alphonse Trois, in Auteuil. (463).

Apart from constituting a countdown towards Lucette's death, the Alphonses one to five also associate Lucette closely with the woman who

we find in the "Must Trucks" passage has become the wife and queen of Alphonse the Second.

Lucette herself, too, is directly evoked in the "Must Trucks" passage, where Van notes, just before referring to the former actress, that "The streets had been considerably quieter in the sourdine Past" (554). The "sourdine" here distinctly echoes a comment Van has made on Lucette's acting skill: "She does--to perfection!--my favorite viola sordina. She's a wonderful imitatrix . . ." (395).¹²

Lucette, then, is linked so precisely with Lenore Colline that when Van hears the trucks in Mont Roux on that extraordinary morning just before he steps out to see Ada, the good reader should also hear the "Must Trucks roar through Must Rux" and the allusion to Lenore Colline--and to Lucette--from the previous day.

When, at last, Van does get to the balcony, the thought of falling to his death and the strange question as to whether he has done this before bring Lucette most precisely to mind just an instant before he sees Ada:

He went up to the rail of the balcony and wondered if he had ever satisfied the familiar whim by going platch--had he? had he? You could never know, really. One floor below, and somewhat adjacently, stood Ada engrossed in the view. (561)

That odd speculation about a previous suicide-by-jumping recalls an error that remains in the text as Van describes Lucette's leap to her

¹² Van's "favorite viola sordina" is Ada's "demure little whisper of ultimate bliss" (376) which Lucette reproduces to convince Van of the truth of her account of her and Ada's interweavings.

death: "Although Lucette had never died before--no, dived before, Violet--from such a height . . ." (493). Just when Van comes uncan- nily close to following Lucette's example and giving up his life as hopeless, he catches sight of Ada--who may be there because of "a mermaid's message."

At this point we must turn back for another viewing of Don Juan's Last Fling. Insofar as the film has a source it is Pushkin's version of the Don Juan legend. In Pushkin's Kamenniy Gost' the ghost of Don Juan's victim finds vengeance by animating his sepulchral statue to become the "Stone Guest" that frightens Juan to death. In Don Juan's Last Fling there is no returning ghost, yet there is a "Stone Cuckold's revenge" (490), what we can only construe therefore as some involvement of the dead "Cuckold" in the fates of the living, through some mortal agency. The revenge is not, as in Pushkin's play, the death of Don Juan, but instead Juan's impotence--after that "premature spasm" (489) drawn from him by Dolores--when after at last reaching Donna Anna's castle he is expected to make love to his hostess. This part of the movie's plot is made clear in an unposted letter to Ada, in which Van (who since the fatal visus interruptus on the Tobakoff has seen Don Juan's Last Fling again and again) fondly recollects Ada's performance:

the best moment is one of the last--when you follow barefoot the Don who walks down a marble gallery to his doom, to the scaffold of Donna Anna's black-curtained bed, around which you flutter, my Zegris butterfly, straightening a comically drooping candle, whispering delightful but futile instructions into the frowning lady's ear, and then peering over that mauresque screen and suddenly dissolving in such natural laughter. . . . (500)

But if this is the Stone Cuckold's revenge, the plot of Don

Juan's Last Fling closely corresponds to much of the plot of The Texture of Time. Van rides toward Ada; just before the two are united, the phone call from Ada, a "miraculous connection" (555) that seems to be "resurrecting the past" (556), arouses Van's expectations far too high. Though of course the phone call has wrung no spasm from him, Van's "senses certainly remained stirless" (557) when he comes down to find Ada so old and so changed: it is as if the Stone Cuckold has exacted his revenge.

This is not a flimsy and fanciful parallel but is woven right into the texture of Don Juan's Last Fling. The leading female role in the film is that of "not too irresistible, obviously forty-year-old, Donna Anna" (488), a description appropriate only to the events in The Texture of Time and not to the earlier reading of the film in which Lucette awaiting "a long night of love in her chaste and chilly chamber" is Donna Anna. In the film "the aging libertine" is on his way "to the remote castle where the difficult lady, widowed by his sword, has finally promised him a long night of love" (488). Van in Part 4 is on his way to Mont Roux, where he and Ada are meeting because at last Ada is a widow (Van of course has not killed Andrey Vineland, though he has often imagined doing so). Note too that the "remote castle" to which Juan is travelling appears in Van's Texture of Time: "I delight sensually in Time. . . . I wish to do something about it; to indulge in a simulacrum of possession. I am aware that all who have tried to reach the charmed castle have got lost in obscurity or have bogged down in Space." (537) In the movie the gitanilla "bends her head over the live table of Leporello's servile back to trace on a scrap of parchment

a rough map of the way to the castle" (489). Van on his journey asks: "Why is it so difficult--so degradingly difficult--to bring the notion of Time into mental focus and keep it there for inspection? What an effort, what fumbling, what irritating fatigue! It is like rummaging with one hand in the glove compartment for the road map . . ." (537).

Van's journey to Mont Roux and widowed Ada can be equated with Juan's journey to Donna Anna's castle, and Van's "stirless" response, after the excitement of the phone call, to a considerably aged Ada can be seen to match Juan's impotence, after his "premature spasm," with the "not too irresistible, obviously forty-year-old, Donna Anna." But how can Lucette be considered a "Stone Cuckold"?

Though she does not marry Van, Lucette at least proposes it (466), and when in the last chapter of the novel Van and Ada are working on a translation of John Shade's Pale Fire into Russian, Ada says:

"Oh, Van, oh Van, we did not love her enough. That's whom you should have married . . . and then everything would have been all right--I would have stayed with you both in Ardis Hall, and instead of that happiness, handed out gratis, instead of all that we teased her to death!" (586)

(The passage in Pale Fire which Van and Ada have been translating and which prompts this outburst deals, significantly, with the possibility of an afterlife, as we shall see in the next chapter.) But if Ada's regrets allow Lucette to be considered as the "Stone Cuckold," and if, like the Stone Cuckold in Don Juan's Last Fling, Lucette is a ghost who does not return physically yet influences the lives of mortals, her intervention in Van and Ada's lives, if it is one, has been an act not of revenge but of kindness. Dead Lucette has no part in the phone call

that parallels the film's revenge, but her "mermaid's message" (if it is this), her prompting something in Ada's mind to make her decide to return to Mont Roux, is an action manifesting that generosity that characterized her in life. This free gift of kindness is the basis for the happiness of Van and Ada's lives and the happiness of their whole story, of Ada itself.

In this chapter we have already seen Nabokov's shaping Ada according to his concern for the independence of life in time and simultaneously according to his interest in the possibility of a patterner of time, a shaping consciousness behind life, infinitely beyond any possible extension of human consciousness. Now too we can see that Nabokov has once again imaginatively explored the possibility of some transformation of human consciousness beyond death. Lucette, it would appear, has been granted the ability to reinvestigate the past endlessly and has discerned the "morning" pattern of which even Van and Ada are not aware. She has reached, one presumes, a fuller freedom, a state of consciousness no longer confined within the present but able to range at leisure throughout the past and to discern its patterns. She would seem to inhabit the "There, tam, là-bas" where "the gaze of men glows with inimitable understanding," as Nabokov imagines in Invitation to a Beheading:

there the freaks that are tortured here walk unmolested; there time takes shape according to one's pleasure, like a figured rug whose folds can be gathered in such a way that two designs will meet--and the rug is once again smoothed out, and you live on, or else superimpose the next image on the last, endlessly, endlessly. . . . (IB 94)

Though Lucette cannot communicate directly with mortal lives she can

perhaps influence them subtly and thus leave her own pattern in time. Like the transparent things who explain that "The most we can do when steering a favorite in the best direction, in circumstances not involving injury to others, is to act as a breath of wind and to apply the lightest, the most indirect pressure" (TT 92), she seems only to offer gently to Ada's mind the possibility of a change in plans. Because Ada does change her mind, because she will be there on the balcony below Van the next morning, this morning will bring together and crown all the vital mornings of Van and Ada's lives, and reveal--to herself at least--Lucette's own participation in the pattern of their lives.

Nabokov always envisages that human, mortal memory might be the forerunner of a consciousness to which the past might be directly accessible, the forerunner of a consciousness which could endlessly reinvestigate the past, discovering new patterns and new harmonies. Because as readers we can continue to re-examine the fictive past, Nabokov has offered us the uncanny and exhilarating thrill of discovering in the novel's events harmonies as unexpected as the "morning" pattern. In allowing such shockingly unforeseen pleasure, such sudden new insight into familiar events, Nabokov makes almost unbearably delightful the prospect of an immortality in which such discoveries would be rife.

But if we have been offered this analogy, Lucette, it would appear, has been offered the thing itself, an immortality in which, because she can endlessly reinvestigate the past, she has been able to discern the "morning" pattern of which even Van and Ada do not know. This eerie but strangely tender and touching possibility makes it

apparent how richly and unexpectedly little Lucette has come to permeate Ada, how far a final reading of the novel is not only from the blind bliss of a first encounter but from the disquiet and disorder of later perusals, how different Ada's real structure is from that slide downward, that triumph of gravity and time's onward direction that seems to be the basis of its organization.

IX

ENDING

The end of a "final reading" of Ada, as we shall see, is as much an opening out as a conclusion, more an invitation to return to the beginning than a last farewell.

1. Aging Together

The reunion of Van and Ada at the end of Part 4 endures throughout the rest of their lives, from 1922 until their deaths in 1967.

There is a new considerateness, a new faithfulness in their relationship which is the basis of their continuing to live together so long and so happily. Van writes that "Rakes never reform. They burn, sputter a few last green sparks, and go out." (577) But this is unfair to himself: even while his sexual desire remains, he refuses to be unfaithful to Ada, for he now appreciates the pain it would cause. He recognizes the absurdity of his sexual longings, his urge to unfaithfulness:

His love for Ada was a condition of being, a steady hum of happiness unlike anything he had met with professionally in the lives of the singular and the insane. . . . She never refused to help him achieve the more and more precious, because less and less frequent, gratification of a fully shared sunset. . . . An overwhelming tenderness impelled him to kneel suddenly at her feet in dramatic, yet utterly sincere attitudes, puzzling to anyone who might enter with a vacuum cleaner. And on the same day his other compartments and subcompartments would be teeming

with longings and regrets, and plans of rape and riot. The most hazardous moment was when he and she moved to another villa, with a new staff and new neighbors, and his senses would be exposed in icy, fantastic detail, to the gipsy girl poaching peaches or the laundry woman's bold daughter. (574)

In the past Van had said to Ada: "I've remained absolutely true to you because those were only 'obmanipulations' (sham, insignificant strokings by unremembered cold hands)" (195). But he knows now that what matters is not the emotional insignificance to himself of satisfying these crude cravings, but the hurt it could cause Ada:

In vain he told himself that those vile hankerings did not differ, in their intrinsic insignificance, from the anal pruritus which one tries to relieve by a sudden fit of scratching. Yet he knew that by daring to satisfy the corresponding desire for a young wench he risked wrecking his life with Ada. How horribly and gratuitously it might hurt her, he fore-glimpsed one day in 1926 or '27 when he caught the look of proud despair she cast on nothing in particular before walking away to the car that was to take her on a trip in which, at the last moment, he had declined to join her. He had declined --and had simulated the grimace and the limp of podagra-- because he had just realized, what she, too, had realized--that the beautiful native girl smoking on the back porch would offer her mangoes to Master as soon as Master's housekeeper had left for the Film Festival in Sindbad. The chauffeur had already opened the car door, when, with a great bellow, Van overtook Ada and they rode off together, tearful, voluble, joking about his foolishness. (574-75)

It is as if some of the kindness of dead Lucette, who may have brought Van and Ada together again in 1922, has imparted itself to Van, as if the want of consideration Van showed in the past is being at last atoned for by a new discipline of considerateness.

This new faithfulness, this protracted glow of shared love is essential to the whole novel: there is a special stamp put on Van and Ada's early love by the fact that this youthful ardour is recounted by a couple still serenely in love so much later in life. But the

venerable Veens in love are not seen through an optical mist of gold-tinted sentiment. The brief account of their last years is also a sharply physical and exact and very moving depiction of the process of aging:

He now noticed, however, that furtive, furcating cracks kept appearing in his physical well-being, as if inevitable decomposition were sending out to him, across static gray time, its first emissaries. A stuffed nose caused a stifling dream, and, at the door of the slightest cold, intercostal neuralgia waited with its blunt spear. The more spacious his bedside table grew the more cluttered it became with such absolute necessities of the night as nose drops, eucalyptic pastilles, wax earplugs, gastric tablets, sleeping pills, mineral water, zinc ointment, a spare cap for its tube lest the original escape under the bed, and a large handkerchief to wipe the sweat accumulating between right jaw and right clavicle, neither being accustomed to his new fleshiness and insistence to sleep on one side only, so as not to hear his heart. . . . (569)

These forewarnings of "inevitable decomposition," of death itself, are linked with the theme of night already so hauntingly associated (in Van's hammock, in his last visit to a last Villa Venus) with the theme of death:

Normally, one or two sleeping pills helped him to hold at bay the monster of insomnia for three or four hours in one blessed blur, but sometimes . . . a night of excruciating restlessness would grade into morning migraine. No pill could cope with that torment. . . . that wretched restlessness continued to make of him an outcast in his own home: Ada was fast asleep, or comfortably reading, a couple of doors away; the various domestics in their more remote quarters had long passed over to the inimical multitude of local sleepers that seemed to blanket the surrounding hills with the blackness of their repose; he alone was denied the unconsciousness he so fiercely scorned and so assiduously courted. (572)

2. Outside Influence

Ada itself Van describes as "the solace of what are, no doubt, my last ten years of existence" (576). He begins Part 5 jauntily, immediately after that July morning at the end of Part 4, yet forty-five years later:

I, Van Veen, salute you, life, Ada Veen, Dr. Lagosse, Stepan Nootkin, Violet Knox, Ronald Oranger. Today is my ninety-seventh birthday, and I hear from my wonderful new Everyrest chair a spade scrape and footsteps creak in the snow-sparkling garden, and my old Russian valet, who is deafer than he thinks, pull out and push in nose-ringed drawers in the dressing room. This Part Five is not meant as an epilogue; it is the true introduction of my ninety-seven percent true, and three percent likely, Ada or Ardor, a family chronicle. (567)

Part 5 is indeed the true introduction to Ada, for here we see the process of its composition and the conditions of happy love which make the whole chronicle possible. The day of Van's ninety-seventh birthday is the day the "master-copy" of Ada, a memoir on which the Veens have been working for ten years, is handed to Van, only to be revised and reread again and again by Van and Ada in their remaining months of existence:

- What everybody thought would be Violet's supreme achievement, ideally clean, produced on special Atticus paper in a special cursive type (the glorified version of Van's hand), with the master copy bound in purple calf for Van's ninety-seventh birthday, had been immediately blotted out by a regular inferno of alterations in red ink and blue pencil. (587)

"Violet" here, the Violet of that breezy paragraph opening Part 5, is Violet Knox, Van's typist, and, along with the others Van addresses in the salute to life, one of the Veens' permanent household establishment. The others are: Ronald Oranger, Van's associate (secretary, protégé,

literary adviser); Stepan Nootkin, Van's Russian valet (his name comes from that of Stepin Fetchit, the black comedian of Hollywood's 1920's and 1930's, and from the Russian "nutka," an interjection which means something like "step and fetch it," or "go to it," "get on with it"); and Dr. Magosse, who has been the Veens' physician and constant companion since 1950. Now, when Van and Ada are too old for the "fairly long travels" (in pursuit of butterflies) which have added variety to their "healthy and active old age" (567), the Veens and their retinue have settled at the most loved of "all their many houses; in Europe and in the Tropics, the château recently built at Ex, in the Swiss Alps" (567).

