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Filming Nabokov

On the Visual Poetics of the Text

The last years of the twentieth century were marked by a bull market in screen adaptations of Vladimir Nabokov's novels, including a new *Lolita*[1] (1997) and a feature-length version of *The Luzhin Defence* (2000).[2] This phenomenon is only partially explained by a quest for new plots on the part of a Hollywood film industry in the throes of a "crisis of ideas" and by the commercial interests of private studios. So what, exactly, makes Nabokov's texts so attractive to the writers of screen adaptations, and how relevant are those adaptations to an understanding of the artist's original intent? Our assumption is that not only the power of the author's imagination but also certain narrative mechanisms render the Nabokovian discourse suitable for translation into the cinema idiom. In Nabokov's

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case, moreover, the text itself may be viewed as having been structured according to certain "cinematic" laws. The first part of this article is devoted to a reconstruction of Nabokov's unique method of *cinematic vision* and presents an analysis of the literary text as a model that is implicitly invested with cinematic techniques. The second part offers a brief overview of screen adaptations of Nabokov's works in the modern American and European cinema and defines the level of correspondence between them and the author's original.

The Text as Cinema

Nabokov was a regular moviegoer in the 1930s. He and his wife visited one of Berlin's inexpensive movie houses about twice a month, preferring comedies.[3] Even thirty years later, as his biographer tells us, Nabokov was able to extract from his tenacious memory most of the scenes he had seen back then, "shot by shot." And when his friend Georgii Gessen began writing movie reviews for the newspaper *Rul´*, he shared his complimentary tickets with Nabokov. Iosif Vladimirovich Gessen remembers Nabokov's lively reaction to on-screen absurdities; he literally rocked with laughter, to the point at which he sometimes had to leave the theater. Saba Kiandzhuntsev, Nabokov's former classmate at the Tenishev Academy in St. Petersburg, ran his own movie house in Paris during the 1930s, which afforded Nabokov the opportunity to see new films free of charge. And, like many Russian émigrés, Nabokov-Sirin had occasionally earned a little extra money doing walk-on parts at Berlin's UFA studios in the 1920s.[4]

This latter fact is important in proving that Nabokov's knowledge of the cinema went beyond that of a mere spectator; he had also had the opportunity to familiarize himself with the mechanics of the cinema from the inside, under controlled conditions.

In the 1928 poem "Moving Pictures" [Kinematograf] Nabokov acknowledges:

> I love the bright-lit, slapstick shows,
> ever more hopeless and more tender yet . . .
> . . . Look
> how that shawl falls crumpled on the rug.
> No blinding floodlight to be seen,
> No vexed director to be heard . . .

The life beyond the shot and the hustle and bustle on the set, far from escaping Nabokov's notice, were actually transferred into his prose. What interests us here is the work, in the broad sense of the word, performed by the artist ("puppet master" [*Puppenmeister*, to use Nabokov's term]) beyond the shot, whose principles involve as much plot structure and lexical range for the prose writer as they do shot composition and lighting for the director.

A study of Nabokov's prose shows that he utilized contemporary cinematic innovations, reshaping them for use in literature, although even today most researchers pass over in virtual silence the close attention that he paid to the development of Soviet cinematography and to the works of students and supporters of artistic formalism. *The Gift* [Dar] contains an exact description of a scene from a contemporary Soviet film: the hero, Fedor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, goes with his mother to a Berlin movie theater "where a Russian film was being shown which conveyed with particular brio the globules of sweat rolling down the glistening faces of the factory workers—while the factory owner smoked a cigar all the time."[5] This is in fact a sequence from Eisenstein's *Strike* [Stachka] (1924), which is "a textbook example of parallel montage" and close-up.[6] Indeed, the magnification of everyday details and the saturation of the prose with visual effects are hallmarks of Nabokov's narrative technique in general. He was the king of detail, of the particular. The triumph of sight, freed from the traditional authorial narrative conventions, allows, for example, his hero Ganin to see "[t]wigs, leaves, and the chalky vermicules of bird droppings" (*Mary* [Mashen′ka], chapter 8) on a damp garden table after a rainstorm.[7] One of many examples of close-up and spliced montage in Nabokov's prose is the following description of the movement of Pnin's car, paralleled with the movement of an ant that "having, after hours of inept perseverance, somehow reached the upper platform of the balustrade (his *autostrada*) . . . , was getting all bothered and baffled much in the same way as that preposterous toy car progressing below" (*Pnin*, *SSA,* vol. 5, p. 1).[8]

Another thing that various commentators have failed to note, among the other parodies in *Pnin*, is the allusion to Akhmatova's "Hot Blows the Stifling Wind" [Zharko veet veter dushnyi . . .] (1910):

> Arid scent of immortelles
> In an unkempt braid.
> On a gnarly fir-tree trunk
> Winds an ant highway.[9]

Eisenstein's article "Beyond the Shot" [Za kadrom] (1929) advances certain postulates that are in many respects consonant with Nabokov's cinematic mindset. Eisenstein illustrates his theory by reference to the "copulative" category of [Chinese] ideograms (the *huiyi*): in this category, "the combination of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is regarded not as their sum total but as their product, i.e., as a value of another dimension." Per Eisenstein, this describes cinematic montage to a nicety. In montage, "representational shots that have, as far as possible, the same meaning, that are neutral in terms of their meaning" are combined "in meaningful contexts and series." This, "in a condensed and purified form," he holds to be "the starting-point for 'intellectual cinema,' " which seeks to achieve "the maximum laconicism in the visual exposition of abstract concepts."[10] Similarly, Aleksandr Dolinin has found Nabokov's early prose to contain experimentation "with the short, concise, 'close-hewn' phrases that were coming into vogue at the time among young Soviet prosewriters."[11] In our view, this invocation of Victor Shklovsky—who is not explicitly mentioned but is definitely present in the subtext—elicits a cinematographic thread that ties together the stylistics of cinematic narrative and those of literature. The visual aesthetic of written texts closely approaches the tasks of cinematic style wherever the hypertextual organization of meanings shapes the interpretation of a given structure. As Shklovsky put it, "the people moving on the screen are, in a way, ideograms. They are not cinematic images but cinematic words, cinematic concepts. Montage is the syntax and etymology of the cinematic language."[12] In like style and to elucidate the notion of the latent artistic potential of montage, Vsevolod Pudovkin, in a 1926 article, drew a comparison between the cinema and literature, arguing that individual words are the poet or writer's raw material. Only by means of thoughtful organization do the montaged phrases, scenes, and episodes gradually come together to form, step by step, the finished product—the film.[13] The end result of subordination to the laws of rhythm (i.e., of the effect created by the montaged succession of longer and shorter segments of film or, following the symphonic principle, by the juxtaposition of two or more plotlines into one of the text's story arcs) is that films, in Pudovkin's words, *are not shot but constructed*.[14]

Original to Nabokov in observing one of Pudovkin's basic principles was his use in the "construction" of his novel not only of segments lifted from other people's texts but of narrative gambits and plot motifs borrowed from contemporary Soviet cinema. It is highly likely that he drew

from one of Pudovkin's own films some "building blocks" for *The Luzhin Defence* [Zashchita Luzhina, published in the United States as *The Defense*], borrowing motifs from Pudovkin's directorial debut, *Chess Fever* [Shakhmatnaia goriachka] (1925). Nabokov's novel is reminiscent of Pudovkin's film in its image of the main character and its central love story. Like Luzhin, Pudovkin's absent-minded and eccentric chess player carries tiny chessboards and sets of chessmen in his pockets; he wears checkered socks and a checkered tie and cap. The entire world is divided for him into black and white squares, and he imagines himself surrounded by chessmen. As in *The Defense*, the comic plot of Pudovkin's experimental film centers on an unhappy love affair, in which the hero seems incapable of combining his passion for chess with love of a woman.

