

“The Precision of Poetry and the Exactness of Pure Science”: Nabokov, Stravinsky, and the Reader as Listener

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Parallel Lives

In his meticulously prepared compendium of interviews, *Strong Opinions*, Vladimir Nabokov reprinted a 1970 response to a question posed by Alfred Appel about whether he knew Igor Stravinsky, “another outspoken émigré.” Nabokov replied, “I know Mr. Stravinsky very slightly and have never seen any genuine sample of his outspokenness in print.”¹ Nabokov’s response to Appel, one of the first and most respected of Nabokov scholars, revealed an uncanny but not unexpected doubt about Stravinsky’s role in the authorship of the (by then) extensive accumulation of Stravinsky-Craft volumes of conversations. The questions about Robert Craft’s role and who was responsible for what appeared in print as Stravinsky’s words remain matters of controversy.² Craft’s contribution was, if not decisive, then certainly substantial. He confessed to Stephen Walsh, with pride, that one reviewer of the 1959 *Conversations* expressed the opinion that “the two finest writers of English prose” were Russians: Nabokov and Stravinsky.³

The idea that Stravinsky was considered a “fine writer” surely irritated Nabokov. Such a notion revealed a familiar philistinism and stupidity, not entirely unrelated to the evils of *poshlost'*, Nabokov’s term for the fake suggestion of genuine art, refinement, and judgment so rampant in so-called civilized society.⁴ Nabokov’s subtly worded skepticism about the authorship of the volumes anticipated what has remained for scholars a source of ambiguity with respect to understanding Stravinsky, particularly in his American years. It seems that everything Stravinsky published, from his *Autobiography* of 1935 and 1936 to the 1939 Charles Eliot Norton Lectures and the volumes with Craft was, if not ghostwritten, then the work of close collaboration.⁵ This does not disqualify the utility of what was published under Stravinsky’s name as sources for understanding Stravinsky. But there are no grounds for elevating the composer to the stature of Nabokov as a writer.⁶

Nabokov’s aside about Stravinsky also needs to be read within the context of the writer’s persistent comments about his own weak relationship to music.

Even if we accept Nabokov's humorous descriptions of his imperviousness to music, the contact between these two prominent émigrés during the American exile they shared was unexpectedly minimal, as many have noted.⁷ They appear to have barely known each other. Stravinsky seems not to have read Nabokov, neither during the 1930s in Russian, nor in English in the 1950s and 1960s. After 1940 Nabokov took pains to protest his lack of musicality, even though he took ironic pride in being a descendant of Carl Heinrich Graun, a minor but well-regarded eighteenth-century composer, and took genuine pleasure that his only son, Dimitri, became an opera singer. "I have no ear for music—a shortcoming I deplore bitterly," he confessed in a 1964 *Playboy* interview.⁸ Nabokov admitted to retaining a memory of unwanted attendance at operas during his childhood and having once translated Schubert song texts into Russian, but officially the art of music was foreign to him. "Music, I regret to say, affects me merely as an arbitrary succession of more or less irritating sounds," he wrote in *Speak, Memory*. In underscoring his distance from most modern poetry in 1969, he quipped: "I know as little about today's poetry as about new music."⁹ Nonetheless, Alfred Appel suggested in 1967 that Nabokov was perhaps protesting too much about his lack of connection to music, an idea now increasingly supported in the critical literature.¹⁰ Appel argued that Nabokov's obsessions with memory, consciousness, time, and the structure of the novel all took on explicitly musical metaphors and analogies; perhaps Nabokov, by dismissing his connection to music, was following a time-honored tradition of intentionally throwing off his would-be interpreters.

Stravinsky was, by all accounts, an avid reader. But he seems to have taken no interest in Nabokov the writer. The absence of any real contact between him and Nabokov, who both arrived in America from France within two years of each other and shared common cultural and historical origins, is even more remarkable given the tight interconnections (so vividly described in *Priglasenie*) within Russian émigré circles. True, Nabokov resided in the East, and Stravinsky on the West Coast, until the mid-1960s, when he was already quite ill. But the two men seem also never to have met in Berlin or Paris, where both found themselves with some frequency, and were in contact with Russian émigrés in those cities.