Pt.5 Ch.4, the antepenultimate chapter, depicts in greatest detail the origins and process of Ada's composition. Ada spends her old age (her eighties and nineties) preparing French, Russian and English translations (from one language into the other two) "for the Oranger editions en regard" (577)--"Oranger" editions presumably because Ronald Oranger, "a born catalyzer" (578), has suggested the undertaking. One afternoon in 1957, as Van, Ada and Mr Oranger are discussing the problems of translation, Van realizes that his philosophical and psychological works

were not epistemic tasks set to himself by a savant, but buoyant and bellicose exercises in literary style. He was asked why, then, did he not let himself go, why did he not choose a big playground for a match between Inspiration and Design; and with one thing leading to another it was resolved that he would write his memoirs--to be published posthumously. (578)

Van notes that despite "the unbelievable intellectual surge . . . that occurred in the brain of this strange, friendless, rather repulsive nonagenarian" (577), it "took him six years to write the first draft and

dictate it to Miss Knox, after which he revised the typescript, rewrote it entirely in long hand (1963-1965) and redictated the entire thing to indefatigable Violet, whose pretty fingers tapped out a final copy in 1967" (578). But the novel's antepenultimate chapter also reveals something more than this simple account of the creation of Ada: namely, that Lucette's influence still lives on.

The chapter does not state explicitly that Ronald Oranger is the editor of Ada, but it does make this deduction inevitable. On a page preceding the beginning of Part 1, there is a note from the editor:

With the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Oranger,
a few incidental figures,
and some non-American citizens, all the persons
mentioned by name in this book are dead.

[Ed.]

Now it would be possible that the editor is not a character named in Ada, but Pt.5 Ch.4 makes us suppose otherwise when it describes Ronald Oranger's involvement in Van and Ada's writing enterprises and makes plain his adulation of Van:

Violet knocks at the door and lets in plump, short, bow-tied Mr. Oranger, who stops on the threshold, clicks his heels, and (as the heavy hermit turns with an awkward sweep of frieze robe) darts forward almost at a trot not so much to stop with a masterful slap the avalanche of loose sheets which the great man's elbow has sent sliding down the lectern-slope, as to express the eagerness of his admiration. (577)

What confirms the supposition is that the editor's amusing delicacy and intrusiveness in regard to Violet Knox can be explained only as Ronald Oranger's pride in and fussy consideration for his wife (to whom in fact he only draws attention all the more gauche):

Violet Knox [now Mrs. Ronald Oranger. Ed.], born in 1940, came to live with us in 1957. She was (and still is--ten years later) an enchanting English blonde with doll eyes, a velvet carnation and a tweed-cupped little rump [.....]; but such designs, alas, could no longer flesh my fancy. She has been responsible for typing out this memoir--the solace of what are, no doubt, my last ten years of existence. A good daughter, an even better sister, and half-sister, she had supported for ten years her mother's children from two marriages, besides laying aside [something]. I paid her [generously] per month, well realizing the need to ensure unembarrassed silence on the part of a puzzled and dutiful maiden. (576)

Oranger's editorial work is very limited: apart from the contributions in the passage just quoted, which are necessary to establish the identity of our "Ed.," the editor appears only fifteen times, about once every forty pages. The one major flurry of editorial activity occurs in Pt.2 Ch.5, where Lucette (but not Ada) is present with Van. The redactor's remarks are elicited by Van's reconstructing the conversation between himself and Lucette with the help of the letter Lucette had sent him a year earlier:

In the fall of 1891 she had sent him from California a rambling, indecent, crazy, almost savage declaration of love in a ten-page letter, which shall not be discussed in this memoir. [See, however, a little farther. Ed.] (366)

"Van, it will make you smile" [thus in the MS. Ed.]

"Van," said Lucette, "it will make you smile." . . . (371)

". . . because I was afraid of the cougars and snakes" [quite possibly, this is not remembered speech but an extract from her letter or letters. Ed.], "whose cries and rattlings Ada imitated admirably, and, I think, designedly, in the desert's darkness under my first-floor window. Well [here, it would seem, taped speech is re-turned on], to make a short story sort of longish--"

(374-75)

[The epithetic tone strongly suggests that this speech has an epistolary source. Ed.] (378)

This burst of editorial intrusiveness should be contrasted with Pt.2

Ch.9, where it is obvious that Van is again drawing upon a letter (in this case, Ada's Dreams of Drama letter) for his dialogue, but where "Ed." makes no comments. The one other occasion when Oranger is fussily present is in Pt.2 Ch.8, immediately before the note Lucette writes to Van and Ada when she runs away from the debauch ("[sic! Ed.]" [420]) and immediately after Van's letter in reply ("[thus in the manuscript, for 'life.' Ed.]" [421]). The editor's presence, then, seems to coincide with messages between Lucette and Van.

Violet Knox's participation in the preparation of Ada is explained in Pt.5 Ch.4, where at the end of the chapter we see her limited competence: he "redictated the entire thing to indefatigable Violet, whose pretty fingers tapped out a final copy in 1967. E, p, i --why 'y' my dear?" (578). Van has to spell out the beginning of "epistemic," which he has used earlier in the page, and Violet Knox transcribes his correction. But if Violet's role is explained in Pt.5 Ch.4, it is first seen (and indeed this is the only other time her part in Ada is visible) at Lucette's death:

Although Lucette had never died before--no, dived before, Violet --from such a height, in such a disorder of shadows and snaking reflections. . . . Owing to the tumultuous swell and her not being sure which way to peer through the spray and the darkness and her own tentacling hair--t,a,c,l--she could not make out the lights of the liner, an easily imagined many-eyed bulk mightily receding in heartless triumph. Now I've lost my next note.

Got it:

The sky was also heartless and dark, and her body, her head, and particularly those damned thirsty trousers, felt clogged with Oceanus Nox, n,o,x. (493-94)

Van has to spell out his wordplay ("tentacling") to Violet, but the poor secretary takes down the instruction too and then transcribes all

Van says in his search for a note; and of course Van must spell out "Nox" so that Violet Knox will not confuse it with her own surname or the verb "knocks."¹

This close association of Lucette and Violet is made much closer still in Pt.5 Ch.4. Ada calls Violet "Fialochka" and allowed herself the luxury of admiring 'little Violet's' cameo neck, pink nostrils, and fair pony-tail" (576). "Fialochka" is a diminutive of the Russian for "violet," "fialka," which links the Veens' typist with Lucette, who is described as she lies by the Tobakoff's pool as a "hardy girl used to bracing winds no less than to the detestable sun. Spring in Fialta and a torrid May on Minataor, the famous artificial island, had given a nectarine hue to her limbs." (477) "Spring in Fialta" is the title of one of Nabokov's stories (1936) (its main structural feature is the death of the heroine); "Fialta" is an invented place name that combines Yalta, the Crimean resort town, with "fialka," "violet."² Another play on Violet's name ("Violet knocks at the library door" [577]) also associates her with Lucette,³ noted for her door-knocking ("the door had come alive: two small fists could be heard drumming upon it from the outside, in a rhythm both knew well" [190]; "and now their four eyes were looking again into the azure brook of

¹ "Oceanus Nox" is an allusion to Victor Hugo's famous lament for the drowned, "Oceano Nox" (1840).

² "Minataor, the famous artificial island," is Taormina (in Sicily) posing as the labyrinth of Dedalus, in which the Minotaur was concealed.

³ As first noted by Mason, p. 110, who also notices other Lucette-Violet connections but cannot interpret the relationship.

Pinedale, and Lucette pushed the door open with a perfunctory knuckle knock" [392-93]). Violet is "A good daughter . . . and half-sister" (576), like Lucette, who tends to her dying mother and who is the half-sister of Van and Ada. Like Lucette, finally, Violet is also the object of Ada's lesbian attentions:

Sometimes, at dinner, lingering over the liqueurs, my Ada would consider my typist . . . with a dreamy gaze, and then, quick-quick, peck at her flushed cheek. The situation might have been considerably more complicated had it arisen twenty years earlier. (576)

Not only is Lucette very closely tied to Violet but she is also implied throughout Pt.5 Ch.4, the chapter which details the origin and composition of Ada. Van writes that:

More fiercely than ever he execrated all sham art, from the crude banalities of junk sculpture to the italicized passages meant by a pretentious novelist to convey his fellow hero's cloudbursts of thought. He had even less patience than before with the "Sig" (Signy-M.D.-M.D.) school of psychiatry. Its founder's epoch-making confession ("In my student days I became a deflowerer because I failed to pass my botany examination") he prefixed, as an epigraph, to one of his last papers (1959) entitled The Farce of Group Therapy in Sexual Maladjustment, the most damaging and satisfying blast of its kind (the Union of Marital Counselors and Catharticians at first wanted to sue but then preferred to detumify). (577)

Every part of this paragraph is intended to bring Lucette to mind. Van's attack on the "crude banalities of junk sculpture" recalls the novel's only other reference to the subject, Lucette's marvelous outburst:

Lucette asked him not to mention that sickening, maddening girl. She was furious with Ada and jealous by proxy. Her Andrey, or rather his sister on his behalf, he was too stupid even for that, collected progressive philistine Art . . . objets trouvés, or rather troués, the polished log with its polished hole à la

Heinrich Heideland. His bride found the ranch yard adorned with a sculpture, if that's the right word, by old Heinrich himself and his four hefty assistants, a huge hideous lump of bourgeois mahogany ten feet high, entitled "Maternity," the mother (in reverse) of all the plaster gnomes and pig-iron toadstools planted by former Vinelanders in front of their dachas in Lyaska.

The barman stood wiping a glass in endless slow motion as he listened to Lucette's denunciation with the limp smile of utter enchantment. (462)

Van's contempt for "the italicized passages meant by a pretentious novelist to convey his fellow hero's cloudbursts of thought" matches Lucette's own opinion of Faulkner:

"Hold it!" cried Van. "That's the Collected Works of Falknermann, dumped by my predecessor."

"Pah!" uttered Lucette. (371)

The dismissal of "the 'Sig' (Signy-M.D.-M.D.) school of Psychiatry" alludes to the parodic proxy for Freud present at Aqua's last sanatorium in St. Taurus as "Dr. Froit of Signy-Mondieu-Mondieu" (27). Apart from the fact that Lucette's death is intimately connected with Aqua's, Lucette in 1888 has to "undergo a series of 'tests' at the Tarus Hospital" (236). Moreover when Ada and Van are translating into Russian John Shade's lines "He meets his wives; both loved, both loving, both / Jealous of one another," they must leave out the Russian "both" (a trisyllabic "obéih"):

The Signy brain-shrinkers would gleefully claim that the reason the three "boths" had been skipped in the Russian version was not at all, oh, not at all, because cramming three cumbersome amphibrachs into the pentameter would have necessitated adding at least one more verse for carrying the luggage:

"Oh, Van, oh Van, we did not love her enough. That's whom you should have married . . . instead of all that we teased her to death!" (586)

The "Sig" confession, "In my student days I became a deflowerer because

I failed to pass my botany examination," recalls Ada's monologue on botanical nomenclature in Pt.1 Ch.10, the play on "marsh marigold" and the elaborate expression of the fatal irony of Lucette's life, that she is not "deflowered," that she is destroyed by a too-early sexual initiation and by not being able to lose her virginity to Van. "The Farce of Group Therapy in Sexual Maladjustment," finally, is a grisly remembrance of the damage done to Lucette in the débauche à trois scene.

The next paragraph of Pt.5 Ch.4 ("Violet knocks . . .") we have already seen; the one after that also evokes Lucette while seeming to be only about Ada and Van's literary activities:

Ada, who amused herself by translating (for the Oranger editions en regard) Griboyedov into French and English, Baudelaire into English and Russian, and John Shade into Russian and French, often read to Van, in a deep mediumesque voice, the published versions made by other workers in that field of semiconsciousness. The verse translations in English were especially liable to distend Van's face in a grotesque grin which made him look, when he was not wearing his dental plates, exactly like a Greek comedial mask. He could not tell who disgusted him more: the well-meaning mediocrity, whose attempts at fidelity were thwarted by lack of artistic insight as well as by hilarious errors of textual interpretation, or the professional poet who embellished with his own inventions the dead and helpless author (whiskers here, private parts there)--a method that nicely camouflaged the paraphrast's ignorance of the From language by having the bloomers of inept scholarship blend with the whims of flowery imitation. (577-78)

The two chief instances of Ada's translating that occur earlier in the novel, Coppée's "leavesdropper" and the version of "Mémoire," both deeply implicate Lucette, and Griboedov, Baudelaire and Shade too are all associated with the youngest of the Veens. The principal earlier allusion to Griboedov occurs in Pt.1 Ch.37, where on Mlle Larivière's advice Marina warns Van not to turn Lucette's head:

"Belle, with her usual flair for the right phrase, has cited to me the cousinage-dangereux-voisinage adage--I mean 'adage,' I always fluff that word--and complained qu'on s'embrassait dans tous les coins. Is that true?"

"I do not mean Ada, silly," said Marina with a slight snort. . . . Mlle Larivière meant Lucette, of course. Van, those soft games must stop. Lucette is twelve, and naive, and I know it's all clean fun, yet (*odnako*) one can never behave too delikatno in regard to a budding little woman. A propos de coins: in Griboedov's Gore ot uma, 'How stupid to be so clever,' a play in verse . . . the hero reminds Sophie of their childhood games, and says:

How oft we sat together in a corner
And what harm might there be in that?" (232-33)

The most important of the Baudelaire allusions in Ada occurs when Baudelaire becomes entangled with "Charles" Chateaubriand, the discoverer of Chateaubriand's mosquito (which as we have seen marks the dangerous confusion of Ada and Lucette) and when the sulphuric Parisian's "L'Invitation au voyage" becomes entangled with Chateaubriand's "Romance à Hélène":

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à l'épaisseur
Du grand chêne à Tagne;
Songe à la montagne,
Songe à la douceur--

--of scraping with one's claws . . . the spots visited by that . . . insect characterized by an insatiable . . . appetite for Ada's and Ardelia's, Lucette's and Lucile's . . . blood. (106)

As we have seen in Chapter 8 and just above, the translation of John Shade is quite explicitly linked in Pt.5 Ch.6 with Lucette's death. Finally, the closing phrase of the paragraph above, "by having the bloomers of inept scholarship blend with the whims of flowery imitation" (578) refers back again to the "Mémoire" translation:

"As in the case of many flowers," Ada went on, with a mad scholar's quiet smile, "the unfortunate French name of our plant,

souci d'eau, has been traduced or shall we say transfigured--"
 "Flowers into bloomers," punned Van Veen. (63-64)

What is one to make of these very oblique but very insistent signs of Lucette's presence in Pt.5 Ch.4, of her somehow being specially linked with Ronald Oranger and Violet Knox? Miss Knox joins the Veen entourage in 1957. In that year,

As Ada, Mr. Oranger (a born catalyzer), and Van were discussing those matters one afternoon . . . it suddenly occurred to our old polemicist that all his published works . . . were not epistemic tasks set to himself by a savant, but . . . exercises in literary style. He was asked why, then, did he not let himself go, why did he not choose a big playground for a match between Inspiration and Design; and with one thing leading to another it was resolved that he would write his memoirs. . . . (578)

Van writes of the "unbelievable intellectual surge, . . . the creative explosion, that occurred in the brain of this strange . . . nonagenarian" (577). One is driven to the conclusion that Lucette, somehow acting through the agency of Violet Knox and Ronald Oranger, has encouraged Van to write Ada and has acted throughout as a source of inspiration. Though the conclusion is odd, it matches the bizarre compositional history of other Nabokov works: Transparent Things, where the ghost of one or more of the characters writes the novel; "Ultima Thule," where the narrator appears to be inspired to write his story (in the form of a letter to his dead wife) by his wife's acting through the agency of another character, whose sudden disturbing vision of humanly unbearable truth becomes the subject of the narrator's "letter"; "The Vane Sisters," where the narrator is inspired to write the story by the two dead girls about whom he writes--and who sign the story, in its last paragraph, without the narrator's knowledge.