Nabokov's text may be viewed multifunctionally, thanks less to its universal plot than to its formalist construction. His constructional principles are borrowed not merely from Western models (the current received wisdom) but even more from the contemporary achievements of Soviet film theory.

In this intertextual approach, the exercise of the director or writer's craft begins at the point where he initiates the process of connecting and splicing various segments of film or manuscript fragments. By conjoining the segments in differing combinations and by reordering their conjunction, he varies the meaning they carry.[15]

We will not be dealing here with the routinely cinematic leitmotifs of romance in Nabokov's novels (frequently a stereotypical love triangle founded on a cliché) but will instead concentrate on the "flashpoints" of the literary–cinematic plot. In a number of Nabokov's novels and their screen adaptations, these flashpoints are catastrophic in nature. The cinematic mechanics of the novel's text are laid bare in a climactic episode—an auto accident involving the central male character. In Nabokov's own words, the author describing the crash must "put the impact of an instantaneous vision into a sequence of words" even though "their physical accumulation in the page impairs the actual flash, the sharp unity of impression" (*Lolita*, p. 103).[16]

In *King, Queen, Knave* [Korol′, dama, valet], Kurt Dreyer's "unfortunate Icarus" (*SSR*, vol. 2, p. 173) is involved in two accidents.[17] The first time, while trying to overtake a truck, the chauffeur "had first hit a wooden railing where the tram tracks were being repaired, and swerving sharply had collided with the side of the truck; the Icarus had spun around and crashed into a pole" (*SSR*, vol. 2, p. 162 [*King, Queen, Knave*,

pp. 49–50]). The second was a full-speed collision with streetcar No. 73. The *King* (Dreyer, the car's owner) walks away from the collision with the *Seven* and the *Three* (these numbers allude to Pushkin's numerology in *Queen of Spades*) suffering only bruises, but the chauffeur does not come out of it so well: he "[c]racked his skull, his rib cage" and died in the hospital (*SSR*, vol. 2, p. 216 [*King, Queen, Knave*, pp. 128–31]). The impressionable Franz, having learned about the accident from an account in the city news section of the paper, completes the scenario in sadistic detail: "[A]ll that jagged glass hitting you in the face, that crunch of metal and bones, and blood and blackness. I don't know why but I picture such things so clearly. Makes me want to vomit" (*SSR*, vol. 2, p. 217 [*King, Queen, Knave*, p. 133]).

The description employs two points of view, a technique that equates in the grammar of the cinema with the use of two cameras on the set, one in extreme close-up (when the shards of glass fly at the audience/into the camera) montaged with what is seen by a third-party observer (when the audience is shown the corpse's mutilated head).

It was in *Camera Obscura* [Kamera obskura, translated into English as *Laughter in the Dark*] that Nabokov first encountered the need to describe an auto accident in elaborate detail. This work—which one critic called Nabokov's most "cinematographic"[18] (even the design of the 1933 edition's dust jacket replicates a piece of movie film, with the novel's title repeating across it)—is without the slightest doubt constructed according to the paradigm described above, the formal techniques of the prose here duplicating the functions of the film editor's cutting-room table.

Nabokov's description of the trip, the gradual preparation of the hero and the reader for the approaching event, and the account of how it happened and what happened next occupy four pages, which establish a linkage, along the lines of a movie script, between a storyboard overview and close shots rapidly intercut with distance shots.[19]

This episode contains several distinct points of view, those of the passengers and the witnesses to the accident (both on the ground and in the air), respectively, which develop in parallel and gradually come to center, in terms both of motif and of plot, on the accident. At the narrative breakpoint that is the accident in *Laughter in the Dark*, the powerful critic Albinus (whose name is Bruno Krechmar in the original Russian version) becomes a helpless, vulnerable invalid. Let us now pause to examine the narrative techniques that Nabokov uses to achieve

his desired effect. At the end of chapter 31 we feel the first pulsation of the impending wreck: "A sharp bend was approaching and Albinus proposed to take it with special dexterity. High above the road an old woman who was gathering herbs saw to the right of the cliff *this little blue car speed toward the bend, behind the corner of which, dashing from the opposite side, toward an unknown meeting, two cyclists* crouched over their handlebars" (*Laughter in the Dark*, p. 236; emphasis added, here and below—Y.L.).

Chapter 31 ends at this point. Then, after this typographical (and, adopting Yuri Tynianov's theory, semantically pregnant) pause, the story continues with a revisitation of the scene: "The old woman gathering herbs on the hill-side saw the car and the two cyclists approaching the sharp bend from opposite directions" (*Laughter in the Dark*, p. 237). A triple reversion to the figure of the old woman[20] slows down the discourse, closes the action in on itself, and, as in a Moebius strip, directs its internal movement along interlinked circumferences. The central event—the crash—is relayed by "stills" shot on several levels, with the old herb-gatherer watching from her earthbound vantage point and a pilot observing from high above:[21] "From a mail plane flying coastward through the sparkling blue dust of the sky, the pilot could see the loops of the road . . . and two villages twelve miles distant from one another. Perhaps by rising still higher it would be possible to see simultaneously the mountains of Provence, and a distant town in another country—let us say, Berlin" (*Laughter in the Dark*, p. 237).

The details of the crash are reconstructed in the following chapter, when the injured driver forces himself to remember "like a colored photograph on glass: . . . A sharp jerk of the steering wheel to avoid [the approaching cyclists] and up the car dashed, mounting a pile of stones on the right, and in the next fraction of that second, a telegraph post loomed in front of the windscreen." The moment of the crash is conveyed through the metaphor of a glass transparency that is broken—a metaphor that would have had the same effect on the contemporary reader as today's overused image of a break in the *film of life*: "Margot's outstretched arm had flown across the picture—and the next moment *the magic lantern went out*" (*Laughter in the Dark*, p. 240).[22] (Compare this with the finale of *The Enchanter* [Volshebnik], a later novella whose central character also dies in a traffic accident: "*this instantaneous cinema of dismemberment*—that's it, drag me under, tear at my frailty—I'm traveling flattened, on my smacked-down face. . . . Zigzag gymnastics

of lightning, spectrogram of a thunderbolt's split seconds—*and the film of life had burst*" [*The Enchanter*, pp. 94–95].)[23]

The critics' reaction is proof that readers perceived the car crash as a powerful episode. Even though reviewers of the novel disagreed with those reviewing the tamer screenplay, that scene was still a show-stopper. Nikolai Andreev expressed himself surprised that "a peaceful, stable world mutates strangely, as if under a spotlight's merciless glare: it is awoken, the familiar perspective is distorted, a catastrophe is imminent."[24] In June 1934, an irritated Yuri Terapiano wrote in the almanac *Numbers* [Chisla]: "The car crash and its related consequences for the characters of *Camera Obscura*, brilliantly expounded as they may be, are governed by nothing other than the author's whim."[25]

Any new art seeks to be commensurate to the historical moment, to be synonymous with its time. As Mandel′shtam wrote in "Moving Pictures" [Kinematograf] (1913), "And down the chestnut avenue / A monstrous motor darts / Clattering film and beating hearts / Alarmed, yet merry too." The depiction of a railway or a motor vehicle automatically demanded from the writer innovative terminology and metonymic originality, and many writers in the first quarter of the twentieth century found their source of inspiration in the cinema.