Nabokov and Stravinsky had one significant friend in common, perhaps the only person to be in attendance at the funerals of both men, Nicolas Nabokov, the composer and controversial cultural impresario. Nicolas was a first cousin of the writer. His help for Nabokov extended to arranging lodgings (his ex-wife provided Vladimir and Vera Nabokov with their first home in America in 1940), and Vladimir was in intermittent social contact with him until his death.¹¹ Stravinsky knew Nicolas from his Paris years, and throughout the American years he was among those closest to Stravinsky and worked hard to promote his music.¹² Bringing Nabokov and Stravinsky together would have been easy. It appears that they may actually have avoided each other.¹³

Considering Stravinsky and Nabokov together for the mere fact of shared birthplace and common exile—first in Europe and then America—possesses a basic historical logic. There are obvious parallels in their lives, as well as key divergences that help explain the absence of contact. Despite the social distance between them, striking connections emerge between Stravinsky's music and Nabokov's prose when one compares their careers and work. They shared parallel premises and prejudices in their views on art. And their respective places in the history of modernism bear comparison.

Upon closer inspection, the contrasts in biography stand out. The writer was seventeen years younger. Nabokov was born into a family of high aristocracy and great wealth. Stravinsky, in contrast, descended from petty aristocracy.¹⁴ He did his best to assert his aristocratic origins and prized his provenance of privilege and exclusivity, but the social gulf between them was marked. In their American years, Nabokov seems never to have complained about his loss of status and wealth and he did not try to impress Americans with his ancestry. Stravinsky, in contrast, exaggerated his vanished social distinction and was notoriously obsessed about money. Both men had famous fathers, but Vladimir Nabokov idealized and idolized his whereas Igor Stravinsky seems only to have harbored resentment against his distinguished father, Russia's finest operatic bass before Fyodor Chaliapin.¹⁵ Nabokov's parents, music lovers, were in the patron class. Chaliapin and Serge Koussevitzky performed in the Nabokov home, and perhaps so too did Igor's father.¹⁶

Both the writer and the composer spent the interwar years in exile in Europe. Both lived at one time in Switzerland, a country for which each had a particular fondness. Stravinsky spent most of the years between 1917 and 1939 in France, whereas Nabokov chose Berlin. In Berlin Nabokov kept close to the Russian émigré community. Stravinsky had many Russian friends and colleagues in France, but he became a French citizen and emerged by the 1930s as the leading and most influential composer among the French. Ironically, Stravinsky's best foreign language from childhood was German. His French developed later, during his many years in France and in French-speaking Switzerland. Nabokov (for whom English was a childhood language and his second language) preferred French, his years in Berlin notwithstanding. He read German and spoke it, but never used it as a language of writing, even though he wrote most of his early novels in Germany. Stravinsky shifted from an initial hostility to the German cultural tradition in music to an increasing admiration and consideration of it as normative.¹⁷ He never could quite accommodate Wagner, but in his later years Beethoven and Schubert became important to him in a manner they had not been early in his career. By the mid-1930s he was most eager, despite the Nazi seizure of power, to gain acceptance in Germany. Nabokov was repulsed by things German, except for scientific works. His novels—particularly *King, Queen, Knave* and *The Gift*—are peppered with contempt and parody of German habits and culture. For

Nabokov, the Germans came to be emblematic of the worst of pseudo-culture, prime purveyors of a particularly pretentious tradition of *poshlost'*.¹⁸