This last case is particularly apt. The Vane sisters induce a dream in the narrator that he feels is "somehow . . . full of" dead Cynthia Vane (TD 237). But when in the story's final paragraph he declares that he could find less in the dream than he expected, the very words in this paragraph form an acrostic that announces to the reader but not to the narrator that dead Cynthia and dead Sybil have mildly influenced the narrator's life the day before the dream, have induced the dream itself, and have inspired the story. When on the morning of his first reunion with Ada after Lucette's death Van dreams of his last day with Lucette by the Tobakoff pool, the oneirically interchangeable Lucette and Ada conflate "Van" and "Veen" to become "one of the Vane sisters" (521). On the morning of Van's second reunion with Ada after Lucette's death, just after "a mermaid's message" has led Ada to turn back to Van and Lucette has thus signed herself into the pattern of Van and Ada's lives, the last day on the Tobakoff again appears to Van in a dream, now of "the lecturing hall of a transatlantic liner" (561).

Van seems to be aware of Lucette's presence no more than the narrator of "The Vane Sisters" can discern the role of Cynthia and Sybil Vane. But if Lucette has inspired Van to write Ada, her inspiration shows not only that she forgives Van and Ada for their part in her downfall and not only that she is beyond jealousy, that she only wishes her brother and sister as much happiness as possible in mortal life (for these attitudes are manifest in Lucette's turning Ada back down the road to Van in 1922), but also that, in accordance with her deep kindness, she wishes others to share in the happiness of Van and Ada

and to be warned of the need for the kindness and consideration whose absence contributed to her own suicide. And in sending Van and Ada back to an investigation of their past, Lucette is generously giving them and their readers a foretaste of the delights of a life beyond time, where consciousness can survey and arrange the past with endless fascination. In intimating Lucette's participation in Ada Nabokov surely fulfils more completely than he has anywhere else what he has defined as the aim of the greatest fiction, to afford "a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" ("On a Book Entitled Lolita," Lolita 316-17).

One further note must be made on Lucette's contribution to Van and Ada's story, to Van and Ada's lives. Van's change of mind in not availing himself of that "beautiful native girl" (574-75) in 1926 or 1927 (see above, p. 608) is his first demonstration of a real discipline of considerateness (that trait in which he was so lacking towards Lucette) and of the rich self-denying kindness practised by Lucette herself. Let us recall the scene, and carry on a few lines further:

he had just realized, what she, too, had realized--that the beautiful native girl smoking on the back porch would offer her mangoes to Master as soon as Master's housekeeper had left for the Film Festival in Sindbad. The chauffeur had already opened the car door, when, with a great bellow, Van overtook Ada and they rode off together, tearful, voluble, joking about his foolishness.

"It's funny," said Ada, "what black, broken teeth they have hereabouts, those blyadushki."

("Ursus," Lucette in glistening green, "Subside, agitation of passion," Flora's bracelets and breasts, the wheel of Time).
(574-75)

Ada's "blyadushki" brings back the evening at the Ursus restaurant,

where "with ill-feigned indifference" Ada and Lucette had applied the term "blyadushka (cute whorelet)" (411) to "Flora, a slender, hardly nubile, half-naked music-hall dancer of uncertain origin (Rumanian? Romany? Ramseyan?) whose ravishing services Van had availed himself of several times in the fall of that year" (410). This Flora as we have seen is associated with the whores of Van's last visit to his last Villa Venus ("And if the child really was called Adora, then what was she?--not Rumanian, not Dalmatian" [357]) and as we shall see is associated with all Van's and Demon's "Roses," their secretaries and servant-girls and whores, their self-centred infidelities. The other phrases in the parenthesis ending the inset quotation above recall the same night at Ursus: Lucette's dress, the Glinka song "Subside, agitation of passion," Flora's bracelets and breasts. Indeed, this last phrase specifically alludes to an amusing moment at the restaurant, as Van steers his sisters away:

"I say, Veen," whinnied a voice near him (there were lots of lechers around), "you don't rally need two, d'you?"

Van veered, ready to cuff the gross speaker--but it was only Flora, a frightful tease and an admirable mimic. He tried to give her a banknote, but she fled, bracelets and breast stars flashing a fond farewell. (414)

The "whelk of Time," though, refers to nothing within the Ursus scene itself but points instead to a passage from The Texture of Time: "for Log's sake, let us not confuse Time with Tinnitus, and the seashell hum of duration with the throb of our blood" (559). This occurs between Van's recollection of the glistening green eye make-up Lucette had worn on the night of the Ursus outing ("a face powder, with a bird of paradise on the lid. . . . it had been Lucette, now a mermaid in the groves

of Atlantis . . . who had favored that powder" [559]) and Ada's "I told him to turn . . . somewhere near Morzhey ('morses' or 'walruses,' a Russian pun on 'Morges'--maybe a mermaid's message)" (562). The wheelk of Time, then, evokes Lucette and her mermaid's message, while the remainder of that parenthesis so provokingly detached from its context sends us again to Lucette in her bird of paradise attire and to the newly appropriate comment from Flora, "you don't rally need two." Van's change of mind here, in 1926 or 1927, just before Ada is to leave in a chauffeur-driven car (in 1922 Ada's change of mind had come in another chauffeur-driven car), might be prompted by another mermaid's message encouraging Van to resist his "Demonic" penchant for inconsiderate self-gratification: Lucette's spirit seems to be felt here again as Van inclines towards a new course of considerateness.

3. The Design of Time

If Lucette's role in Ada does not finish with her death, if she can detect traces of pattern in Van and Ada's lives and perfect the pattern by her own delicate intervention, if she is responsible even for inspiring Van to record his whole past, it is perhaps not surprising that in her lifetime too Lucette should be present at some "chance crease in the texture of time" (34). When Lucette is noticed at a bar in Paris in the pose from Toulouse-Lautrec's "Divan Japonais," a scene prefigured at Brownhill in 1884 and in Kalugano in 1888, Van finds it "a queer feeling--as of something replayed by mistake . . . a repeated blemish, a wrong turn of time" (460). But Lucette is part of such

rufflings of time throughout Ada.

In Pt.1 Ch.36 Van describes the games of Russian Scrabble he, Ada and Lucette play at Ardis. Since Ada plays the game far better than Van, and since "ambitious, incompetent and temperamental Lucette" (225) is so hopeless in comparison with her big siblings that her involvement ruins any chance of ludic pleasure and only delays Van and Ada's next "little flourish of the sweet summer day" (225), Van finds the game interesting only because it seems occasionally to point to eerily curious coincidence: "all this would have been insupportably boring to Van had he not been stung as a scientist by the curious affinity between certain aspects of Scrabble and those of the planchette" (225). The first instance of astonishing coincidence he has recorded is this: Blanche has brought a lamp, Ada is picking out her seven blocks "showing nothing but their anonymous black backs," and says casually:

"I would much prefer the Benten lamp here but it is out of kerosin. Pet (addressing Lucette), be a good scout, call her --Good Heavens!"

The seven letters she had taken, S,R,E,N,O,K,I, and was sorting out in her spektrik (the little trough of japanned wood each player had before him) now formed in quick and, as it were, self-impulsed rearrangement the key word of the chance sentence that had attended their random assemblage. (226)

The second instance follows immediately:

Another time, in the bay of the library, on a thundery evening (a few hours before the barn burned), a succession of Lucette's blocks formed the amusing VANLADA, and from this she extracted the very piece of furniture she was in the act of referring to in a peevish little voice: "But I, too, perhaps, would like to sit on the divan." (226)

The third instance records the last game of Scrabble the three

children ever play together:

Either because it happened to end in a memorable record for Ada, or because Van took some notes in the hope--not quite unfulfilled--of "catching sight of the lining of time" (which, as he was later to write, is "the best informal definition of portents and prophecies"), but the last round of that particular game remained vividly clear in his mind.

"Je ne peux rien faire," wailed Lucette, "mais rien--with my idiotic Buchstaben, REMNILK, LINKREM . . ."

"Look," whispered Van, "c'est tout simple, shift those two syllables and you get a fortress in ancient Muscovy."

"Oh, no," said Ada. . . . "Oh, no. That pretty word does not exist in Russian. A Frenchman invented it. There is no second syllable."

"Ruth for a little child?" interposed Van.

"Ruthless!" cried Ada.

"Well," said Van, "you can always make a little cream, KREM or KREME--or even better--there's KREMLI, which means Yukon prisons. Go through her ORHIDEYa."⁴

"Through her silly orchid," said Lucette.

"And now," said Ada, "Adōchka is going to do something even siller." And taking advantage of a cheap letter recklessly sown sometime before in the seventh compartment of the uppermost fertile row, Ada, with a deep sigh of pleasure, composed the adjective TORFYaNUYu which went through a brown square at F and through two red squares (37 x 9 = 333 points) and got a bonus of 50 (for placing all seven blocks at one stroke) which made 383 in all, the highest score ever obtained for one word by a Russian scrambler.

(227)

Unlike those in the KEROSIN and VANIADA cases, the coincidence in this game is not explained. In fact there is here a triple prefiguring of Blanche's disclosure to Van at the end of Ardis the Second. All three words, KREM, ORHIDEYa and TORFYaNUYu, anticipate details of Pt.1 Ch.40.

As has been noted in Chapter 7, the "KREM" (cream) here recurs when it is transmuted into Van's own Scrabble coinage, "CITROILS, which

⁴ "ORHIDEYa" in all the published editions is a misprint for "ORHIDEYa," since in "TORFYaNUYu" Nabokov has adopted the convention of an upper case and a lower case letter to represent a single Cyrillic character that requires more than one character in transliteration, as does the "я," the "Ya," that ends "ORHIDEYa."

grooms use for rubbing fillies" (379). Related to both of these is an ointment Marina recommends Van to apply to the knee he hurt while wrestling with Percy de Prey at the picnic. Ada is to fetch it when she goes "on horseback to Ladore" (283), but she has in fact ridden to see Percy de Prey, and instead of the embrocation there arrives Percy's tentative cartel brought by a "stable boy or kennel girl" (284).

The "ORHIDEYa" (orchid) foreshadows the fact that two days after Ada's failure to bring Van's embrocation Van finds a single common orchid in Ada's bag when she returns from an ostensible botanical ramble. The real purpose of her outing had in fact been to farewell Percy de Prey as he embarked for the Crimea (287).

When Ada makes her fabulous "TORFYaNUYu" coup on the Scrabble board, Lucette objects with "a sudden howl of hope" that the word is a place name and therefore cannot be used:

"Yes, Torfyanaya, or as Blanche says, La Tourbière, is, indeed, the pretty but rather damp village where our cendrillon's family lives. But, mon petit, in our mother's tongue--que dis-je, in the tongue of a maternal grandmother we all share--a rich beautiful tongue which my pet should not neglect for the sake of a Canadian brand of French--this quite ordinary adjective means 'peaty,' feminine gender, accusative case." (228)

In Pt.1 Ch.40 Percy sends that note vouching that he is prepared to meet Van "at dawn tomorrow where the Maidenhair road crosses Tourbière Lane" (283), and Torfyanka Blanche leaves Van the ominous note "One must not berne you" (287).

Each of the Scrabble games which Van records is a striking manifestation of coincidence that Van can recognize. But each of the words Lucette forms has a second level of significance, involves a

second ruffling of "the lining of time" (227), and in two of the three that follow Van seems unaware of the additional patterning of relationships.

The game in which Lucette produces "DIVAN" from the letters VANIADA occurs on the day of the Burning Barn, "a few hours before the barn burned" (226). Lucette is kept off the divan on which Van and Ada are sitting, just as that night (as the Cinderella motif stresses) she will be kept out of the lovemaking that begins on the divan and that initiates a frenzy of activity again and again requiring her exclusion. Note that in the account of the Night of the Burning Barn the passage that runs from Lucette's leaving the manor to Ada's joining Van on the divan plays on "Van" and "divan" in a reprise of that afternoon's Scrabble game:

little Lucette lay for a minute awake before running after her dream and jumping into the last furniture van.

Van, kneeling at the picture window, watched the inflamed eye of the cigar recede and vanish. . . .

That multiple departure really presented a marvelous sight . . . a distant flamingo flush at the spot where the Barn was Burning. To reach it one had to drive round a large reservoir which I could make out breaking into scaly light here and there every time some adventurous hostler or pantry boy crossed it on water skis or in a Rob Roy or by means of a raft--typical raft ripples like fire snakes in Japan. . . .

As two last retainers . . . scurried across the lawn toward a horseless trap . . . that stood beckoning them with erected thills (or was it a rickshaw? Uncle Dan once had a Japanese valet), Van was delighted and shocked to distinguish, right there in the inky shrubbery, Ada in her long nightgown passing by with a lighted candle in one hand and a shoe in the other as if stealing after the belated ignicolists. It was only her reflection in the glass. She dropped the found shoe in a wastepaper basket and joined Van on the divan. (116)

Note too the presence of the "fire snakes in Japan" and "Japanese valet": these recall (in time) and anticipate (in the order of reading) "the

little trough of japanned wood each player had before him" while playing Scrabble (226). It is a strange coincidence that Lucette should say "I, too, perhaps, would like to sit on the divan" while she makes the word DIVAN from VANIADA. It is stranger still in that it is because "Van i Ada" (the Russian for "Van and Ada") are on the divan that Lucette makes her complaint. But even stranger is that this incident should also foreshadow so thoroughly the utterly unforeseeable barn-burning that occurs later that night. Nor is this the last flourish in time's surprising pattern. The "japanned wood" of the Scrabble letter trough and the "divan" whose letters rest on it in scrambled form will be recalled when Van sees the reflected blaze break into "fire snakes in Japan" as he looks across the reservoir from the library's divan: both anticipate Lucette's "Divan Japonais" and its disturbingly precise precursors.

The other word Lucette makes in one of the three Scrabble games in which Van recognizes uncanny coincidence is KREM or KREME, Russian "cream," Lucette's poor choice before Ada's magnificent TORFYANUYU. The KREME turns up in Pt.1 Ch.40 as the liniment Ada is supposed to get for Van's injured knee when she goes "on horseback to Ladore" (283) --or rather to Percy de Prey; the TORFYANUYU anticipates the role of Blanche de la Tourberie in the dismal disclosure. KREM alone reappears directly, if transmuted, when Van toys with his young sister as she raves "about the delectations of clitorism" (394):

"finally I quietly composed ROTIK ("little mouth") and was left with my own cheap initial. I hope I've thoroughly got you mixed up, Van, because la plus laide fille au monde peut donner beaucoup plus qu'elle n'a, and now let us say adieu, yours ever."

"Whilst the machine is to him," murmured Van.

"Hamlet," said the assistant lecturer's brightest student.

"Okay, okay," replied her and his tormentor, "but, you know, a medically minded English Scrabbler, having two more letters to cope with, could make, for example, STIRCOIL, a well-known sweat-gland stimulant, or CITROILS, which grooms use for rubbing fillies." (379)

But if KREM is evoked in Van's STIRCOIL and CITROILS (see above, pp. 470-71), the whole of the children's last Scrabble game, including Ada's TORFYaNUYu, is recast here. In the "last round" (227) of the children's last game, Lucette says "Je ne peux rien faire" . . . with my idiotic Buchstaben" (227); in the "last round" (379) of the game Lucette recalls she notes she was "stuck with six Buchstaben" (379). Van writes of the final game that the difference between Lucette's paltry score and Ada's TORFYaNUYu was less important than other differences:

The bloom streaking Ada's arm, the pale blue of the veins in its hollow, the charred-wood odor of her hair shining brownly next to the lampshade's parchment (a translucent lakescape with Japanese dragons), scored infinitely more points than those tensed fingers bunched on the pencil stub could ever add up in the past, present or future. (228)

At Kingston, Lucette and Van echo this as they compare memories of the library and its "stand with golden dragons . . . really a . . . stand japanned in red lacquer" (373). Lucette puns obscenely at Kingston:

"You examined and fingered my groove and quickly redistributed the haphazard sequence which made, say, LIKROT or ROTIKL and Ada flooded us both with her raven silks as she looked over our heads, and when you had completed the rearrangement, you and she came simultaneously, si je puis le mettre comme ça (Canady French), came falling on the black carpet in a paroxysm of incomprehensible merriment. . . ." (379)

The "Canady French" here recalls Ada's answer to Lucette's objection in the other game: "Torfanaya, or as Blanche says, La Tourbière, is, indeed, the pretty but rather damp village where our cendrillon's family lives.