While the cinema was still in its infancy, the window of a railway carriage could not fail to evoke associations with the movie screen and parallels with film techniques (from the fast-motion shot to the random composition, all within a square frame). The fluidly moving picture (as seen by the train passenger) and the multiplicity of planes, on which earlier writers had also remarked,[26] bewitch Nabokov and his characters: the sudden appearance of a tunnel interrupts the illusory monotony of the landscape and a halt at an unknown way station is fraught with a secret subplot. When the form is sufficient to the content, Fate is free to assume any configuration at will: a character looking out of the carriage window at children waiting for a train "would try with all his might to single out at least one remarkable destiny—in the form of a violin or a crown, a propeller or a lyre" ("Cloud, Castle, Lake" [Oblako, ozero, bashnia], *SSR*, vol. 4, p. 585).[27] Transience and *cursory observation* force the reader/passenger to complete the picture in his own mind; the speed with which the signs that would enable one to single out a musical virtuoso or heroic pilot-in-the-making disappear is offset by a dramatic sense of eternal loss. The cinema, though, actualizes that plot-related tension through the instruments of artistic expression, from sound to

shot composition. Among the various factors that bring the cinema to mind at this juncture is the presence of an outside observer, *snooping* on someone else's intimate life: "Outside the window was a fairytale world—fairytale because *I was peeking at it unintentionally and illicitly, without the slightest possibility of participating in it*" (*Other Shores* [Drugie berega], *SSR*, vol. 5, p. 238).

Even in the early years of the twentieth century, the view from the carriage window had already taken on a tritely elegiac tone, some of the more typical examples of which are found in the poetry of Apollon Korinfskii[28] and Poliksena Solov′eva.[29] The scenery in Nabokov, however, contrasts with the typical perceptions of landscape. Mikhail Osorogin was certainly not just splitting hairs when he wrote a review reproaching Nabokov because in his world, "*nature may be glimpsed through a carriage window* or in the frame of a health spa, but she never presents herself in a state of disarray. The author does not need her. She does not inspire him."[30] Nabokov's untraditional perception of the surrounding world disturbed his contemporaries. While technically not a member of the group inclined to deal "a slap in the face to public taste," he nevertheless had his characters focus on things that would likely offend the sensibilities of a reader raised on the Russian classics. At railway stations, the author's "representative" in "Cloud, Castle, Lake" looks out of the carriage window "at the configuration of some entirely insignificant objects—*a smear on the platform, a cherry stone, a cigarette butt*" (*SSR*, vol. 4, p. 585 [English translation from *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, p. 428]); the protagonist in "A Dashing Fellow" [Khvat] watches through the window of a moving train, waiting for "the background" ("a refuse bin, a poster, a bench") to "show through" a woman standing on the platform (*SSR*, vol. 3, p. 602 [English translation from *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, p. 257]); and the main character in *King, Queen, Knave* bids a visual farewell to the platform as it pulls away, carrying off with it "on an unknown journey *cigarette butts, used tickets, flecks of sunlight and spittle*" (*SSR*, vol. 2, p. 132 [*King, Queen, Knave*, p. 1]). Insignificance borders on shock value, and Nabokov's strength lies in the collision of objects, the contrast between their inconsequentiality and the mystical codification of their "particular interrelation." The pattern that the author presently "sees with such deathless precision" is fated never to be repeated.

The writer's task is to present a momentary snapshot of the world of objects, to bring the recording device into a darkened room, along the

lines of the Kinoks' plans [Kinoks: a group of young cinema professionals formed in the early 1920s in Russia, fascinated by the techniques of *cinéma verité*. The name is a contraction of Kino-oko ("cinema eye")—Trans.] to secretly plant a camera in a crowd of Soviet office workers, so that life would rush "into the cinema along literary channels, refreshing, renewing, enriching the formal fabric of our cinema."[31]

But what do Nabokov's characters actually see—and, more importantly, how do they see it—through the railway carriage window? There is an example in the following excerpt from *King, Queen, Knave*: "A wall of beech trees was flickering by the window in a speckled sequence of sun and shade . . . it was no longer a fence-like forest glancing by but vast meadows majestically gliding past, and, in the distance, parallel to the tracks, flowed a highway, along which sped, lickety-split, a lilliputian automobile" (*SSR*, vol. 2, pp. 133, 134 [*King, Queen, Knave*, pp. 5–6]).

This passage is constructed on the classic parameters of Nabokovian prose, from alliteration ("sped, lickety-split, a lilliputian") to the views of the far distance with its superposition of objects moving in the same direction but at different speeds. The car is clearly going faster than the train, although both are presented against the backdrop of a smoothly flowing landscape.[32] This observation comes as a comment direct from the author, who has all the information and commands a panoramic vision of both the scene in question and also, theoretically speaking, of what is beyond it. The author, in Bakhtin's definition "not only sees and knows everything seen and known by each hero individually and by all the heroes collectively, but he also sees and knows *more* than they do"; he also knows things that are in principle not accessible to them.[33] In the following passage, however, the pastoral view from the railway car is not given in authorial focus but is shown through Franz's eyes: "He was left alone with his gray sandwich in the now spacious compartment. He munched and gazed out of the window. A green bank was rising there diagonally until it suffused the window to the top. Then resolving an iron chord, a bridge banged overhead and instantly the green slope vanished and open country unfurled—fields, willows. a golden birch tree, a winding brook, beds of cabbage. Franz finished his sandwich, fidgeted cozily, and closed his eyes" (*SSR*, vol. 2, p. 139 [*King, Queen, Knave*, p. 13]).

This excerpt's emphatically down-to-earth presentation of the village landscape and the circular structure, which begins and ends with a rather coarse reference to food, correlate with this provincial traveler's own limited scope. In the mind of a man who finds his inspiration in picture

postcards (one showing "a translucent tower against a black background") and could not care less about the countryside, the antithesis to all this is the vistas offered by the big city, with its towering buildings. And if the two excerpts above are compared, the difference between the imaginary hero's perception of the landscape (with its fragmented, pointillistic impressions) and that of an implicit author capable of continuous contemplation and of ascendancy over a multifaceted image can clearly be seen ("no longer a fence-like forest"). The creator's perceptual continuum contrasts with the disconnected visual emotions of the high-strung Franz, who is startled when the train enters a tunnel: "A short tunnel deafened him with resounding darkness"; then "it was light again, but the conductor had vanished." The momentary loss of the image is offset by the return of the light.

The absence of something to look at not only undermines the full validity of the traveler's experience but also elicits feelings of depression in a sensitive individual. Nabokov proceeds further in his experimental study of how an individual behaves in extreme situations, constructing the internal state of a blind man on a train, with all its attendant nuances. Traveling to Zurich by train, Albinus "felt his gorge rise with nausea, because he could not harmonize the clatter and rocking of the carriage with any forward motion, *no matter how hard he tried to imagine the landscape which, surely, was speeding past*" (*SSR*, vol. 3, p. 369 [*Laughter in the Dark*, p. 250]).