Nabokov, like his father, was an ardent foe of anti-Semitism. He despised not only the Nazi variety but also the anti-Semitism so commonplace within the Russian intelligentsia. Nabokov hated the fascists, and indeed all tyranny. The same cannot be said of Stravinsky. Stravinsky admired Mussolini; in 1936 he was annoyed only that Il Duce had no time for him.¹⁹ The text of Stravinsky's 1939 Norton Lectures, *The Poetics of Music*, is marked by an obsessive assertion that the centrality of "the stern auspices of order and discipline" in modern life and art were being neglected. Stravinsky declared, "Modern man is progressively losing his understanding of values and his sense of proportion." This was "serious" since it challenged the "fundamental laws of human equilibrium." Whether intentionally or not, Stravinsky evoked the pseudo-historical justification peddled by purveyors of fascist ideology as the proper antidote to chaos and degeneracy. Stravinsky thought that the errors of contemporary culture revealed that "the mind itself is ailing." Much of the music of the time, Stravinsky told his audience, "carries within it the symptoms of a pathologic blemish and spreads the germs of a new original sin."²⁰ His rhetoric possessed an uncanny and perhaps unintended family resemblance to the aesthetics favored by fascist regimes that defined "degenerate art." Despite Stravinsky's unambiguous dislike of the Soviets in the 1930s, the Eurasianism he subscribed to led him to a critical skepticism in 1939 more implicitly consonant with the Stalinist dogma of the mid- and late 1930s that ostracized Dimitry Shostakovich and Gavriil Popov. The criticisms shared a tone of moral disapproval.

In exile, Stravinsky not surprisingly developed an overt commitment to religion, in particular Russian Orthodoxy. And by the mid-1920s he assumed, under the guise of neoclassicism, a stark anti-modernist stance. Stravinsky had no use for socialist realism, but his problem with Russia under Communism was comparatively nuanced. During the years he flirted with Eurasianist notions, Stravinsky observed, "Now Russia has seen only *conservatism*, without *renewal* or *revolution* without *tradition*."²¹ Nabokov shared none of this. Organized traditional religion remained foreign to him. He maintained the same strict and unwavering contempt for post-revolutionary Russia, the Soviets, as he did for the fascists. He kept his distance from all "isms." His views on human history and progress were linked to his own lifelong encounter with the detailed scientific observation of nature. Individuality and freedom in art and thought were endangered by the politics and culture of modern times. In 1937 Nabokov wrote, "The symmetry in the structure of live bodies is a consequence of the rotation of worlds . . . and that in our straining toward asymmetry, toward inequality, I can detect a howl for genuine freedom, an urge to break out of the circle."²² For all his snobbery about writers past and present, Nabokov never strayed from the modernism he came to admire early in his career, that of Andrey Bely, Franz Kafka, the Proust of *Swann's Way*, and the Joyce of *Ulysses*.²³

Although both men were anti-communist, Nabokov's pessimism about modernity never led him down the more reactionary path taken by Stravinsky in the years between 1922 and the mid-1950s. Nabokov feared the populist embrace of the despotic imposition of order and discipline in political life—including the sort of uniform assertion of a “healthy” social utilitarian aesthetic promoted by Hitler and Stalin. He also did not romanticize autocracy, including that of the czars before 1917. The trap faced by Adam Krug, Nabokov's protagonist in *Bend Sinister*, is the futility and self-destructiveness of any struggle to hold on to a shred of individuality, genuine refinement, originality, and morality—particularly by engaging with language, thought, literature, and culture—in the context of modern dictatorship. The pretense of value on behalf of culture and the making of art itself are complicit in concealing this trap—a truth grasped by Ember, the Shakespeare translator and Krug's friend in *Bend Sinister*.²⁴

The cult of self-improving culture displayed in *Lolita* by Dolores Haze (consider the meaning of the name) and the sort of bad art associated with middle-class, semi-educated taste for the sentimental and the emotionally illustrative provide no protection against barbarism and violence. Humbert Humbert's highly cultivated and persuasive tastes in literature, music, and art, his evidently learned superiority over the Americans he meets seduces the reader; Humbert's aesthetic sensibility, even his capacity for poetic eloquence, makes the case for his defense hard to resist. Yet connoisseurship does not prevent his crimes. It merely softens the cruelty and deepens the plausibility of rationalization. Whether delivered by would-be individualists like Humbert or bureaucrats and dictators who create concentration camps, aesthetic gifts and cultural sensibilities fail, for Nabokov, as antidotes to the evil in modern life.²⁵