But, mon petit, in our mother's tongue . . . which my pet should not neglect for the sake of a Canadian brand of French--this quite ordinary adjective means 'peaty.' . . ." (228)

Let us look now at the first appearance of Blanche's Torfyanaya or Torfyanka, keeping in mind the Hamlet ambience of KREM's reappearance above when Van joins in with Lucette's "[p]unning in an Ophelian frenzy on the feminine glans" (394).⁵ Van is on his way to Ardis for the first time:

Sunflecks and lacy shadows skimmed over his legs and lent a green twinkle to the brass button deprived of its twin on the back of the coachman's coat. They passed through Torfyanka, a dreamy hamlet consisting of three or four log izbas, a milkpail repair shop and a smithy smothered in jasmine. The driver waved to an invisible friend and the sensitive runabout swerved slightly to match his gesture. They were now spinning along a dusty road between fields. The road dipped and humped again, and at every ascent the old clockwork taxi would slow up as if on the brink of sleep and reluctantly overcome its weakness.

They bounced on the cobblestones of Gamlet, a half-Russian village, and the chauffeur waved again, this time to a boy in a cherry tree. Birches separated to let them pass across an old bridge. (34-35)

Even on a first reading, there is something suspicious and mildly unsettling about this passage: the repetition of "hamlet" and "Gamlet" cannot be accidental in Nabokov, surely, especially when coupled with the repeated gesture of the coachman. Coachman? No, chauffeur. Or rather, coachman, then neutral "driver," then chauffeur, for this is the famous first metamorphic voyage, and the hackney coach has become a clockwork taxi before turning into the horse on which Van arrives at Ardis. But if

⁵ See Chapter 6, pp. 397-400, for Hamlet allusions in the Kingston chapter.

it is unlikely that one will note the metamorphic voyage on a first reading, one may already be made pleasantly uneasy (a common feeling when reading Nabokov) if one suspects a sort of time warp in the repetition of "hamlet" and "Gamlet" and the driver's wave.

If one knows that "Gamlet" is the Russian for "Hamlet" (the character or play, not "hamlet," little village, which is "derevushka"), one becomes even more suspicious that "Gamlet, a half-Russian village" is a repetition in time rather than a neighbour in space of "Torfyanka, a dreamy hamlet" (which, the novel makes clear, is also a half-Russian village). The parallel between the 1888 Scrabble game's KREM and TORFYANUYa/Torfyanka and the CITROILS and the Hamlet ambiance of Lucette's 1892 recollection of an earlier game seems almost to confirm that Gamlet may be only a bizarre repetition of Torfyanka.

The strange duplication of Torfyanka and the driver's wave as Van travels on through Gamlet is not only tantalizingly irresolvable in itself but is also a foreshadowing of the strange duplication in 1888 of the ride back to Ardis from the 1884 picnic: "it was that other picnic which he now relived and it was Ada's soft haunches which he now held as if she were present in duplicate, in two different color prints" (280). During both the 1884 and 1888 rides the children's calèche passes through only one settlement, Gamlet:

Poor Van shifted Ada's bottom to his right knee. . . . In the mournful dullness of unconsummated desire he watched a row of izbas straggle by as the calèche drove through Gamlet, a hamlet. (87)

With the fading of that fugitive flame his mood now changed. . . . They were now about to enter Gamlet, the little Russian village. . . . (282)

That repetition of the picnic ride was both the most exact and to Van the most glorious of the ways in which Ardis the Second seemed able to repeat Ardis the First and the most precise anticipation--in the behind motif, in Van's near-orgasm under Lucette as formerly under Ada, in the confusion of the two girls--of Lucette's fateful last night.

But there is another reason for the instant replay, the folding over of time, on Van's first journey to Ardis. The subversion of continuity effected by the calèche-clockwork taxi-horse metamorphosis joins with the unaccountable repetition in Torfyanka-Gamlet to create a double disruption of the onward direction of time. Early in the Scrabble chapter, before Van writes that he is "stung as a scientist by the curious affinity between certain aspects of Scrabble and those of the planchette" (225), he tabulates the frustrations of the game:

Especially boring were the girls' squabbles over the legitimacy of this or that word: proper names and place names were taboo, but there occurred borderline cases, causing no end of heartbreak, and it was pitiful to see Lucette cling to her last five letters (with none left in the box) forming the beautiful ARDIS which her governess had told her meant "the point of an arrow"--but only in Greek, alas. (225)

Van has missed this most important portent: for in that first voyage to Ardis, the very thing that is happening, in both the metamorphosis and the repetition, is that the ardis, the direction, of time is being silently subverted. This first voyage towards Ada, then, performs in a comic and mysterious fashion what Van does consciously in his last voyage towards Ada, where he challenges, even despite the journey on which he is engaged, the "direction of Time, the ardis of Time, one-way Time" (538).

As Van travels from station to manor, time seems to unfold with its habitual smoothness, but Van's vehicle quietly metamorphoses under

him and his traversing a hamlet appears to happen twice. Lucette is involved in both unobtrusive challenges to time: her part in two Scrabble games virtually confirms the folding over of time in Torfyanka and Gamlet; her ARDIS in a third game emphasizes that the very notion of time's direction is being secretly undermined as Ardis begins. But there is a third disruption of time here in which Lucette is even more directly involved. When Van arrives at the station he finds no means to carry on to Ardis: "In a miniature of the imagination, he had seen a saddled horse prepared for him; there was not even a trap" (34).

Stranded Van is saved, however, by a lucky coincidence:

Suddenly a hackney coach drove up to the platform and a red-haired lady, carrying her straw hat and laughing at her own haste, made for the train and just managed to board it before it moved. So Van agreed to use the means of transportation made available to him by a chance crease in the texture of time, and seated himself in the old calèche. (34)

But that "chance crease in the texture of time" refers to more than the obvious overlap: it is a signal that time has been confounded even before Van's journey from the station begins. For this red-haired lady who rushes past Van from calèche to train is almost an escapee from the future. In 1901, in Ovenman's bar, just after time has been turned on again after its brief suspension in Van's description of Lucette's Divan Japonais pose, Van says to his red-haired sister:

"The last time I saw you . . . was two years ago, at a railway station. You had just left Villa Armina and I had just arrived. You wore a flowery dress which got mixed with the flowers you carried because you moved so fast--jumping out of a green calèche and up into the Ausonian Express that had brought me to Nice."

"Très expressioniste. I did not see you or I would have stopped to tell you what I had just learned. . . ." (461-62)

In the last chapter and in section two of this one we have considered what seems to be Lucette's involvement in mortal life after she died, her part in shaping a little the continuing patterns of time: on that morning in Mont Roxx in 1922; on that day in 1926 or 1927 when Van changed his mind about the beautiful native girl; on that afternoon in 1957 when Van was challenged to write Ada, and on the days since then when the "unbelievable intellectual surge" (577) of his inspiration has remained. In this section of Chapter 9 we have been considering Lucette's part in patterns of time formed of events that took place while she was still alive: the divan-and-japan motif (the coincidence of VANIADA/DIVAN/"But I, too, perhaps, would like to sit on the divan," and the associated "japanned wood"; the divan and the japanned table recalled at Kingston; the "Divan Japonais" and its fore-runners), and the subversion of time's ardis on Van's journey from station to manor (the ARDIS in Lucette's Scrabble-playing; the confirmation of the Torfyanka-Gamlet relationship in two other "Flavita" games; the red-haired lady who seems to be dashing in from the future). All these patterns, and, even more significantly, the other major patterns focussed upon Lucette, those foreshadowing her death (her rubber doll that gets swept away, the "liquid prison" in which she is kept, the Torfyanka-Gamlet confusion as a precursor of the Lucette-Ada confusion in the picnic ride as a precursor itself of the Lucette-Ada confusion in Don Juan's Last Fling), are of such a high degree of "coincidence" that one can only accept that they have been foreplanned, that the patterns have been worked out in advance.

Now it is important to appreciate the distinction between these two different ways in which events seem to have been shaped from somewhere outside human time, between Lucette's contribution to Van and

Ada's lives and the subtle foreplanning Van tries to detect.

In her post-mortal state Lucette can discern the past, leisurely and endlessly, as her recognition of the "morning" pattern in Van and Ada's lives demonstrates, and she can gently suggest things in the present, too, it seems, but she can neither alter the past nor foresee (let alone shape) the future. The difference between mortal consciousness and the post-mortal consciousness into which Lucette has entered is, then, a difference in the relationship of present and past. If Lucette wishes to act in such a way as to affect our world, it can only be within the present we know, but she is not confined in consciousness within this present; the whole past is available for her endless reinvestigation, and the future exists for her no more than for mortal man.

Because she can revisit the past, though, Lucette can see the patterns of time, including patterns that seem--like those emerging out of the Scrabble game--to have been arranged "in advance." That the coincidences that arise during the Scrabble game are arranged in advance by a force unknowable to the characters within the work is economically indicated by the fact that the Scrabble set is given to the children by "an old friend of the family (as Marina's former lovers were known), Baron Klim Avidov" (223), an anagram of Vladimir Nabokov. But if the arranger of the patterns must remain unknown even to Lucette, the fact of the patterning becomes evident to her when she can endlessly ~~reperuse~~ the past. She can inspire Van to notice some of these designs, to record others without noticing them, perhaps even to invent others (he treats his past at times a little freely, as we see in the meta-

morphic voyages, though he may not quite realize all he is doing in such transformations.

The patterns of Lucette's attentive involvement in continuing time after her death are of a totally different order from those patterns which appear (upon retrospection, of course) to have signaled in advance that they are foreplanned. These latter imply some conscious control of "the future" (a future impossible to be known even by some vastly expanded form of once-human consciousness) and they disclose an infinite tenderness on the part of the unknown controller, a tenderness real and profound even when to a mortal eye the events of some of these patterns may seem merely cruel. One can see the foreplanning of Lucette's fate, the poignant exactness with which her maltreatment prefigures her death, has been undertaken with an astonishing solicitude, a tenderness which has nothing in common with the cruel inconsiderateness with which she is treated by the young Van and Ada.

Since we readers are outside the book we can of course easily see that the foreplanning is Nabokov's. But just because we are in a position so different from that of the novel's characters and can see who has designed their lives we are induced to consider the relationship between human consciousness and some possible foreplanning power: these two forms of consciousness would be as different in the order of their being as are the characters of a story and the story's creator, and the unknowableness to the human mind of a (possible) designing consciousness might be exactly as necessary as the unknowableness, to fictional characters, of the existence of their author. The identity and power of such a foreplanning consciousness as Nabokov impersonates in Ada, a

consciousness able to create a world, its time, its people, is totally beyond even such knowledge as Lucette's: even her post-mortal state is on the order of being of the created, not the creator.

Nabokov's role in Ada is that of a designing force whose very condition of being cannot be known by mortal man or even perhaps by human consciousness transfigured beyond death. But some suggestive patterns may at least dimly draw the attention of mortals to the possibility of such a controlling fate, of such a weaver of time's texture--as some fatidic patterns indeed catch Van's attention. He notices some uncanny relationships, some unfathomable coincidences, some mysterious excess of design over chance, and hopes he is "catching sight of the lining of time" (227). As he writes elsewhere, too, he feels that "some law of logic should fix the number of coincidences, in a given domain, after which they cease to be coincidences, and form, instead, the living organism of a new truth" (361). The role that Lucette plays after her death, moreover, suggests that though still unknown directly a foreplanning fate may be understood through the blissful and confident apprehension of its designs in an afterlife that allows one to investigate the full richness of time's patterns, that allows one the thrill of perceiving the vast tenderness of these designs, a thrill perhaps as close as one may come to the thrill of actual creation.

4. The World of the Novel

Nabokov's speculative sallies have opened up an enchanting universe, but his exploration remains within the confines of art, in the

independent world of his own work where he can arrange everything as he chooses. What of the real world in which we live, where we can know no such transcendent consolation as Lucette might have found, where pain, evil, death are immediate realities? They are realities for Nabokov too, and as the penultimate chapter of Ada makes clear, he is not chary of denouncing evil or deploring suffering.

Pt.5 Ch.5 of Ada describes the unauthorized film made in 1940 by the brilliant French director Victor Vitry from Van's novel Letters from Terra (1891). The phenomenally successful movie is a travesty of Van's completely unsuccessful and unnoticed novel. In that youthful work, the heroine, Theresa, a microscopic inhabitant of microscopic Terra, had been a Roving Reporter on her planet before being beamed to Antiterra,

thus giving Van the opportunity to describe the sibling planet's political aspect. This aspect gave him the least trouble, presenting as it did a mosaic of painstakingly collated notes from his own reports on the "transcendental delirium" of his patients. Its acoustics were poor, proper names often came out garbled, a chaotic calendar messed up the order of events but, on the whole, the colored dots did form a geomantic picture of sorts. (340)

Van relates that his work rose out of the "pleasurable urge to express through verbal imagery a compendium of certain inexplicably correlated vagaries observed by him in mental patients, on and off, since his first year at Chose" (338). The information Van has so diligently gleaned from his patients confirms that Terra is "presently" (at the time of Van's researches on his patients, at the time of his writing Letters from Terra, at the time of the novel's action) situated at about 1940 and that twentieth-century Terra is remarkably peaceful and

thriving in comparison with the torments nineteenth-century Antiterra has undergone since its "Great, and to some Intolerable, Revelation" (20), since those "evil days of 1859" (329).

Van explains, however, that the real purpose of his novel was not only to assemble his madmen's visions of Terra but also to suggest that this other world was not a place of perfect happiness: he tries to express in political terms his own doubts that human happiness can be unalloyed with grief. But despite his efforts, Van's record of Terranean politics in the twentieth century does depend on the visions of his patients, and therefore does conform to the general notion of a serene Terra strikingly unlike turbulent and troubled nineteenth-century Antiterra.

Van's wish to indicate that life on Terra is not pure happiness is the result of his discovering the painfulness of what he had thought to be Ardis's perfect pleasure. At one of their finest moments at Ardis he and Ada had called each other "Spies from Terra" (264), but now he knows the pain Ada's unfaithfulness has brought into the former purity of his joy. Letters from Terra reflects the bitterness of his new grief and the fact that in his jealous pride he can neither answer the imploring letters Ada sends nor forget her for a moment. All this is manifest in terms more direct and personal than those used in constructing the political dimensions of the novel when Van describes his inventing the characters that enact his story:

In his struggle to keep the writer of the letters from Terra strictly separate from the image of Ada, he gilt and carmined Theresa until she became a paragon of banality. This Theresa maddened with her messages a scientist on our easily-maddened planet; his anagram-looking name, Sig Leymanski, had been

partly derived by Van from that of Aqua's last doctor. When Leymanski's obsession turned into love, and one's sympathy got focused on his enchanting, melancholy, betrayed wife (née Antilia Glems), our author found himself confronted with the distressful task of now stamping out in Antilia, a born brunette, all traces of Ada, thus reducing yet another character to a dummy with bleached hair.