Albinus's opposite number is the character type who is blind because he chooses not to see, as embodied by Zilanov in *Glory* [Podvig], who "always traveled light, with three clean handkerchiefs in his briefcase, and would sit in the railway carriage *completely blind to picturesque spots* (which the fast train traversed in its trusting efforts to please), immersed in a brochure and making occasional notes in the margin" (*SSR*, vol. 3, p. 154 [English translation, *Glory*, p. 81]).[34] Nabokov's irony (including a pun on the Russian word *polia* ["margin" *and* "fields"]) confirms that the view through the window is an essential component of a complete traveling experience, that a mobile landscape is an invariable element in the romance of the rails. As an alternative to metropolitan urbanism, the landscape is in some degree the supernumerary companion of every traveler.

What most strikes the student of Nabokov's writing technique is the virtual realism of his portrayals, the sentential architectonics, and the generally rhythmic organization of the prose, precise lexical choices,

and rich metaphorical lexicon. We now analyze one aspect of that synthetic artistry in the area of interest to us—namely, the way in which Nabokov succeeds in producing the effect of movement in the text and evoking in the reader a sense of speed:

> It was morning in the corridor, the sun had just risen, the fresh, blue shadow of the train ran over the grass, over the shrubs, swept sinuously up the slopes, rippled across the trunks of flickering birches—and an oblong pondlet shone dazzlingly in the middle of a field, then narrowed, dwindled to a silvery slit, and with a rapid clatter a cottage scuttled by, the tail of a road whisked under a crossing gate—and once more the numberless birches dizzied one with their flickering, sun-flecked palisade. ("The Passenger" [Passazhir], *SSR*, vol. 2, p. 483 [English translation from *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, pp. 185–86])

Six basic narrative characteristics can be singled out here, not only as the "supporting structure" of the excerpt in question but also as putatively general rules of the poetics of movement:

(1) the accumulation of active verbs—*ran, swept sinuously, scuttled, whisked*;

(2) the discrete visual perception—verbs (*rippled, shone*) and adjectives (*flickering* [twice], *sun-flecked*);

(3) the cinematographic technique of "storyboarding" the picture—in this case, changing distance in each succeeding shot—(a) *oblong pondlet* (which is really "oblong" only from the perspective of the person on the moving train) → (b) *narrowed* → (c) *dwindled to a silvery slit*;

(4) the displacement of the means of transport's characteristic speed and noise to the observed object (*with a rapid clatter a cottage scuttled by*), to convey increasing speed;

(5) the semantic investment in the text of words describing the protagonist's reactions (*dizzied one*); and

(6) the deliberate elongation of the sentence, using grammatical ploys to imitate a long journey.[35]

Here is another excerpt from "The Passenger": "The birches suddenly dispersed, half a dozen small houses poured down a hill. Some of them, in their haste, barely missing being run over by the train; then a huge purple-red factory strode by flashing its windowpanes; somebody's chocolate hailed us from a ten-yard poster; another factory followed with its bright glass and chimneys; in short, there happened what usually

happens when one is nearing a city" (*SSR*, vol. 2, p. 484 [English translation from *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* p. 186]).

The application of verbs of motion to inanimate objects (the houses *poured down*, the factory *strode by*) is metonymically fresh,[36] while the repetition of objects in a string of dependent sentences linked with semicolons ("*factory* . . . flashing *its windowpanes* . . . another *factory* . . . with its *bright glass*") is invoked to satiate the eye, to overload and exhaust the reader/onlooker. The most frequent possible repetition of lexemes and phonemes in the smallest possible expanse of text also, in the long run, creates the required rhythm of movement, sometimes even through recourse to tautology or puns—as in *Ada*, where "[t]he length of the journey varied according to Van's predorminent mood, when . . . he imagined *the landscapes unfolding* all along his comfortable, too comfortable fauteuil . . . 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*—" (*SSA*, vol. 4, p. 332) (the graphical equivalent of that concluding numerical sequence would probably be the gradual blurring of a figurative depiction into an entirely abstract field of color).[37]

A phrase about the anthropomorphized advertisement in the except from "The Passenger" quoted above, which well illustrates the semantic complexity of a Nabokovian sentence, warrants a separate analysis: "somebody's chocolate hailed us from a ten-yard poster." That "chocolate hailed us"[38] could indicate the poster tagline (an indirect-speech paraphrase of an ad caption along the lines of "Eat More Meat!" or Mayakovsky's "Drink Van Houten's Cocoa" [from his "Cloud in Trousers"—Trans.]), or a picture of a languid beauty holding out a bar of chocolate to the potential consumer, or a caption combined with an illustration of the product being advertised. All the hypothetical variants combine, ideographically, in that single word "hailed," which was certainly no random choice: "hailed" [*okliknul*] (not "called" [*pozval*], not "yelled" [*kriknul*], and not "accosted" [*obratilsia*]) involves *making a person switch the focus of his attention*, which is in fact the double take elicited from a traveler whose attention is momentarily drawn by something on the other side of the window.

Back in 1925, Shklovskii stated that the cinema, being the art of semantically invested movement, takes as its basic substance the cinematic word [*kinoslovo*], which is a scrap of inherently meaningful photographic material. He held that the cinematic substance by its very nature gravitates toward the plot as the means whereby the cinematic words or the

cinematic phrase [*kinofraza*] are organized.[39] The model that Shklovskii describes is the simplest method of combining shots. Another important element of the grammar of the cinema was deduced by Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, who described the principle of "rhyme" in cinematic narrative and how the laws of cause and effect affect the linking of shots. Lotman also documents a more complex model in which the "cause and effect" connection is consciously violated—when, for instance, several shots elapse between cause and effect, thus leaving the audience in suspense, in a state of anticipation. Lotman believes that this directorial game with the audience complicates the ability to predict what is going to happen in succeeding shots, but there is nevertheless an evident link between what we are seeing and what is going to happen later. It is the anticipation that causes the shots to merge into a syntactical entity.[40]

We must look to Nabokov's poetry to find the sources of this perception of the world and for its satisfactory transfer into a literary text. As we can see (the stylistic approaches used by the author to achieve the effect of movement are italicized in the three verses quoted below), even before applying innovative techniques to his prose, Nabokov experimented in poetry. In the almanac *Two Paths* [Dva puti] (1918), which he published in partnership with Andrei Balashov, his classmate at the Tenishev Academy, Nabokov reproduces a moving picture seen through a railway car window without employing a single keyword (train, steam train, locomotive, etc.):

> The fields *go scudding* past the fen.
> The *pitted* tree trunks *sally forth*
> Then *step aside*. The smoke shreds then
> *Chase here and there*, *from south to north.*
>   A *rumbling* bridge. The *flickering* trees
> Come slicing through the threefold cord.
> And *all at once* the muttered word
> Of rails shifts into clanking pleas.
> The crossing gate. *Road snaps like thread.*
> The pine trees *dart* to the ravine.
> A lingering whistle overhead
> And faster clattering wheels careen.
> And now the platform *scuds* in view. (*SSR*, vol. 1, pp. 437–38)

He uses the same strategy in "Spring" [Vesna], a 1925 poem in which the train first appears, then dissolves into a birch grove, leaving only smoke to be remembered by:

> The locomotive *rushing* to the cottage,
> While *in an agile, timid throng*
> The tree trunks *scamper* to the cutting:
> White waves of smoke *come billowing* along
> In April birches' *speckled polychrome*.