After beaming to Sig a dozen communications from her planet, Theresa flies over to him, and he, in his laboratory, has to place her on a slide under a powerful microscope in order to make out the tiny, though otherwise perfect, shape of his minikin sweetheart; a graceful microorganism extending transparent appendages toward his huge humid eye. Alas, the testibulus (test tube--never to be confused with testiculus, orchid), with Theresa swimming inside like a micromermaid, is "accidentally" thrown away by Professor Leyman's (he had trimmed his name by that time) assistant, Flora, initially an ivory-pale, dark-haired funest beauty, whom the author transformed just in time into a third bromidic dummy with a dun bun.

(Antilia later regained her husband, and Flora was weeded out. Ada's addendum.) (339-40)

But if the ordinary narrative level of Letters from Terra is evidence that his own pain has spurred Van to write the novel, there are other forces at work in this plot. Sig Leymanski is named in honour of Aqua's last doctor, "Herr Doktor Sig" (29); his trimmed surname, Leyman, recalls Van's punning at the beginning of Pt.1 Ch.3, the chapter in which he introduces both the notion of Terra and the story of Aqua's madness: "The details of the L disaster . . . are too well-known historically, and too obscene spiritually, to be treated at length in a book addressed to young laymen and lemans" (17). As these connections indicate, Letters from Terra is in part the result of Van's long fascination with his "mother"'s madness, the madness brought on by the pain Aqua has felt at Demon's unfaithfulness.

Theresa, the heroine of Letters from Terra, is both modeled on and a deliberate attempt not to evoke Ada. The identification of Ada with Theresa is confirmed when in the credits for Don Juan's Last Fling

Ada is "obscurely and fleetingly billed as 'Theresa Zegris'" (492). But when Theresa is said to be "like a micromermaid" she is at once connected with Lucette, "our Esmeralda and mermaid" (421), the "mermaid in the groves of Atlantis" (559) who maybe sends "a mermaid's message" to Ada "somewhere near Morzhey" (562). The diminutive Theresa the "micromermaid" is also associated with Lucette's death in another way: when Van's New York palazzo is burnt down, he erects in its place "a most appetizing little memorial" (337), "his famous Lucinda [Lucette's official name] Villa, a miniature museum just two stories high, with a still growing collection of microphotographed paintings" (336). And, moreover, the test tube "with Theresa swimming inside like a micromermaid" which is "'accidentally' thrown away" (340) oddly anticipates both Lucette's throwing herself from the Tobakoff and the ironic title of Don Juan's Last Fling. Theresa, then, who "maddened with her messages a scientist on our easily maddened planet," is not only Ada, who writes imploringly to Van, but also Lucette, who has sent Van an even more desperate letter declaring her hopeless love and who, when she has become a "mermaid," may be sending much stranger messages from Terra the Fair.

Van writes that "When Leyman's obsession turned into love, . . . one's sympathy got focused on his enchanting, melancholy, betrayed wife (née Antilia Glems)" (340). Again, Van explicitly links Ada and Antilia: he has to stamp out "in Antilia, a born brunette, all traces of Ada." But once again Lucette too is involved. When Van remarks that Sig Leymanski's name is "anagram-looking" (the anagram is of Kingsley Amis), he alerts us to the probability of an anagram in the

equally suspicious "Antilia Glems." The odd-looking solution to the anagram is "Gitanilla Esm": Lucette is almost identified with Dolores, the gypsy dancing girl on Osberg's The Gitanilla, and Van has called Lucette "our Esmeralda and mermaid," after the gitanilla, the gypsy dancing girl, of Notre Dame de Paris. By being implied in Antilia, Lucette is once again associated with the adultery theme, with hurtful inconsiderateness, with, in this case, the focussing of sympathy on Sig's "enchanted, melancholy, betrayed wife." The relationship of Lucette to Antilia and the adultery theme is strengthened by the fact that "Antilia" is an "imaginary archipelago west of Atlantis" (W2).

Lucette as Antilia, a name current just before the discovery of the New World,⁶ is once again ranked with the men whom Van has cuckolded, Ivan Tobak, descendant of Admiral Tobakoff, the invented discoverer of Tobago, and Andrey Vineland, supposed descendant of the leader of the Vineland voyage. For Van, Letters from Terra records the bitterness of his anguish after Ada's unfaithfulness. But the novel's plot also hints at the cruelty of Demon's infidelity to Aqua and at the likeness between Van and Ada's inconsiderateness to Lucette and the inconsiderateness of adultery.

The third woman in Letters from Terra, Flora, is emblematic of the pain Van nearly causes Ada by his own unfaithfulness. "Flora" is also the name of the "blyadushka (cute whorelet)" of the Ursus restaurant

⁶ The term Antilles "dates traditionally from a period before the discovery of the new world, when it was called Antilia and referred to semi-mythical lands somewhere west of Europe across the Atlantic." (D[onald] R[ay] D[yer], "Antilles," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1962.)

outing who is recalled in that last scene, in 1926 or 1927, of Van's near-infidelity. This "Flora" as we have seen is linked with all the whores of Van's "floramors," with the beautiful native girl who sums up all the "Roses," the servants and secretaries of whom Van and Demon have taken advantage. "Flora," Sig's assistant in Letters from Terra, is "weeded out" (340), just as Van will manage to weed out his exploitativeness and infidelity when, perhaps with the help of Lucette's momentary influence, he resists the temptation to take advantage of that final "blyadushka," the native girl. At this late moment, Van at last acts as if he is prepared to consider the reality of Ada's feelings.

If Van writes Letters from Terra to distract himself from the pain Ada's inconsiderate unfaithfulness has caused him, then, it also records in Theresa and Antilia and Flora the pain caused by his own inconsiderateness towards Lucette, towards the husbands of his adulterous partners, towards Ada herself. Behind Van's book is the lesson of the reality of another's pain. In a very different form and with a very different scope this same lesson lies behind the film version of Letters from Terra.

Van's novel had depicted a strikingly modern-looking 1890 (high-rises and aeroplanes were common) peering towards what it took to be "contemporaneous," nineteen-fortyish Terra, a parodic version of our world in about the 1930's and 1940's and thus despite the modernity of Van's Manhattan of 1890, clearly a look into "the future" for Van and his readers. Vitry's picture, on the other hand, which is made in 1940, shows a nineteen-fortyish Terra definitely not equivalent to the Antiterra in which the film is released. Vitry's Terra, unlike Van's, is

marred by chaos, division, warfare, whereas Antiterra has now long been enjoying peace. Vitry's Terranean 1940, however, is still "contemporaneous" with the 1890 of its sister planet: Theresa still flies from Terra's 1940 to Antiterra's 1890. But this 1890 is no longer that of Van's Manhattan but something curiously archaic and quaint:

Vitry dated Theresa's visit to Antiterra as taking place in 1940, but 1940 by the Terranean calendar, and about 1890 by ours. The conceit allowed certain pleasing dips into the modes and manners of our past (did you remember that horses wore hats--yes, hats--when heat waves swept Manhattan?). . . . (580)

It is not merely that Vitry is overturning Van's Letters from Terra but that the whole past appears to have been rewritten since the days when it was present. The whole shuffling of past, present, future and the changing equivalences and contrasts provide a subtle and teasing comedy of the relationship between work and world.

Another source of delight is the irony that though Vitry's film is an unconscionable travesty of Van's novel and utterly perverts all the results of Van's arduous researches among the insane, it is far closer to a true picture of Terra--if we take that planet to be our earth--than Van's novel had been. Van had written that in eighteenth-century Terra's France "a virtually bloodless revolution had dethroned the Capetians" (341). The "de-" and the "Capet-" murmur "decapitation": in calling up the guillotine they belie the "virtually bloodless" revolution Van constructs. One of the contributions to the popularity of Vitry's film shows that somehow Vitry does have a real sense of Terranean history:

A second attraction came from a little scene that canny Vitry had not cut out: in a flashback to a revolution in former France,

an unfortunate extra, who played one of the under-executioners, got accidentally decapitated while pulling the comedian Steller, who played a reluctant king, into a guillotinable position. (581)

Perhaps an even stranger irony is that though Vitry does get very close to real earth history, the pseudo-newsreel style only makes earth's past seem singularly unreal and unconvincing in comparison with the fictional lives of Van and Ada that we have been following so closely:

In an impressive historical survey of Terra rigged up by Vitry--certainly the greatest cinematic genius ever to direct a picture of such scope or use such a vast number of extras (some said more than a million, others, half a million men and as many mirrors)--kingdoms fell and dictatorships rose, and republics half-sat, half-lay in various attitudes of discomfort. The conception was controversial, the execution flawless. Look at all those tiny soldiers scuttling along very fast across the trench-scarred wilderness, with explosions of mud and things going pouf-pouf in silent French, now here, now there!

In 1905, Norway with a mighty heave and a long dorsal ripple unfastened herself from Sweden, her unwieldy co-giantess, while in a similar act of separation the French parliament, with parenthetical outbursts of vive émotion, voted a divorce between State and Church. Then, in 1911, Norwegian troops led by Amundsen reached the South Pole and simultaneously the Italians stormed into Turkey. In 1914 Germany invaded Belgium and the Americans tore up Panama. In 1918 they and the French defeated Germany. . . . (580)

The predominance of French and Norwegian concerns is a comic reflection of the fact that Vitry is French and his wife Gedda, Letters from Terra's star, Norwegian. But the historical events listed are all accurate (with the exception of the "troops" of Amundsen) no matter how forgotten they may be, how unsure we may be of dates and sequences.

At this point in our reading we feel these real events in our planet's history strangely distant in comparison with the immediacy of the reality of Van and Ada's lives. The structuralist, Jonathan Culler, begins his excellent analysis of the poetics of the novel by stating,

accurately, that "the basic convention which governs the novel . . . is our expectation that the novel will produce a world."⁷ Nabokov parodies this fundamental convention of the genre by taking it literally, by making his novel produce its own world whose distinctness from Terra is emphasized in innumerable minor historical and geographical distortions --and then by making the reality of this invented world come to seem, after hundreds of pages of reading, more immediate and vivid than the abstractness even earth's recent past has in Letters from Terra.

But suddenly and terribly a paragraph that purports merely to describe the popularity of the Letters from Terra film pitches us into an abyss of uncertainty:

L.F.T. clubs sprouted. L.F.T. girlies minced with mini-menus out of roadside snackettes shaped like spaceships. From the tremendous correspondence that piled up on Van's desk during a few years of world fame, one gathered that thousands of more or less unbalanced people believed (so striking was the visual impact of the Vitry-Veen film) in the secret Government-concealed identity of Terra and Antiterra. Demonian reality dwindled to a casual illusion. Actually, we had passed through all that. Politicians, dubbed Old Felt and Uncle Joe in forgotten comics, had really existed. Tropical countries meant, not only Wild Nature Reserves but famine, and death, and ignorance, and shamans, and agents from distant Atomsk. Our world was, in fact, mid-twentieth century. Terra convalesced after enduring the rack and the stake, the bullies and beasts that Germany inevitably generates when fulfilling her dreams of glory. Russian peasants and poets had not been transported to Estotiland, and the Barren Grounds, ages ago--they were dying, at this very moment, in the slave camps of Tartary. Even the governor of France was not Charlie Chose, the suave nephew of Lord Goal, but a bad-tempered French general. (582)

The novel's world, hitherto accepted as Antiterra, as comically distant, proves to have been our own world, with its Roosevelt (Old Felt) and

⁷ Structuralist Poetics (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 189.

Stalin (Uncle Joe), its Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, even its de Gaulle. This disturbing collapse of the book's world insists on the fact of evil and suffering in the world we know. In the novel's previous chapter, where he has indicated that Lucette seems to be inspiring Van to write Ada and, perhaps, to incorporate into these memoirs patterns from the past that she can now discern, Nabokov seems to have created not only a fictional world but a whole metaphysical universe. But now the right of the artist to create his own self-contained sphere is being challenged: how can a writer devise his own separate and speculative world within his work when neither he nor his readers can be ignorant of the far from speculative realities of pain and cruelty in the world around them?

But Nabokov demonstrates that even in the midst of creating his own world and by the very exercise of his imaginative freedom he can analyze the brutality and deplore the bloodshed of earth's real history. According to Vitry's film of Terra, "In 1933 Athaulf Hindler (also known as Mittler--from 'to mittle,' mutilate) came to power in Germany" (581). Nabokov insists on Hitler's mediocrity ("Mittler") as well as his brutality (the English "mittle"); he points to the sad fact of the recurrence of violence in political history by linking Hitler with Hindenburg; he indicates the sordid trail of greed, ambition and the lust for conquest leading throughout man's past by yoking Adolf Hitler with Athaulf, King of the Goths, and Atahualpa, the last Inca, who lost his empire and his gold to Pizarro's weaponry. As Nabokov stressed in 1942, political power scants morality: "Morally, democracy is invincible.

Physically, that side will win which has the better guns."⁸

Though such direct engagement with historical evils is unusual in Nabokov's novels, his works do not ignore the world we know. Even in the Antiterra of Ada the collapse of the novel's distinct world that seems to coincide with the success of Letters from Terra reveals that Nabokov confronts directly the problem of the relationship between the artist's independent world and the ordinary sphere of human conduct--but this too he does as part of his radical investigation of the role and possibilities of consciousness. Nabokov may disconcert the staid and the earthbound when he points out that the world that seems real and solid to us may be made of a fabric of flimsy truth, that it may be little compared with the deeper reality of other worlds, other states of being whose unimaginability may be the best we can imagine. Yet if the position of consciousness in the universe remains always in question for Nabokov, the need for responsibility within the scope of the human and the known does not.

It is precisely because human consciousness contains the imagination to call seriously into question its own ultimacy that it also positively insists upon responsibility. Consciousness allows each of us the vast privilege of being able to imagine the feelings of another--in shared love, for instance--and with the privilege comes the challenge to exercise that capacity in one's dealings with others. To behave with inconsiderateness towards another is not to exercise the whole range of

⁸ Report of a colloquium, "What Faith Means to a Resisting People," The Wellesley Magazine (Wellesley, Mass.), April 1942, p. 212.

consciousness, not to imagine the full reality of another's feelings.

The truest imagination pleads for considerateness and responsibility: "The forces of imagination . . . in the long run . . . are the forces of good" (Eye [10]). This becomes the basis of Nabokov's moral strategy as a novelist: to shake us into recognizing how we abuse our best potential, into recognizing the failures of our imagination, into recognizing how little we really do try to envisage the feelings and needs of others before we act. He exposes the self-concentration and the ready self-deceptions to which we blithely limit ourselves, and traps us into finding how readily we let our own interests come to seem sufficient consideration.

Nabokov does this in Ada by enticing us to accept the limitations of Van's vision; he inveigles us into ignoring Van's hypocrisy, into condoning Van's certainty that the romantic intensity of his grief needs a vengeful outlet, and above all into disregarding Lucette except as a pest. Nabokov encourages us first to make these mistakes and then gradually to become aware of our errors, to reread to the point where we can see what we should have been sensitive to at once, had we had sufficient imagination, sufficient consideration of the feelings of others not represented in the consciousness--Van's--in which we have placed ourselves.

Lucette is at the centre of Ada's "responsibility" theme, Nabokov's answer to the problem of reconciling the independence of the world the artist creates and the pressures of the real, of responsible life. Nabokov can deplore large-scale evil and suffering, but it is individual responsibility that he considers the basis of morality, and

it is a sense of individual responsibility that he can sharpen in the individual reader: he induces the reader to make mistakes of judgement and then compels him to realize how dangerously easy it is to identify with the interests of one person (or two; the eager interests of Van and Ada) and to forget in such a concentration of interest real responsibility towards other lives. The process of successive readings leads one to apprehend one's mistakes, enables one to see the web of dreadful interrelationship entangling Lucette's fate in her sister's fortunes, and forces one to recognize the claims of responsibility that must exist because lives are not lived in isolation.

Yet this same process of successive changes in reaction which leads one to a proper attentiveness towards Lucette, to an appreciation of the demands made on consciousness in return for the privilege of interaction, to a recognition of the responsibility of real life, also leads one to distinguish Lucette's participation in Van and Ada's lives after her death and to perceive those patterns in the lives of the Veen children that Lucette can now discern. In rereading one finds that a scene at first striking for its independent vitality comes to disclose, through re-examination after re-examination, the sort of patterns that it might be possible to discern could consciousness timelessly reinvestigate the past and that might reveal the participation of some force capable of designing the future, some form of consciousness unimaginably beyond any conceivable expansion of the human mind. Such a force might not only have created life but might permeate life's every manifestation, perhaps leaving some of its patterns to be discerned even by the efforts of human consciousness, perhaps offering to some state of being beyond.

mortal time the surprise of discovering its fullest patterns. In this surprise and this delight one might participate as fully as possible in the miracle of creation, rediscovering the marvel of design and the marvel of that independence an architect of design nevertheless might allow to all it has created.

The successive, deepening responses possible in Ada are essential not only to Nabokov's ethics but also to his whole metaphysics. At their final stages they offer the promise of successive enrichments of reality which might lead towards higher states of being, and at the same time an insistence that the world of real, responsible life is the only one we know and the only one in which we act. Through Lucette Nabokov resolves the doubts he raises in us about the independence of the artist's world, his Antiterra, from the real world of responsible life, for he shows that the artist's independent world can be a means of testing and enlarging our own awareness of responsibility. But at the same time Nabokov also allows other worlds of wonderful possibility to surround the one we do know, and he encourages us to look for these other worlds by looking deeper into the reality of this one, by seeking out the vital independence and the eerie thrills of pattern he himself has found in both nature (in his beloved butterflies) and time (in that unrivalled memory).

5. Dying Together

In Ada's last chapter, death closes in on Van and Ada, still keeping its secret: nothingness, or a consciousness beyond time? An end

which makes a mockery of all that has gone before, or a new beginning?

Old Van and Ada listen to young Van and Ada on the subject of death, on the hope of eternity:

Recorded and replayed in their joint memory was their early preoccupation with the strange idea of death. There is one exchange that it would be nice to enact against the green moving backdrop of one of our Ardis sets. The talk about "double guarantee" in eternity. Start just before that.

"I know there's a Van in Nirvana. I'll be with him in the depths moego ada, of my Hades," said Ada.

"True, true" (bird-effects here, and acquiescing branches, and what you used to call "golden gouts").

"As lovers and siblings," she cried, "we have a double chance of being together in eternity, in terrarity. Four pairs of eyes in paradise!"

"Neat, neat," said Van.

Something of the sort. One great difficulty. The strange mirage-shimmer standing in for death should not appear too soon in the chronicle and yet it should permeate the first amorous scenes. Hard but not insurmountable (I can do anything, I can tango and tap-dance on my fantastic hands). (583-84)

Let us look back now and see where death does appear amidst Ardis's green and gold.

"I can do anything, I can tango and tap-dance on my fantastic hands" is a clue which takes us back to the picnic on Ada's twelfth birthday, in 1884, when Van dances on his hands, when he almost seems to overcome gravity. This, certainly, is one of the first amorous scenes, and Ada's behaviour the next day--her indifference to Greg's attentions--shows that she now regards herself as Van's. The Erminins, neighbours of the Veens, have been invited to the picnic and arrive just after their hosts:

A strange pale butterfly passed from the opposite side of the woods, along the Lugano dirt road, and was followed presently by a landau from which emerged one by one, nimbly or slowly, depending on age and condition, the Erminin twins, their young pregnant aunt . . . and a governess, white-haired Mme Forestier.

The strange butterfly that precedes the Erminins becomes even stranger when one sees it follow them as they leave: "Hands waved, and the twins with their ancient governess and sleepy young aunt were carried away in the landau. A pale diaphanous butterfly . . . followed them."

(85)

Van imagines Marina (a great believer in such things as reincarnation) imagining the dead Lady Erminin looking down at the picnic:

The early afternoon sun found new places to brighten and old places to toast. Aunt Ruth dozed with her head on an ordinary bed-pillow provided by Mme Forestier, who was knitting a tiny jersey for her charges' future half-sibling. Lady Erminin, through the bothersome afterhaze of suicide, was, reflected Marina, looking down, with old wistfulness and an infant's curiosity, at the picnickers, under the glorious pine verdure, from the Persian blue of her abode of bliss. (81)

If Aunt Ruth is pregnant with her niece and nephew's "future half-sibling," Lady Erminin has presumably committed suicide because of her husband's affair with her sister, just as Aqua had committed suicide ultimately as a consequence of her husband's affair with her sister. Aqua's suicide, we remember, took place at a picnic, and we recall too that Lucette's suicide (because of the hold her sister has over Van's affections) not only repeats many details of Aqua's, but also specifically evokes, in the picnic scene Lucette remembers from Herb's diary, the scene of Aqua's death.

That strange butterfly accompanying the Erminins and almost identified with Lady Erminin's imagined surveillance ("in the magical heart of Ardis, under Lady Erminin's blue eye" [82]) plays other odd roles. We noted in Chapter 5 how Van treats the anguish and solitude of his separation from Ada as a foretaste of the ultimate solitude of

death. There is a foreshimmer of both separation and death in the Erminins' departure:

the twins with their ancient governess and sleepy young aunt were carried away in the landau. A pale diaphanous butterfly with a very black body followed them and Ada cried "Look!" and explained it was closely related to a Japanese Parnassian. Mlle Larivière said suddenly she would use a pseudonym when publishing the story. '(85)

The story, of course, is Mlle Larivière's "La rivière de diamants," or de Maupassant's "La Parure" (which the governess has just completed and which she read out at the picnic) and as we saw in Chapter 4 this butterfly-necklace link foreshadows Van and Ada's separation at the end of Ardis the Second (the necklace Van breaks in wild fury after seeing Percy de Prey kiss Ada's hand at the beginning of Ardis the Second, the butterfly tie he breaks after reading Blanche's note). Now, too, the butterfly has its own ominousness, its association with Lady Erminin's death. But the butterfly has an even more exact function in anticipating the end of Ardis the Second, in warning of the pain of separation, in foreshadowing the death of Van himself. A strange thing happens when Van steps out of the car that has brought him to his duel in Kalugano: "At the moment his foot touched the pine-needle strewn earth of the forest road, a transparent white butterfly floated past, and with utter certainty Van knew that he had only a few minutes to live" (310). This is a false "utter certainty," for Van is only wounded, but a very exact echo, including the "-lugano," the pine forest, the dirt road, the emerging from a vehicle, of the butterfly at the 1884 picnic: "an old pinewood. . . . A strange pale butterfly passed from the opposite side of the woods, along the Lugano dirt road,

and was followed presently by a landau from which emerged . . . the Erminin twins." (79)

The strange pale butterfly of the 1884 picnic is one manifestation of the "mirage-shimmer standing in for death . . . [that] should permeate the first amorous scenes" (584). There are several other tokens of death even in the picnic scene, but let us turn now to the most remarkable of Van and Ada's quite deliberate foreshadowings of death, at the end of the very first of their "amorous" scenes, on Van's first morning ("or a couple of days later" [50]) at Ardis. After Van has trampled on Ada's sun and shade games, he is eager to atone for his rudeness, and Ada, as a sign of forgiveness--and of the excitement Van's presence is causing her--decides to "relent and show you the real marvel of Ardis Manor; my larvarium" (54). Van and Ada describe in vivid entomological detail, with keen pleasure in the quirks of natural variety, six different kinds of larvae which Ada is breeding. Van then glances forward to "the end of his so remote, so near, 1884 summer" when before leaving Ardis he made "a visit of adieu to Ada's larvarium" (56) and depicts with meticulous precision how the metamorphosis of each type of larva is progressing. I recommend that if you have a copy of Ada close by, you read this passage (pp. 55-57, the end of Pt.1 Ch.8) just for a sense of the sheer force of Nabokovian "resistance." For the non-lepidopterist, or almost all of Nabokov's readers, it is difficult enough to know that all the members of the early description are repeated in the later one, but it is a pleasure to pair up each larva with its reappearance, to label and master each item in the twin lists. The remarkable thing about this passage, though, is that each of these kinds

of larvae foreshadows the death of one of the more important characters in Ada (if you would like to try working these out, the characters are Lucette, Dasha Vineland, Andrey Vineland, Dan, Demon and Marina, in that order).

There is only one clue within this passage that might lead one to this fact (although I made the discovery by another, considerably less efficient, route): Aqua's death is mentioned in the middle of the later block of descriptions, in a sudden leap of Van's thought:

The two Puss Moth larvae had assumed a still uglier but at least more vermin and in a sense venerable aspect: their pitchforks now limply trailing behind them, and a purplish flush dulling the cubistry of their extravagant colors, they kept "ramping" rapidly all over the floor of their cage in a surge of prepupal locomotion. Aqua had walked through a wood and into a gulch to do it last year. (56)

One can see why Van's thought has made the leap: ~~the~~ "surge of prepupal locomotion" is somewhat like Aqua's scurrying to her death ("pupation"),⁹ and Van certainly thinks of Aqua as being "caged" like the Puss Moths ("Van . . . recalled the cage in the park and his mother somewhere in a cage of her own" [38]). But where are the merely implicit deaths?

Let us begin with the Puss Moths. Here is Van's first (June) description of these grotesque creatures: "The retractile head and diabolical anal appendages of the garish monster that produces the

⁹ Cf. Nabokov in an interview with Dieter E. Zimmer: "Aber ich habe auch vor, Schmetterlinge in Peru oder im Iran zu sammeln, ehe ich mich verpuppe" ("But I also intend to collect butterflies in Peru or Iran, before I pupate"). ("Despot in meiner Welt," Die Zeit, November 1, 1966, Feuilleton p. 9.)

modest Puss Moth belong to a most uncaterpillarish caterpillar" (55).
 The "diabolical anal appendages" and the later "surge of prepupational locomotion" together foreshadow exactly the circumstances of Dan Veen's death:

he had been complaining for some time . . . that a devil combining the characteristics of a frog and a rodent desired to straddle him and ride him to the torture house of eternity. To Dr. Nikulin Dan described his rider as black, pale-bellied, with a black dorsal buckler shining like a dung beetle's back and with a knife in his raised forelimb. On a very cold morning in late January Dan had somehow escaped, through a basement maze and a toolroom, into the brown shrubbery of Ardis; he was naked except for a red bath towel which trailed from his rump like a kind of caparison, and, despite the rough going, had crawled on all fours, like a crippled steed under an invisible rider, deep into the wooded landscape. (435)

The "diabolical anal appendages," later "limply trailing behind," prefigure the bath towel trailing from Dan's rump (and allude to the "devil" riding him) and the "surge of prepupational locomotion" describes exactly demented Dan's pitiful crawl to his death.¹⁰

Four others of the "larvae" can be summarily identified. The Lorelei Underwing "whose gray knobs and lilac plaques mimicked the knots and lichens of the twig to which it clung so closely as to practically lock with it" (55) is a ruthless representation of Dasha Vineland, whose face is marked by "a fleshy little excrescence, resembling a ripe

¹⁰ Dan's death also reflects his lately-conceived obsession with the paintings of Bosch, and Dan's nakedness, the red bath towel trailing from his rump, his crawling on all fours and being straddled by "a devil combining the characteristics of a frog and a rodent," "black, pale-bellied, with a black dorsal buckler shining like a dung beetle's back and with a knife in his raised forelimb" all form a very exact description of a human figure and its bestial rider in the centre panel of Bosch's "Last Judgement" (Kunsthistorischesmuseum, Vienna).

maize kernel, at the side of one nostril" (511), which mimics the "various wartlets and lumps" (513) on the face of her brother, to whom indeed she clings very closely.

The "little Vaporor fellow, its black coat enlivened all along the back with painted tufts, red, blue, yellow . . . like those of a fancy toothbrush" foreshadows Andrey Vineland. Immediately after the toothbrush image, Van remarks that "that kind of simile . . . reminds me today of the entomological entries in Ada's diary" (55). While Ada and Van walk beside Lake Geneva during the reunion in which they cuckold Andrey Vineland--a poor fellow whose interest in birds is his only redeeming feature--they watch the local bird life. The various species are described in the same vividly imagistic style as the earlier caterpillars, and Van notes that "the . . . comparisons are all Ada's" (525). Ada points to the "black tuft" of the ducks, recalling the "painted tufts" of the Vaporor larva, and to the crests of grebes. Van tries to draw her back to the subject of her marriage:

"I asked you about Andrey's rituals."

"Ach, Andrey is so excited to see all those European birds! He's a great sportsman and knows our Western game remarkably well. We have in the West a very cute little grebe with a black ribbon around its fat white bill. Andrey calls it pestroklyuvaya chomga." (525)

"Pestroklyuvaya chomga," which means "grebe with a multicolored beak," partly echoes the second description of the Vaporor, in which Van notes that "The multicolored toothbrush had comfortably pupated within a shaggy cocoon." The "comfortably . . . shaggy cocoon" too is echoed when Van describes Andrey lying in his tuberculosis clinic "with a comfortably collapsed lung and a straw-colored beard" (531).

Dr Krolik gives Ada "five young larvae of the newly described very local Carmen Tortoiseshell." On Van's later inspection of the larvarium, a "freshly emerged Nymphalis carmen was fanning its . . . wings, only to be choked with one nip" (56). These details look towards the death of Demon, a winged creature (his "long, black, blue-ocellated wings trailed and quivered" [180]) who also meets with a sudden end. Demon is seen as a parody of Humbert Humbert in his search for younger and younger girls (see above, p. 471), and the "Nymphalis carmen" here evokes Humbert's beloved nymphet, his "Carmen."¹¹ When Van reads of Demon's death he is "on the terrace of Villa Armina . . . surrounded by four or five lazy nudes, like a sultan" (504). If these girls are not themselves dancers, they are intimately connected with "the local Shah's pet dancer" "[o]n another terrace" (449), and their number is the reason that there are five Carmen larvae.

The Cattleya Hawkmoth or Odettian Sphinx that turns "into an elephantoid mummy with a comically encased trunk" (57) is, as we saw in Chapter 3, linked with Marina, structurally the equivalent of Proust's Odette and "mummy-wizened" (452) just before her death.

The identification of the first larva in Van's list, which fore-shadows Lucette's death, is complicated: "Many decades later Van remembered having much admired the lovely, naked, shiny, gaudily spotted and streaked sharkmoth caterpillars, as poisonous as the mullein flowers clustering around them" (55). It seems strange to think of Lucette as

¹¹ See Proffer, Keys to Lolita, pp. 45-53 and Appel, Annotated Lolita, pp. 357-58 for the Carmen allusions in Lolita.

poisonous, but she is often associated with snakes, being called a "baby serpent" (369) with a "pretty viper tongue" (370). She tells Van she and Ada "interweaved like serpents" (375) and when she dives to her death it is into "a disorder of shadows and snaking reflections" (493).