(Compare with "the fleeting, speckled world of automobile racers" in the story "Perfection" [Sovershenstvo] [English from *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, p. 336].)

The authorial craft that Nabokov honed throughout his Russian period retained its timely originality in his English writings. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, the protagonist sees through the window of his railway carriage a road that "drew out and *glided* for a minute along the train. and just before it *turned* away, a man on a bicycle *wobbled* among snow and slush and puddles. Where was he going? Who was he? Nobody will ever know" (*SSA*, vol. 1, p. 184 [English from *Novels, 1955–1962,* p. 153]); and Pnin "repaired to the vestibule of the car so as to wait there for the *confused* greenery *skimming* by to be *cancelled* and *replaced* by the definite station he had in mind" (*SSA*, vol. 3, p. 20 [English from *Novels, 1955–1962,* p. 308]).

The Cinema as Text

As we learn from drafts of the sequel to *The Gift* (dated in the late 1930s), in a section with the working title of "The Last Chapter" [Posledniaia glava], Zina Mertz was to be run over by a car and killed:

> He left the building with Zina, parted company with her at the corner . . . returned home, saw the landlady's back heading out into the street, found a note by the telephone: the police had just called (from such-and-such a street) and asked him to present himself forthwith. . . . There on a leather sofa, wrapped in a sheet (where did they get that sheet?) lay Zina, dead. *In those ten minutes she had managed to alight from a bus and tumble straight under a car.* And there too was a vaguely familiar lady, who had chanced to be on that same bus. Now playing the vulgar role of comforter. He shook her off at the corner. Wandered around, sat in square after square.[41]

There is no question that this is a preliminary sketch of the car accident in *Lolita*, in which Charlotte Haze is killed (note the "accessories": the phone, the note, the telephone call in which a man is asked to come

and identify the body of his wife, etc.). It becomes the reader's (and the character's) hermenuetic metatask to try to orient himself in the text, to detect correctly the "agent of fate" amid the "intricacies of the pattern" (*SSA*, vol. 2, p. 129 [English from *Novels, 1955–1962,* p. 96]). The role of Fate's envoy in *Lolita* is assigned to the driver of the car that relieves Humbert of his nymphet's mother. (Incidentally, the 1997 screen adaptation contains a chronological error. There is a close-up of an alarm clock, which clearly sets the time of the accident at seven minutes past three, but this is either an anachronism or carelessness on the director's part, since in Nabokov's book, Humbert returns home, prior to the accident, at 3:30 P.M.—both the Russian and the English versions have "exactly half past three"—which means that the accident could not have occurred any earlier than 3:40 or 3:45.)

Nabokov provides a detailed inventory, an itemized topography of the street and the roles and trajectories of everyone involved in the accident:

> I rushed out. The far side of our steep little street presented a peculiar sight. A big black glossy Packard had climbed Miss Opposite's sloping lawn at an angle from the sidewalk . . . and stood there, shining in the sun, its doors open like wings, its front wheels deep in evergreen shrubbery. On the anatomical right of this car, on the trim turf of the lawn-slope, an old gentleman . . . lay supine . . . the laprobe on the sidewalk . . . concealed the mangled remains of Charlotte Humbert who had been knocked down and dragged several feet by the Beale car as she was hurrying across the street to drop three letters in the mailbox. (*Lolita*, pp. 103–4)

Nabokov the stylist conveys the shock felt by witnesses to the event through expressive language: he deforms and transforms the narrative stock-in-trade, displacing the link between subjective (seen from the author's angle) and objective (seen from an "outsider's" angle, that of the protagonist-narrator) aspects through repetition and accumulations of nouns, each of which purports to be of equal weight in the overall picture (or, by analogy with a film sequence, to be equally sharply focused in an unexpectedly disrupted composition, where close shots and long shots are identically meaningful). The narrator's estrangement is underscored by the grammatical shift of the narrative in a scene with no dialogue,[42] from the first person to the third: "The widower, a man of exceptional self-control, neither wept nor raved . . . he opened his mouth only to impart such information or issue such directions as were strictly necessary in connection with the identification, examination, and disposal

of a dead woman, *the top of her head a porridge of bone, brains, bronze hair, and blood*" (*Lolita*, p. 104).[43]

Both film versions are somewhat more considerate of their audiences' feelings. In Lyne's *Lolita* all we see of the dead woman are twisted feet and motionless eyes that gaze reproachfully at Humbert and the viewer; in Kubrick's 1962 version the body remains completely out of sight under a black cloth.[44]

The critics may not have seen Charlotte's death as the most convincing ploy the author ever used, but it is the pivotal point from which the novel's main thematic lines are deployed. Nabokov does everything necessary to make the car the hook in the game played by "precise fate, that synchronizing phantom" (*SSA*, vol. 2, p. 129 [English, here and immediately below, from *Novels, 1955–1962,* p. 96])—a stopcock that, when opened, causes the "hurrying housewife, slippery pavement, a pest of a dog, steep grade, big car, baboon at its wheel" to be mixed together in one "alembic." In other words, the *topos* of the traffic accident becomes the Nabokovian variant of the will of happenstance, which has perplexed every writer from ancient times to the present. It serves as a banal method of killing off a character without fuss or muss, a kind of narrative euthanasia.[45]

The cinema offers a visual synthesis of *object*, *action*, and *sound* and, as Shklovsky might have put it, an "economy of image." For instance, the impact of the phrase "the . . . yaps of the Junk setter" in the text must necessarily be similar to the *barking of the dog* in the screen adaptation. The dog that indirectly causes Charlotte's death is not shown during the accident sequence in Lyne's *Lolita*; instead, the audio engineer places on the soundtrack cawing crows, a wailing police siren, and a dog's staccato bark—a cacophony of sound that serves as a most powerful irritant on the audience's auditory nerves. We note that Humbert encountered a dog, most likely the "Junk setter," on his very first visit to the Haze home; that same animal makes an assonant reappearance on the day of Charlotte's death.

One curious thing is that in Nabokov's own *Lolita* screenplay, the setter is replaced by a collie (there are a total of seven references to that fateful dog there). While that switch may have been intended as an allusion to Kali, goddess of destruction, whose devotees practiced human sacrifice, in the 1997 version the dog undergoes another metamorphosis, this time mutating into a small mixed-breed terrier.

Two words in an advertisement on the newspaper that covers Charlotte's dead face jump out, and that "Tomato Juice" takes on an extremely ominous nuance in the context, for it turns out that the already-

widowed Humbert had been pouring his wife a whiskey on the rocks (in the Kubrick version, the drink of death is a Martini), while at the same time Fate was mixing her a Bloody Mary.

The number of letters that Charlotte never manages to mail before her death remains unchanged, at three. As in the Nabokov telling, they are given to the widower by a little neighbor girl. But Humbert does not "claw them to fragments in [his] trouser pocket" right there and then, while still standing over Charlotte's prostrate body, which is what he does in the novel. Instead he burns them in the fireplace on his return home. It would have been difficult for the camera to get into Humbert's pocket, and the director evidently considered hand movements cloaked by trouser cloth insufficiently expressive.