In fact, though, the poisonous caterpillar above refers principally to an explicitly poisonous caterpillar that seems to have nothing to do with Lucette. Van is describing his travels in the desolate years after he is barred from Ada in 1893:

He contemplated the pyramids. . . . He went shooting. . . . From a hotel balcony in Sidra his attention was drawn by the manager to the wake of an orange sunset. . . . On another terrace, overlooking another fabled bay, Eberthella Brown, the local Shah's pet dancer (a naive little thing who thought "baptism of desire" meant something sexual), spilled her morning coffee upon noticing a six-inch-long caterpillar, with fox-furred segments, qui rampait, was tramping, along the balustrade and curled up in a swoon when picked up by Van--who for hours, after removing the beautiful animal to a bush, kept gloomily plucking itchy bright hairs out of his fingertips with the girl's tweezers. (449)

This last scene is crammed with references to Lucette. The "Shah's pet dancer" combines the "pet" motif associated so poignantly with Lucette (see above, p. 435), Lucette's role as "dancer" (especially in the Dolores of Don Juan's Last Fling), and the "Shah" in a pun she makes on the "Quietus Pills" she takes before her death: "Want one? One a day keeps 'no shah' away. Pun." (487) (The pun is on "nausea" and Russian "nosha," burden.)¹² The "spilled her morning coffee upon noticing a six-inch-long caterpillar" manifests a surprise not unlike

¹² The "burden," like the "Quietus," alludes to Hamlet's famous soliloquy: "When he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear . . . ?" (III.i.75-76).

Lucette's when she comes upon Van and Ada from behind as they make love in their usual position: she stops, "mesmerized by the sight of Van's hairy rear and the dreadful scar all along his left side" (393).

Lucette alludes to this scene at the Ursus restaurant (she is thinking of the scar that commemorates Van's duel):

"... the physical red thing . . . it looked to me at least eight inches long--"

"Seven and a half," murmured modest Van, whose hearing the music impaired. (411)

The "fox-furred" caterpillar evokes Lucette's "foxy red" (126) colouring. Van often thinks of Lucette's hair thus: "one can't stroke (as he did now) the upper copper without imagining at once the lower fox cub and the paired embers" (368). While the "fox-furred" suggests Lucette's pubic hair, the "six-inch-long caterpillar" suggests Van's endowment, so that the "curled up in a swoon when picked up by Van-- who for hours . . . kept gloomily plucking itchy bright hairs" perfectly forecasts Lucette's hopes of swooning in Van's arms and Van's protection against this, his masturbating, and the gloomy remorse with which he must face the tragic sequel to that action.

In the second description of the "Lucette" caterpillar, the "Shark" larva, Van calls it "eye-spotted." Standing on the Tobakoff the evening before his last day with Lucette, Van watches "the low sun's ardency break into green-golden eye-spots a few sea-serpent yards to starboard" (474). Just before Lucette staggers to the edge of the deck a day later, she downs three vodkas, and "her head had started to swim like hell. Swim like hell from sharks, Tobakovich!" (493) But perhaps we should quote the whole of the second description of the "Lucette"

larva: "The porcelain-white, eye-spotted Cowl (or 'Shark') larva, a highly prized gem, had safely achieved its next metamorphosis" (56). That is all: in these elaborate foreshadowings of death, Van and Ada have singled out Lucette, to express here their hope that she has safely survived death.

Lucette's death remains important to Van and Ada in Ada's last chapter as they confront the prospect of their own ends and hope that somehow they need not be separated by death, that somehow they can be together beyond the world of time and change. When young Ada says "As lovers and siblings . . . we have a double chance of being together in eternity" (583-84) her remark expresses her love and her wishes, not any real reflection upon the fact of death and the possibility of existence beyond it. But as Van and Ada draw into their nineties, they cannot cease probing the idea of death for some hint that they might not be separated when they die, a possibility all the more urgently desired after forty-five years of living together, after a lifetime of love, and with death looming close indeed:

Eighty years quickly passed--a matter of changing a slide in a magic lantern. They had spent most of the morning reworking their translation of a passage (lines 569-572) in John Shade's famous poem:

. . . . Sovetī mī dayom
Kak bit' vdovtsu, on poteryal dvuh zhon;
On ih vstrechaet--lyubyaschih, lyubimih,
Revnuyushchih ego drug k družke . . .

(. . . We give advice
To widower. He has been married twice:
He meets his wives; both loved, both loving, both
Jealous of one another . . .)

Van pointed out that here was the rub--one is free to imagine any type of hereafter, of course: the generalized paradise promised by Oriental prophets and poets, or an individual combina-

tion; but the work of fancy is handicapped--to a quite hopeless extent--by a logical ban: you cannot bring your friends along--or your enemies for that matter--to the party. The transposition of all our remembered relationships into an Elysian life inevitably turns it into a second-rate continuation of our marvelous mortality. Only a Chinaman or a retarded child can imagine being met, in that Next-Installment World, to the accompaniment of all sorts of tail-wagging and groveling of welcome, by the mosquito executed eighty years ago upon one's bare leg, which has been amputated since then and now, in the wake of the gesticulating mosquito, comes back, stomp, stomp, stomp, here I am, stick me on. (585-86)

Both Van and Ada and John Shade recognize the impossibility of conceiving an immortal existence in mortal terms, of transposing a life lived in terms of time and change into a life beyond time. One's individual immortality is itself inconceivable. What would be the relationship of one's immortal self to the changing, mutually incompatible, states of one's mortal life, Shade wonders:

What moment in the gradual decay.
Does resurrection choose? What year? What day?
(PF 40, 11.209-10)

But for both Shade and Van a different though closely related problem seems even more irresolvable: how could one's relationships with others be transposed intact? Shade's problem of the wives both loved, both loving, expresses the impossibility precisely: the two relationships eminently compatible provided they are separated by the fact of change cannot be preserved intact, cannot but contradict each other when made to coexist. Like Shade, Van and Ada recognize that any "anthropomorphic paradises" (SM 297) can be accepted only by failing to consider such problems, by failing to note the impossibility of transferring any temporal relationship intact into timelessness. They perceive clearly that if they could be together at all in some form of existence beyond

time, their relationship must inevitably be somehow different from anything they could imagine now.

Prompted by Shade's lines about both wives, both loving, Ada thinks of Lucette and her hopeless and all-consuming love for Van, of the kind and self-effacing terms of marriage Lucette has offered Van as a solution to their terrible entanglement: "Oh, Van, oh Van, we did not love her enough. That's whom you should have married, the one sitting feet up, in ballerina black, on the stone balustrade [this corresponds to the description of the second wife in "Pale Fire"], and then everything would have been all right--I would have stayed with you both in Ardis Hall." (586). Ada forgets that though now she can appreciate what Lucette's needs had been, then her own jealousy would have destroyed the plan.

If one can see Lucette's involvement after death in Van and Ada's lives one can see that the problem of the continuation of individual life beyond death has been solved. But perhaps one can see too that the other problem Van and Ada are confronting--the fate of interpersonal relationships after death and (in Shade's example) the conflicting claims of those relationships--may also have been solved, not in a way the reader can see, but in a way that Lucette seems to know. There is an extraordinary kindness and confidence in the way Lucette has acted towards Van and Ada since her death: her intervention in 1922, to turn Ada back towards Van, her intervention in 1926 or 1927, to turn Van from inconsiderate unfaithfulness, her inspiring Van to write Ada so that others may share Van and Ada's happiness, so that Van and Ada themselves in arranging time's patterns can come near to the pleasures

of postmortal consciousness. There is such kindness, such confidence, such a lack of jealousy on Lucette's part, such an ability to maximize happiness, that it seems dimly suggested Lucette may know now the answer to the problem she tried to resolve in mortal life, the problem of reconciling her love for Van and Ada's love for each other. That there is some transformation of mortal relationships beyond death, a transformation Lucette alone can yet know, a transformation in which all their needs will be satisfied, may be suggested too by the patterns of the past Lucette has been able to discern and inspire Van to record, for these patterns which reveal the great tenderness brooding over Lucette throughout her life, despite the pitifulness of her mortal lot, perhaps hold out a mute promise that there might be even more fulfillment in store.

The tenderness visible in Lucette's fate, a tenderness which seems to involve some mysterious foreplanning, is particularly poignant in Pt.1 Ch.23, where the rubber doll swept away by the river and the "liquid prison" in which Van and Ada keep Lucette foreshadow her death so dreadfully. Perhaps the third of the devices by which Van and Ada keep Lucette out of their way reveals an even greater tenderness. Van persuades Lucette to learn by heart a little poem from among his "collection of the most beautiful and famous short poems in the English language" (145): if she can recite the lines perfectly she can keep the little book, which Van tells her is "one of my most treasured possessions. . . . Numberless fights have been fought over it with wicked boys who wanted to steal it." (145)

At that moment he felt quite proud of his stratagem. He was to recall it with a fatidic shiver seventeen years later when Lucette, in her last note to him, mailed from Paris to his Kingston address on June 2, 1901, "just in case," wrote:

"I kept for years--it must be in my Ardis nursery--the anthology you once gave me; and the little poem you wanted me to learn by heart is still word-perfect in a safe place of my jumbled mind, with the packers trampling on my things, and upsetting crates, and voices calling: time to go, time to go. Find it in Brown and praise me again for my eight-year-old intelligence as you and happy Ada did that distant day, that day somewhere tinkling on its shelf like an empty little bottle. Now read on:

"Here, said the guide, was the field,
There, he said, was the wood.
This is where Peter kneeled,
That's where the Princess stood.

No, the visitor said,
You are the ghost, old guide.
Oats and oaks may be dead,
But she is by my side." (146)

The poem, called "Peter and Margaret" (145), is Nabokov's own, and the Princess is none other than Queen Elizabeth II's sister. "Peter" is Group Captain Peter Townsend, who might have married Princess Margaret had not royal pressure been applied (Townsend had been divorced in 1952, and since his ex-wife was still alive, a marriage between him and Princess Margaret could not have been solemnized by the Church of England). Nabokov's own words explain the poem best: "it is a stylized glimpse of a mysterious person visiting the place, open to tourists,¹³ where in legendary times ('legendary' in Antiterra terms) a certain Peter T. had his last interview with the Queen's sister. Although he accuses the old guide of being a 'ghost,' it is he, in the reversal of

¹³ Presumably Clarence House, from where--just after her thwarted suitor had left--Princess Margaret on October 31, 1955 issued a statement that she did not intend to marry Peter Townsend.

time, who is a ghostly tourist, the ghost of Peter T. himself. . . . it should send a tingle down the spine of the reader."¹⁴ The important thing to note is that the ghost of "Peter T." says to the guide that "she is by my side": a relationship impossible in mortal life proves not to be in the hereafter. Perhaps Lucette can now recognize that this poem applies as aptly to her fate as the rubber doll and the "liquid prison," the other two stratagems Van and Ada adopt in Pt.1 Ch.23; perhaps it is thus she awaits with such perfect assurance a reunion that will work unimaginably better than the solution she had offered in the past to the tangled enigma of her relationships with Van and Ada. Perhaps such a reunion will provide the answer to the problem Shade and Van and Ada all know they cannot find in terms of mortal consciousness. Perhaps some unimaginably wonderful solution--or perhaps instead the utter solitude of death, the ultimate separation, "a more complete assortment of the infinite fractions of solitude" (494).

Certainly as death draws even closer for Van and Ada any comforting hope is put to flight. Van stresses the hideousness of having to lose one's past, the sheer pain of the present, the unpromising emptiness of what may come:

there are three facets to it (roughly corresponding to the popular tripartition of Time). There is, first, the wrench of relinquishing forever all one's memories--that's a commonplace, but what courage man must have had to go through that commonplace again and again and not give up the rigmarole of accumulating again and again the riches of consciousness that will be snatched away! Then we have the second facet--the hideous physical pain--for obvious reasons let us not dwell upon that. And finally, there is the

¹⁴ Quoted in Mason, p. 185.

featureless pseudo-future, blank and black, an everlasting nonlastingness, the crowning paradox of our boxed brain's eschatologies! (585).

As the pain intensifies during the summer of 1967--for both Van and Ada, who are "so close to each other by the time the horror begins, so organically close, that they overlap, intergrade, interache" (584)--present agony shuts out everything else:

Was it time for the morphine? No, not yet. Time-and-pain had not been mentioned in the Texture. Pity, since an element of pure time enters into pain, into the thick, steady, solid duration of I-can't-bear-it pain; nothing gray-gauzy about it, solid as a black bole, I can't, oh, call Lagosse. (586-87)

It seems, indeed, that Van and Ada intend to die together, with Lagosse administering morphine to them, and perhaps to himself. At the beginning of the last chapter, they ask:

. . . who dies first?

Ada. Van. Ada. Vaniada. Nobody. Each hoped to go first, so as to concede, by implication, a longer life to the other, and each wished to go last, in order to spare the other the anguish, or worries, of widowhood. (584)

Shortly afterwards, they add that: "even if Vaniada's end is described in the epilogue we, writers and readers, should be unable to make out (myopic, myopic) who exactly survives, Dava or Vada, Anda or Vanda" (584). Vaniada's end does seem to be described in the epilogue: after the "I-can't-bear-it-pain . . . solid as a black bole, I can't, oh, call Lagosse," as Ada begins to close, Van goes out to get Lagosse:

Van found him reading in the serene garden. The doctor followed Ada into the house. The Veens had believed for a whole summer of misery (or made each other believe) that it was a touch of neuralgia.

Touch? A giant, with an effort-contorted face, clamping and twisting an engine of agony. . . . if our time-racked, flat-lying

couple ever intended to die they would die, as it were, into the finished book, into Eden or Hades, into the prose of the book or the poetry of its blurb. (587)

When at the beginning of the chapter Van had said that the "strange mirage-shimmer standing in for death should . . . permeate the first amorous scenes," he was referring particularly to the insects in Ada's larvarium, larvae often presented to her by Dr Krolik, to whose assistant she would take them for mounting when the imagoes emerged. When Krolik dies in 1886, Ada places "all her live pupae in his open coffin where he lay, she said, as plump and pink as in vivo" (219). Van and Ada's conscious verbal contrivance links Ada's larvae with the deaths of six Veens and Vinelanders, and Ada's later pupae are buried with Dr Krolik (whose name, once again, is Russian for "rabbit"). Now since Van and Ada call for morphine from Dr Lagosse (whose name comes from Greek "lagos," "hare"), since if they "ever intended to die they would die . . . into the finished book" which indeed we have before us, and since Dr Lagosse is dead by the time we read Ada ("With the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Oranger . . . all the persons mentioned by name in this book are dead"), it would seem likely that Van and Ada have received morphine from their very aged and dear friend Dr Lagosse, and that he has followed their lead, to be buried alongside them. This indeed appears to be confirmed by the fact that the first of the "leporine" doctors, Dr Lapiner, whom Aqua misremembers as "Dr. Alpinier" (26) and who attends Van's birth at Ex, is recalled along with Aqua's aborted child: "Eric was a skeleton in the . . . Ex cemetery . . . between an anonymous alpinist and my stillborn double" (354-55): Van's double and some version of the rabbit-doctor present at Van's birth lie

together in the same graveyard at Ex.

Van and Ada's deaths give Ada a curious symmetry. They die together in the novel's last chapter, at Ex in Switzerland, at the hands of Dr Lagosse; in the book's first chapter they discover the secrets of their births, especially the melodrama of Van's birth, at Ex in Switzerland, with Dr Lapiner (from "lapin") attendant, with Van substituted for his stillborn double. In the centre of the novel, in the Villa Venus chapter which so hauntingly emphasizes Van's separation from Ada and Ardis, Van grades eerily and sickeningly into the death of Eric Veen, at Ex, with Lagosse and Lapiner represented in their different ways:

Three Egyptian squaws . . . lovingly borrowed by Eric Veen from a reproduction of a Theban fresco . . . (Kunstlerpostkarte Nr. 6034, says cynical Dr. Lagosse), prepared me by . . . exquisite manipulations of certain nerves . . . accompanied by the no less exquisite application of certain ointments, not too specifically mentioned in the pornolore of Eric's Orientalia, for receiving a scared little virgin, . . . as Eric was told in his last dream in Ex, Switzerland, by a master of funerary rather than fornicatory ceremonies.

Those preparations proceeded in such sustained, unendurably delicious rhythms that Eric dying in his sleep and Van throbbing with foul life on a rococo couch (three miles south of Bedford).

It was now all over. . . . and Eric was a skeleton in the most expensive corner of the Ex cemetery ("But then, all cemeteries are ex," remarked a jovial 'protestant' priest), between an anonymous alpinist and my stillborn double. (353-55)

Has Van's life--begun at Ex, on January 1, 1870, in perhaps the very storm during which Eric Veen died--been just another of those "parodies of paradise" (350) like the Villas Venus that materialize out of Eric's dying dream? When Van dies with Ada at Ex, does their death offer no more than Eric's dying dream of conjunction--a dream that as we have

seen collapses into an even horridier dream of separation and death?

That the whole of Ada is a dream is suggested not only by the Ex at the beginning and end and the Ex at the centre which seems to synchronize Eric's dying dream and Van's birth, but also by the echoes of Alice in Wonderland surrounding the "rabbit" doctors. Dr Krolik, Ada's lepidopterological mentor, is explicitly associated with the March Hare (see above, p. 546); Ada's own lepidopterological exploits are called "Ada's adventures in Adaland" (568). Krolik and Lapiner are linked in the opening chapter of Ada when Van and Ada come upon the record of Lapiner's acting as obstetrician at Van's birth--at the very time that might be synchronized with Eric's last dream. Is Lapiner the White Rabbit to the dream of Van's life, to the dream of Ada's adventures in Adaland?

One strange involution--the whole book's collapsing, as it were, into Eric's dying dream or at least into the minds of some "unknown dreamers" (122)--is followed by another, as Van and Ada die into the book, revising it until the time which they need to complete it becomes mere pain:

What everybody thought would be Violet's supreme achievement, ideally clean, produced on special Atticus paper in a special cursive type (the glorified version of Van's hand), with the master copy bound in purple calf for Van's ninety-seventh birthday, had been immediately blotted out by a regular inferno of alterations in red ink and blue pencil. One can even surmise that if our time-racked, flat-lying couple ever intended to die they would die, as it were, into the finished book, into Eden or Hades, into the prose of the book or the poetry of its blurb.

Their recently built castle at Ex was inset in a crystal winter. In the latest Who's Who the list of his main papers included by some bizarre mistake the title of a work he had never written, though planned to write many pains: Unconsciousness and the Unconscious. There was no pain to do it now--and it was high pain for Ada to be completed. (587) -

The passage continues, as Van and Ada do now die into the book, in the course of a dizzyingly and almost unanalyzably involuted sentence:

"Quel livre, mon Dieu, mon Dieu," Dr. [Proféssor. Ed.] Lagosse exclaimed, weighing the master copy which the flat pale parents of the future Babes, in the brown-leaf Woods, a little book in the Ardis Hall nursery, could no longer prop up in the mysterious first picture: two people in one bed. (588-89)

If one can extract meaning from this sentence in which inside becomes outside and the implied trips over the stated, Lagosse holds up the master copy of Ada (which Van and Ada can no longer hold), which the parents of the future Babes in the Woods in a nursery book in Ardis can no longer prop up. Or to put it more fully: in a nursery book which Van and Ada find at Ardis, a picture of the parents (Demon and Marina?) of the future babes in the woods (Van and Ada, the brother and sister who die in each other's arms?) shows the parents unable to prop up the master copy of Ada, which will not exist for almost a century after young Van and Ada look at this picture--which moreover shows the flat pale parents unable to prop up the very book which describes this picture of their being unable to prop up this not-yet-written book. The confusion of time, dimension, inside and outside should produce the effect Nabokov hoped to achieve in another work: "But (as the author of Discours sur les ombres said in reference to another lamplight): I know (je connais) a few (quelques) readers who will jump up, ruffling their hair" (IB 8).

Behind the description of the Babes in the Woods picture there is in fact a specific book, a specific picture Nabokov appears to have remembered from his childhood: in The Babes in the Wood (R. Caldecott's

Picture Books, No. 4; London: Routledge, 1880) there are indeed two flat pale parents, dying, in one bed in the book's first picture. (In a later picture, the father cannot prop up the will he is writing.)¹⁵ But at the same time those parents of the future babes in the woods, the flatness, the brown-leaf woods, the mysterious first picture, the two people in one bed, all take us back to the beginning of Ada, to the scene in the attic. There Van and Ada discover a herbarium whose flat leaves and notes tell them the identity of Van's mother; there too they discover a newspaper that "had just begun to feature on its funnies pages the now long defunct Goodnight Kids, Nicky and Pimpernella (sweet siblings who shared a narrow bed)" (6), and in this paper the children find a photograph which informs them that Dan cannot be Ada's father. As Van and Ada die into the end of their book, then, they die into its beginning--in the course of a superbly amusing and unsettling sentence, and immediately after time has become pure pain.

Van announces that they would die "into the prose of the book or the poetry of its blurb." That blurb now begins, summing up Ada with comic enthusiasm, with a fetchingly ridiculous buoyancy:

Ardis Hall--the Ardors and Arbors of Ardis--this is the leitmotiv rippling through Ada, an ample and delightful chronicle, whose

¹⁵ Nabokov's father, a great Anglophile, owned thousands of English books (see the catalogue of his library, Sistematicheskii katalog biblioteki Vladimira Dmitrievicha Nabokova [St. Petersburg: Tovarishestvo hudozhestvennoy pechati, 1904]) and Nabokov himself could read English before he could read Russian (see SM 79). According to the librarians of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, Toronto, Caldecott's version was certainly the most popular of its day, and no other version in the Osborne Collection has flat pale parents in one bed in the first picture.

principal part is staged in a dream-bright America--for are not our childhood memories comparable to Vineland-born caravellas, indolently encircled by the white birds of dreams? The protagonist, a scion of one of our most illustrious and opulent families, is Dr. Van Veen, son of Baron "Demon" Veen, that memorable Manhattan and Reno figure. The end of an extraordinary epoch coincides with Van's no less extraordinary boyhood. Nothing in world literature, save maybe Count Tolstoy's reminiscences, can vie in pure joyousness and Arcadian innocence with the "Ardis" part of the book. On the fabulous country estate of his art-collecting uncle, Daniel Veen, an ardent childhood romance develops in a series of fascinating scenes between Van and pretty Ada. . . . (588)

The blurb is a masterstroke in its own right, both as a parody of the language and tones of the publicist and for the sheer cheek of Nabokov's allowing the novel's narrative to run into its own advertisement.

The blurb captures the brightness and glory, the unmatched rapture of Ardis. But because it is an advertisement, its emphasis on the happiness and delight of the book--Van's own emphasis, of course, but now exaggerated and made comically obtuse--veers towards the insane:

Before we can pause to take breath and quietly survey the new surroundings into which the writer's magic carpet has, as it were, spilled us, another attractive girl, Lucette Veen, Marina's younger daughter, has also been swept off her feet by Van, the irresistible rake. Her tragic destiny constitutes one of the highlights of this delightful book. (588)

If Van's blurb alleges that "Nothing in world literature, save maybe Count Tolstoy's reminiscences, can vie in pure joyousness and Arcadian innocence with the 'Ardis' part of the book," this is anything but Nabokov's own evaluation. Of course the mention of Tolstoy's reminiscences, his Childhood, Boyhood and Youth, takes us back to the opening lines of Ada:

"All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike," says a great Russian writer in

the beginning of a famous novel (Anna Arkadievitch Karenina, transfigured into English by R. G. Stonelower, Mount Tabor Ltd., 1880). That pronouncement has little if any relation to the story to be unfolded now, a family chronicle, the first part of which is, perhaps, closer to another Tolstoy work, Detstvo i Otrochestvo (Childhood and Fatherland, Pontius Press, 1858). (3)

Van claims in the first two lines of Ada that his story, unlike Tolstoy's in Anna Karenin, is no tragedy, that his family is both unique and happy. The incestuous Veens are certainly unique, and Van and Ada's love does reach remarkable peaks of happiness. But we have seen that if incest in Ada is not present to provoke a horrified reaction to the mere fact that Van and Ada are brother and sister, and thus to set in motion a conventional tragedy, incest is used as a way of pointing out the seriousness of the entanglement and interconnectedness of human lives, the reality of the need for the considerateness and responsibility so demonstrably not shown towards Lucette. We have seen too that Anna Karenin's fate is significantly associated, at the very end of the Ardis sections, with the fates of both Lucette and Aqua. The joys which Van insists upon, the rich joys of consciousness, are always inseparable from the obligation of responsibility which he and Ada and Demon have so often cruelly shirked.

Ada concludes:

Not the least adornment of the chronicle is the delicacy of pictorial detail: a latticed gallery; a painted ceiling; a pretty plaything stranded among the forget-me-nots of a brook; butterflies and butterfly orchids in the margin of the romance; a misty view descried from marble steps; a doe at gaze in the ancestral park; and much, much more. (589)

The details listed here are a challenge to the specificity of the reader's memory--and to the reader's imagination, for no matter how

intently one looks one will find neither deer nor mist-covered landscape at Ardis. But there is one view from Ardis's marble steps that could be described as misty. Just after Van's departure from Ardis the First, a "tearstained" Blanche (407) stands "on the steps of the pillared porch" (406) as Kim takes a picture (his "apotheosis of Ardis" [406]) of the entire staff ranked at the manor's entrance. Blanche is tearful at Van's departure and misty-eyed throughout the novel. Her mock-romance of Ardis ("Romantically inclined handmaids . . . adored Van, adored Ada, adored Ardis's ardors in arbors" [409]) is a parody of indiscriminating response--and of indiscriminating readings of Ada itself--that is in fact structurally parallel to Van's own blurb (as is stressed by the placement of the "arbors and ardors of Ardis" at the beginning of each). Both summaries of Van and Ada's romance are exaltations of Ardis, but Van's is the work of an artist: "Not the least adornment of the chronicle is the delicacy of pictorial detail." Yet for all his acuity of vision and of intellect, he has shown himself to have scarcely more clarity of moral perception than Blanche herself. That "doe at gaze in the ancestral park" is surely little Lucette, seeing what she should not, unseen by Van and Ada in the "pardonable blindness" of their ascending bliss.

Let us single out just one more item from Van's nosegay of delicate pictorial detail: "a pretty plaything stranded among the forget-me-nots of a brook." The forget-me-nots here signal that Nabokov is issuing a special challenge to the memories of his readers. Indeed, even when we locate the flowers, we find Nabokov charmingly playing with memory: "Van, in turned-up dungarees, . . . was searching for his

wristwatch that he thought he had dropped among the forget-me-nots (but which Ada, he forgot, was wearing)" (142-43). It is an attractive irony that it should be Van's wristwatch that is the "pretty plaything" in this book which takes time more seriously than perhaps any other novel has. But the flowers appear again:

Van washed his hands in a lower shelf-pool of the brook and recognized, with amused embarrassment, the transparent, tubular thing, not unlike a sea-squirt, that had got caught in its downstream course in a fringe of forget-me-nots, good name, too. (275)

Once again Nabokov toys with the remembering and forgetting in the flower's name as he offers an equally unexpected "plaything," a condom. This condom, washed downstream to the picnic site from the brook that runs through Ardis proper, recalls that earlier scene of Van and Ada's lovemaking near the brook and its forget-me-nots, upstream, in Ardis.

During this earlier scene, while Van is looking for the watch he thinks he has dropped, Lucette plays with a

rubber doll. Every now and then she squeezed out of it a fascinating squirt of water through a little hole that Ada had had the bad taste to perforate for her in the slippery orange-red toy. With the sudden impatience of inanimate things, the doll managed to get swept away by the current. (143)¹⁶

Van strips off to retrieve the doll and on his return an aroused Ada joins with him to tie Lucette up before they rush off to make love.

¹⁶ Note that the "fascinating squirt" in this forget-me-not scene will be echoed by the later "sea-squirt" with which the condom in the next forget-me-not fringe is compared. Both will be recalled in the title of a book Van sees on a revolving stand just before he finds Lucette in 1905: "The Gitanilla, . . . Invitation to a Climax, Squirt, . . . The Gitanilla" (459).

The "plaything" occurs once more in Ada, in another form. As Lucette drowns, Van writes: "She did not see her whole life flash before her as we all were afraid she might have done; the red rubber of a favorite doll remained safely decomposed among the myosotes of an unanalyzable brook" (494). The little doll has filled with water through the slit Ada made, and has sunk among the myosotes (forget-me-nots), a grisly forewarning of Lucette's death, a grisly reminder of the way Van and Ada have made a mere plaything of Lucette.

But the "plaything" among a brook's forget-me-nots also alludes to Rimbaud's "Mémoire," its "Jouet de cet oeil d'eau morne" (l. 33), and to the brook that runs through the poem. Rimbaud's lines again recall that scene where Van and Ada tie up poor Lucette, the fairy-tale princess. The scene begins, faintly echoing Rimbaud's "des enfants lisant dans la verdure fleurie," with Ada reading on "the bank of a brook" (142) near the forget-me-nots. The willow to which Van and Ada, brimming with impatience, tie poor Lucette recalls lines already linked in Pt. I Ch. 10 with Lucette's "deflowering": "Les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes / font les saules. . . ."

The water and the sun of "Mémoire"--"Eh! l'humide carreau tend ses bouillons limpides! / L'eau meuble d'or pâle et sans fond les couches prêtes"--conjure up perfectly the brightness of Van and Ada's memories of Ardis. It is no accident that the red rowboat in the scene below is named Souvenance (406):

Their visits to that islet remained engraved in the memory of that summer with entwinements that no longer could be untangled. They saw themselves standing there, embraced, clothed only in mobile leafy shadows, and watching the red rowboat with its mobile inlay of reflected ripples carry them off, waving, waving

their handkerchiefs; and that mystery of mixed sequences was enhanced by such things as the boat's floating back to them while it still receded, the oars crippled by refraction, the sunflecks now rippling the other way like the strobe effect of spokes counterwheeling as the pageant rolls by. Time tricked them, made one of them ask a remembered question, caused the other to give a forgotten answer. . . . (217-18)

But if the final evocation of "Mémoire" brings to mind the pleasant rippling of Van and Ada's memories, the poem (like, of course, almost everything else in Ada) sends its own ripples through the book.

"Mémoire," used for Van and Ada's coded letters in the first of their periods of separation, cannot but recall the pain of those separations:

"miscodings, owing as much to their struggle with inexpressible distress as to their overcomplicating its cryptogram" (161). Rimbaud's line "foulant l'ombelle; trop fière pour elle," embedded in Van's rage at Forest Fork, his "fiercely beheading the tall arrogant fennels with his riding crop" (159), anticipates all the romantic ferocity and the inexcusable brutality of Van's later cane and alpenstock. The "souci d'eau," finally, calls up Lucette, the "care of the water" who drowns because she cannot get Van to make love to her as she has seen him do to Ada ever since she was a frail, susceptible little child.

Ada closes by recollecting the resplendent joy, the sustained ecstasy of Van and Ada's love, by recalling all the vivid enchantment that makes even a first reading of the novel so munificent. But now we can see that these happy recollections are tempered by a sense of the demands of consideration and responsibility, which passionate Van and Ada have ignored, rendering poor Lucette's life too much for her to bear. This tempering has always been present, but before we can reach the compassionate and firm sureness of Nabokov's own moral evaluations

we have to discover again and again that we are each neither as firm with ourselves nor as compassionate as we had thought, that we are far too ready not to consider the feelings and the needs of others.

In concluding the book's blurb Ada's last sentence offers a few bright remembered details, sample gems from the treasury Van's vibrant consciousness has stored up in its lifetime. But the novel's last chapter has been convincing as it has stressed the pain, the humiliation, "the wrench of relinquishing forever all one's memories" (585). Yet perhaps there is "much, much more": perhaps one can turn back the pages of the past to see its endlessly proliferating patterns--like Lucette, who now perhaps can see, eternally, the infinite care with which she has been allowed to die.

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