The transfer of the action in the screen adaptation of Nabokov's novel *King, Queen, Knave* (directed by Jerzy Skolimowski)[46] from the late 1920s to the early 1970s was not done to suit the convenience of the cinematographer or director but was a conscious ideological and aesthetic choice made when the novel was adapted for the screen—a forward shift of approximately four decades. The location was also changed, though not substantially, from Berlin to Munich. The schema of interactions among the characters is preserved, although the motivations of the participants in the love triangle have been switched. So Martha's husband, Dreyer—not exactly a rocket scientist in Nabokov's novel—is juggling two pretty young mistresses in the film, which partially justifies the hatred felt for him by his neglected wife, the daughter of Italian immigrants. This latter detail represents, to all appearances, the director's obeisance to the ethnic origins of Gina Lollobrigida, the cult actress and sex kitten of the 1960s who plays Martha. (While working on his *Lolita* screenplay, Nabokov had met La Lollo in Hollywood, at the home of the producer David O. Selznick, and had even complimented her on her command of French.)[47] The scene in which the lovers-to-be meet on a train has been taken out of the screenplay, being manifestly out of step with the spirit of the jet-setting 1970s; the movie audience is introduced to Franz at an airport instead of at the train station where readers of the 1928 novel first saw him. In the film, Franz's name is anglicized to Frank and his old-fashioned tortoise-shell glasses now have metal frames. And in the scene where Franz visits his uncle's country house, Martha is seen rocking on a swing by the front door. (Adrian Lyne borrowed the same prop for his 1997 *Lolita*, seating Humbert with the young seductress and her mother on a porch swing.)[48]

The very arrangement of Nabokov's texts, their *self-referential* emphasis, motivates directors who bring his works to the screen to borrow from previous versions. Skolimowski, for instance, "quotes" the tennis match scene from Kubrick's *Lolita*, but with parodic displacement: the characters play a fake game, with raw eggs in place of tennis balls. And raw eggs are broken under the opening credits of Rainer Fassbinder's *Despair*, to make the kind of thick egg flip that in Russian is called a *Gogol′-Mogol′*. (This must be a pun, a play on words that invokes the name of a representative of the classical Russian literary canon whom Nabokov rated highly; it is also a metadescription of Nabokov's basic method of textual manipulation, which involves the combination of dissimilar ingredients.) The film thus becomes a text comprising multilayered references to the literary tradition, a complex web of homages that will be grasped by the attentive filmgoer only if, as an audience member, he or she is also in the privileged position of having already been an *attentive reader*.

There was a time when Hollywood producers rejected *Laughter in the Dark* as an overly frivolous piece of writing.[49] Forty years later, European directors were busily inserting invented sexually oriented episodes into their screen adaptations of Nabokov. Skolimowski, for instance, added several erotic sequences to *King, Queen, Knave* while cutting out any number of logically viable scenes. So, apparently to simplify the plot and avoid overburdening the script, the scriptwriters place the inventor of "automannequins" in the room next to Franz's at the boarding house, and they make Franz the one who introduces the Inventor to his uncle. The Inventor himself has a bigger role: shadowy and virtually silent in the book, he is given a lot to do in the movie, while the vivid image of Franz's crazy old landlord is toned way down for no immediately apparent reason. Yet Nabokov might have enjoyed some of Skolimowski's choices—in the party scene, for instance, when Dreyer surprises everyone by placing two champagne bottles on his head, necks pointing upward. In this random gesture, the astute observer will accurately spot a reflection of the cuckold's horns.

The finale of the film version of *King, Queen, Knave* differs from that in the book. In the film, the Inventor brings Dreyer a working mannequin that looks exactly like his late wife, Martha. This is comedically poignant, in that the Inventor came upon a photograph of Franz's mistress (Martha), which he used as a model for his mannequin, by accident. Dreyer

is made to add two and two; finally, from the similarity between the mannequin and the real Martha, he realizes that she and Franz must have had an affair. Even so, the audience is left to guess what his reaction is, because that takes place off-camera.

Fassbinder's film *Despair*,[50] which was adapted from Nabokov's 1934 novel of the same name, also abounds with scenes that need to be tactfully handled, for all that the voluptuous actress who plays Herman's dim-witted wife has been overly sexualized. When she follows Herman about the apartment naked, he pays no attention at all and continues to talk as though nothing unusual is taking place. The comic effect that Fassbinder thus achieves serves to reinforce the audience's awareness that Herman has "slipped out" of normality and now exists in the parallel world of his imagination. Fassbinder intensifies this feeling with the set design; he fills the apartment with a multitude of mirrors. The intersecting reflections support the illusion of duality (which itself plays into the novel's theme of the hero's encounter—or nonencounter?—with his "double").

But the chief discrepancy between the German-made film and its original lies in the introduction of a strongly political cadence into the cinematic narrative. Fassbinder dwells on the historical background of the novel, which is set during the Nazis' rise to power in Germany. The sociopolitical tension that Nabokov merely outlines is elaborated by Fassbinder in several discrete scenes and in invented dialogue. For instance, in the movie, Herman arrives one morning at the chocolate factory that he owns, where his secretary gives him the news that "Müller has resigned." Herman cannot imagine what reason his business manager would have for resigning, especially since nothing had been mentioned about it during their conversation the day before. Then the secretary explains to her boss that she is talking not about Herman's employee but about the Chancellor; in fact, the entire government has resigned, brought down by its failure to cope with Germany's economic woes. A little while later, the other Müller arrives at work wearing a Nazi uniform, and the following exchange (which is not, of course, in Nabokov's book) takes place:

> *Herman:* Have you joined the Boy Scouts or something?
> *Müller:* Do you mind me wearing uniform in the office, sir?
> *Herman* (after a pause): No. Not at all. Most appropriate, a chocolate-colored jacket.

Thus the director converts the theme of chocolate into the motif of the *brown* menace, playing upon the color's ideological baggage, which the writer did not see (or opted not to use).

Later in the same episode, Herman tastes a sample of a new kind of chocolate that Müller has handed him and screws up his face: "You know, this chocolate . . . this chocolate tastes . . . umm . . ." "Bitter?" Müller prompts him. The verbal nudge contains a supplementary irony that is directed at the audience and, as usual, goes right over the ethically purblind Herman's head (as in a scene when he visits his wife's lover, the artist Ardalion, whom he naively assumes to be her cousin). Noticing a swastika on the back of one of Ardalion's canvases, he asks, "Is this your contribution to political art?" to which Ardalion replies, "That was done by the housekeeper's son—he is interested in politics." Finally, Fassbinder also introduces a scene of anti-Semitic violence into his film, in which a group of fascist thugs break the windows of a Jewish store, while Herman watches from a cafe across the road, while two Hasidic Jews sit at a nearby table and play chess. An observant Jew, complete with earlocks, sitting in a non-kosher Berlin café, and playing a secular game of chess to boot, is manifestly nonsensical; but the director needed this paradoxical staging so that the camera could hold the elderly Jews in the foreground while also catching the Nazis marching by in the background—an exercise in heightened contrast.

This roster of divergences would be incomplete without a mention of the changes made to the original by the Dutch director Marleen Gorris in her screen adaptation of Nabokov's *Luzhin Defence* (2000). While the novel's story line is linear, the film version is circular in construction and intercuts the present and the past (Luzhin's childhood). Unfortunately, the director rejects outright the stratagem of concealing the central character's name, which *the reader* is not given until last sentence of the novel, in a last-minute revelation made more powerful by the built-in time-delay of Russian syntax ("No nikakogo Aleksandra Ivanovicha *ne bylo*"—[But Alexander Ivanovich *was gone*]). The film, however, culminates in a sequence that was added to Nabokov's plot by the screenwriter: after Luzhin's suicide, his fiancée wins the game for him by using the notes that he left behind. This is quite incredible, of course, as well as against the rules, but the endgame itself, devised by British grandmaster Jonathan Speelman, is nonetheless correct.[51]

The deviations of modern screen adaptations of Nabokov's novels point to something more than the "Hollywoodization" of literature or a

shopworn metamorphosis of high genre into low. Nabokov's prose is so structured that the text allows for various readings, thanks less to the universality of the plot than to its primordially polyfunctional construction. Yet it must be emphasized once again that he derived his constructional principle not from contemporary Western films, as previously assumed, but from the achievements of the Soviet cinema theory—now classical film theory—of the 1920s and the 1930s. In his 1928 "Moving Pictures," Nabokov offers his own poetic definition of the cinema:

> Oh, yes! The fleetfoot races, waterfalls we see,
> The swirling, mirrored dark, and splendidly.
> But fantasy? The joy of harmony?
> The flight of mind? Oh Muse, where can you be?

Like any reading of a printed text, and regardless of the degree to which they exactly correspond to the canonical written version, screen adaptations reduce, with each new "turn" of the "mirrored dark," the distance that isolates the audience—separated from the author's original intention and invention by time and experience—from an understanding of the text's hidden potential and the inner workings of its internal mechanisms.

Notes

1. *Lolita*, 137 min., directed by Adrian Lyne. Chargeurs (France) and Lolita Productions, Inc., 1997. Cast: Jeremy Irons (Humbert Humbert), Dominique Swain (Lolita), Melanie Griffith (Charlotte Haze), Frank Langella (Claire Quilty), Louise (Pat P. Perkins), Suzanne Shepherd (Miss Pratt), Keith Reddin (Reverend Rigger), Erin J. Dean (Mona).

2. *The Luzhin Defence*, 108 min., directed by Marleen Gorris. Columbia/Tristar Studios, 2000. Cast: John Turturro (Luzhin), Emily Watson (Natalia [Mrs. Luzhin]), Geraldine James (Vera [Mrs. Luzhin's mother]), Stuart Wilson (Valentinov), Christopher Thompson (Stassard [Natalia's suitor]), Peter Blythe (Ilya [Natalia's father]).

3. Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 363.

4. See Alfred Appel, Jr., *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). Lora Schlothauer identifies some possible sources for Nabokov's prose in German films of the 1920s in Harry Raiser, Natalja Sander, and Lora Schlothauer, *Hypertext* Otcajanie */ Sverchtekst* Despair. *Studien zu Vladimir Nabokovs Roman-Rätsel* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 2000). One point that Schlothauer makes is that the flowering of the German cinema was contemporaneous with the ban on the import of foreign films imposed by the German government during World War I.

5. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*, trans. Michael Scammell and Vladimir Nabokov (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), p. 91.

6. A comment made by Aleksandr Dolinin. See Vladimir Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii russkogo perioda*, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg: Simpozium, 2000), vol. 4, p. 663 (henceforth, *SSR*). Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii amerikanskogo perioda*, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg: Simpozium, 1997–99) is cited as *SSA*.

7. Vladimir Nabokov, *Mary*, trans. Michael Glenny and Vladimir Nabokov (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 59.

8. Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, in Nabokov, *Novels, 1955–1962* (New York: Library of America, 1996), p. 380.

9. I am indebted to R.D. Timenchik for sharing this observation with me.

10. Published in *The Eisenstein Reader*, ed. Richard Taylor, trans. Richard Taylor and William Powell (London: BFI Publishing, 1998). [All quotations from this edition.—Trans.]

11. A.A. Dolinin, "Istinnaia zhizn′ pisatelia Sirina," in *SSR*, vol. 1, p. 16.

12. V. Shklovskii, "O kinoiazyke" (1926) in *Stat′i o kinematografe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), p. 34.

13. V. Pudovkin, "Kinorezhisser i kinomaterial," in *Iz istorii kino. Materialy i dokumenty*, pt. 2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), p. 171.

14. "They are constructed from individual segments of film, which are the film's building blocks" (Pudovkin, *Iz istorii kino*, p. 171).

15. See Pudovkin, "Tipazh vmesto aktera," in *Iz istorii kino*, p. 175.

16. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

17. Vladimir Nabokov, *King, Queen, Knave*, trans. Dmitri and Vladimir Nabokov (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. 67. "Powerful black Icarus" in the Russian original.

18. Khodasevich's definition in a review of *Kamera obskura*, quoted from *Klassik bez retushi. Literaturnyi mir o tvorchestve V. Nabokova. Kriticheskie otzyvy, esse, parodii*, comp. and ed. N.G. Med′nikov and O.A. Korostelev (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2000), p. 111. Compare with G. Adamovich, "There is no topic [in *Kamera obskura*]; there is only a scenario" (*Klassik bez retushi*, p. 103).

19. See Dabney Stuart, "*Laughter in the Dark*: The Novel as Film," in *Nabokov: Dimensions of Parody* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1978), pp. 87–113. [Quotations from *Laughter in the Dark* are from the 1960 translation (n.p.: New Directions, 1960); page numbers supplied in parentheses.—Trans.]

20. She also closes out Chapter 32: "The old woman was gathering herbs in the rocky slope, For a whole year at least she would be telling people how she had seen . . . what she had seen" (*Laughter in the Dark*, p. 238).

21. The latter is superfluous to the aerial eyewitness, since only the author is granted the competency that allows him, with his absolute control over what occurs in the novel's space, to travel to Berlin in order to show Albinus's wife for a fleeting second and then promptly return the reader to the reality in which her husband's car is hurtling around a sharp curve. The synchronous intercutting of various levels of magical movement involving various means of transportation (in the heart of St. Petersburg) had already been tested by Konstantin Vaginov in his novel *The Works and Days of Svistonov* [Trudy i dni Svistonova] (1929), which is contextually comparable to Nabokov's *Gift* (being a novel about how a novel is created): "An angel on a column and below him a galloping *quadriga* and below it two stories and the

arch that the car had just come tearing through. Up above, a small airplane was heading off in the direction of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Finally, Kuku, wearing a summer hat, stepped off the tram" (K. Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn′. Trudy i dni Svistonova: Romany* [Moscow: 21 vek—Soglasie, 2000], p. 268).

22. Similarly, Georgii Ivanov, in his essay "Through Europe by Car" [Po Evrope na avtomobile], describes an incident on a narrow country road in which, while attempting to avoid running over a goose, the car knocks over a small motorcycle ("So as not to run him over, the driver at the wheel veered ever so slightly to the left *and suddenly there was a crack, a ringing, a crash*"): "How had it happened? As 'it' always happens. Instantly, in a second, not only before one can do anything about it but even before one can figure out what is going on" (G. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3 vols. [Moscow, n.d.], vol. 2, p. 367).

23. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Enchanter* (New York: Putnam, 1986).

24. "Volia Rossii," 1932. Quoted from *Klassik bez retushi*, p. 102.

25. *Klassik bez retushi*, p. 112.

26. For Nabokov's railway mythology, see Yu[ri] Leving, "O zheleznodorozhnoi mifologii V. Nabokova," *Solnechnoe spletenie* (Moscow/Jerusalem), 2001, nos. 18–19, pp. 231–40. Compare with how Konstantin Mikhailovich Fofanov conveyed what is close (as a fleeting glimpse) and what is distant ("diffused" into an unbroken strip with irregular contours): "A wood afar, a blue, uneven wall / With clouds swift curling high aloft / A glimm'ring fence of steel telegraph poles / And green the looming cliffs, a green so soft" ("On the Train" [Na poezde] [1887], Fofanov, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* [Moscow, 1962], p. 76).

27. Vladimir Nabokov, "Cloud, Castle, Lake," in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, trans. Vladimir and Dmitry Nabokov (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 428.

28. See *Poety 1880–1890-kh godov* (Leningrad, 1972), p. 425.

29. Ibid., p. 371.

30. Quoted from *V.V. Nabokov: Pro et contra*, comp. Boris V. Averin et al. (St. Petersburg: RKhGi, 1997), vol. 1, p. 240.

31. A. Piotrovskii, "Kino i pisateli," *Zhizn′ iskusstva*, 1928, no. 3, p. 6.

32. Compare with what Nabokov defines [in *Other Shores*; the passage was significantly changed when he created the English-language version of his memoirs, *Speak, Memory*—Trans.] as "optical amalgamations": "the transparent carriage with all its contents, including the sweating, listing tightrope-walker waiters . . . is dispatched in slipshod and careless manner into the landscape, while the landscape itself is engaged in a complex multiplicity of movement" (*SSR*, vol. 5, p. 237).

33. M. Bakhtin, *Raboty 1920-kh godov* (Kiev, n.d.), p. 96 [English translation by Vadim Liapunov in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 12]. Bakhtin continues, on the same page, "it is precisely in this invariably determinate and stable *excess* of the author's seeing and knowing in relation to each hero that we find all those moments that bring about the consummation of the whole—the whole of each hero as well as the whole of the event which constitutes their life and in which they jointly participate, i.e., the whole of a work." Compare this with the definition of the "omniscient author" in Western literary studies (W.C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983]).

34. Vladimir Nabokov, *Glory*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author (n.p.: Fawcett Crest World Library, 1973).

35. In Boris Pasternak's poem "Canted Pictures" [Kosykh kartin . . .] (1922) the translocation of the train is shown from the viewpoint of a moving object—an automobile racing down the road. For a discussion of description by an observer in motion, see B. Uspenskii, *Semiotika iskusstva* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 86–88. Uspenskii notes that movement can be conveyed not only as the totality of individual scenes, each occupying its own spatial position (much like the totality of the individually static frames that go to make up a film) but also by means of a scene captured from a shifting position (with the characteristic deformation of objects caused by that motion).

A similar observation has been made with regard to "*Doctor Zhivago*, where the rhythm of the narration is established by the movement of a train, which determines the fleeting appearance of pictures, the unexpected encounters and partings, the blending, one might say, of the incompatible . . . in the novel the train is not only an attribute of everyday life . . . but also a singular point of perception" (S. Fomichev, "Zheleznaia doroga v romane B. Pasternaka *Doktor Zhivago*," *Russkaia literatura*, 2001, no. 2).

36. Which, however, was pretty quickly overdone—as it is, for example, in a Marshak poem written in 1922: "The iron bridge spans the river / *Its pillars swiftly scurrying* / And the station in a faded frame / Of birch and maple / And beyond the file of cars, the steppe" ("Zapakhlo vagonnoi pechkoi," in Marshak, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* [Leningrad, 1973], p. 178).

37. Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada*, in Nabokov, *Novels, 1965–1974* (New York: Library of America, 1996), p. 276.

38. Compare with another method of metonymic transference: "a notice in long hand (runny ink, blue runaway dog)" (*SSR*, vol. 4, p. 192 [Nabokov, *The Gift*, p. 4]).

39. See V. Shklovskii, "Semantika kino," in *Stat′i o kinematografe* (Moscow, 1985), p. 32.

40. Iu.M. Lotman, "Semiotika kino i problemy kinoestetiki," in *Ob iskusstve. Stat′i. Zametki. Vystupleniia (1962–1993)* (St. Petersburg, 1998), pp. 324–36.

41. Quoted from archival materials transcribed by A.A. Dolinin: "Zagadka nedopisannogo romana," *Zvezda*, 1997, no. 12, p. 218. See also a partial reconstruction of the same text by Jane Grayson in *V.V. Nabokov: Pro et contra*, vol. 1 (1997), pp. 609–11.

42. As, for instance, in "decrepit lady herself *may be imagined* screeching."

43. The use of exaggeratedly naturalistic physiologism in descriptions of a victim harks back, strange as this may sound, to a sound Russian classical tradition and not least to analogous passages in the works of Nikolai Leskov and Lev Tolstoy. For further detail on this, see Iu. [Yuri] Leving, "Telesnost′ i motivy raz′′iatiia ploti v russkoi literature," *Nash Skopus*, 1999, no. 16, pp. 11–14.

44. *Lolita*, 152 min., directed by Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer with Seven Arts Production, 1962. Cast: James Mason (Humbert Humbert), Sue Lyon (Lolita Haze), Shelley Winters (Charlotte Haze), Peter Sellers (Clare Quilty), Diana Decker (Jean Farlow), Jerry Stovin (John Farlow), Suzanne Gibbs (Mona Farlow [Mona]), Marianne Stone (Vivian Darkbloom), Gary Cockrell (Dick Schiller).

45. See, for instance, "The death of Charlotte Haze, knocked down by a car as she rushes to post letters . . . cannot realistically be regarded as much more than a device for moving the narrative logically on to its next stage . . . Charlotte *must* now be removed from the scene to allow Humbert access to Lolita, and so the car that

hits her is more a convenience than a metaphor" (Nina Allan, "Madness, Death, and Disease in the Fiction of Vladimir Nabokov," *Birmingham Slavonic Monographs*, University of Birmingham, 1994, no. 23, p. 59).

46. *King, Queen, Knave* (German title: *Herzbube*), 93 min. Story set in Munich and Côte d'Azur, c. 1970. Directed by Jerzy Skolimowski (Poland). Wolper Pictures, Ltd., and Maran Film GMBH, 1972. Cast: Gina Lollobrigida (Martha Dreyer), David Niven (Charles Dreyer [Kurt Dreyer]), John Moulder-Brown (Frank Dreyer [Franz]), Mario Adorf (Professor Ritter [The Inventor]), Erica Beer (Frieda [Dreyer's housemaid]).

47. Appel, *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, p. 58.

48. For the eroticism of the swing, see Iu.L. Vorotnikov, "Obraz kachelei v tvorchestve A.A. Feta i F. Sologuba," *Russkaia literatura*, 2001, no. 2, pp. 25–33.

49. K. Arenskii, *Pis´ma v Khollivud. Po materialam arkhiva S.L. Bertensona* (Monterey, CA: K. Arensburger, 1968), p. 161.

50. *Despair* (German title: *Despair—Eine Reise ins Licht*), 119 min. Story set in Germany and southern France, c. 1975. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (West Germany). 1978. Cast: Dirk Bogarde (Hermann Herman [Herman Karlovich]), Andrea Ferréol (Lydia Herman [Lydia]), Klaus Lewitsch (Felix Weber [Felix Wohlfahrt]), Volker Spengler (Ardalion), Bernhard Wicki (Orlovius), Gottfried John (Perebrodov).

51. Larry Evans, "At End of *Luzhin Defence*, Critics Felt Rooked," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 12 August 2001, p. 6D.

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