When Humbert Humbert chases Clare Quilty, attempting to shoot him, his victim “sat down before the piano and played several atrociously vigorous, fundamentally hysterical, plangent chords, his jowls quivering, his spread hands tensely plunging, and his nostrils emitting the soundtrack snorts which had been absent from our fight. Still singing those impossible sonorities, he made a futile attempt to open with his foot a kind of seaman's chest near the piano.”²⁶ Nabokov could not have evoked a more effective caricature of the pretensions of the modern piano virtuoso and the cheap, illustrative Romanticism of the kind Stravinsky also despised, and the futility of a tradition of cultural consumption (the seaman's chest) as means of escape from a fatal barbarism that threatens the survival of morality, civility, and the humane—much less that of talent, originality, beauty, and learning.

For Nabokov, the Russia of his youth was personal; it vanished and lived only in his memory. The pretense of finding in the past a legitimate basis for nostalgia held no allure. In his adult life Nabokov remained resistant to organized causes and ideologies, including patriotism and cultural chauvinism. Although Russian was his primary language, the Russia that continued to occupy him was his own invention, and bore little, if any relation to the Russia that existed after 1917.

He never sought to return to Russia or to maneuver to gain access to readers in Soviet Russia. Stravinsky on the other hand held on to the idea of an ongoing residual national solidarity, while rejecting a narrow nationalism. He saw himself as a supranational, universal figure above politics. Yet he subordinated his distaste for Communism and joined with other émigrés in taking some pride in the Soviet part of the Allied war effort in the 1940s. Stravinsky may have been ambivalent about returning to Russia, but he calculated correctly that if he did, he would return in triumph—which happened in 1962, after an absence of fifty years. He embraced the Russia he encountered on that trip; it evoked not only nostalgia but also a renewed sense of connection.

Stravinsky rose to fame in 1913 with *The Rite of Spring* not as an exile, but as a Russian composer on a voluntary, temporary sojourn from Russia, the sort of visit to the West commonplace in the history of Russian music and literature, as seen in the examples of Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Nikolay Gogol, Alexander Scriabin, and Ivan Turgenev. In contrast, Nabokov's great fame occurred in the context of involuntary exile. He always resented comparison with Joseph Conrad. Conrad was not an exile. He had no career as a Polish writer. Nabokov was a respected writer of Russian poetry and prose. Like Conrad, he achieved worldwide fame as a writer in English. But Nabokov did so while maintaining an explicit commitment to a particular tradition of Russian literature. His harsh loyalty to the virtue of literal translation (and skepticism about any other sort) was rooted in a view of the indivisible uniqueness of language. Its meanings were contingent on specificity, on time and place.

In the end, however, Nabokov's origins as a Russian did not define him in America, despite his teaching of Russian language and literature in a manner that suggested an indisputably superior knowledge and authority. The works that made him famous—*Lolita*, *Invitation of a Small Boat*, and *Pale Fire*—were all novels located in America. In Stravinsky's case, the explicitly Russian aspects of his music never disappeared, no matter how subtly altered and camouflaged, and actually helped shape some of his finest music written in America. With his Russian influences intact, Stravinsky influenced decisively the direction of French music between the early 1920s and 1940. The role he played in French musical life as a lionized personality was analogous to the place Nabokov came to occupy as a writer in America from the late 1950s until his death in 1977.

If Stravinsky's breakthrough came in 1913, Nabokov's occurred between 1955 and 1958 with the publication of *Lolita* in Paris and New York. Both artists experienced—at different stages of their careers—a sudden burst of worldwide notoriety because of the scandal associated with a single work. Stravinsky became world-famous at age thirty. He arrived in America a well-known, influential, and admired figure, which led to the invitation to give the prestigious Norton Lectures at Harvard. Stravinsky complained constantly about money, but he came to America without the sort of dire financial worries common among émigrés (consider the fate of the Austrian composer Alexander Zemlinsky, who died in penury and

obscurity in 1942 in Larchmont, New York). When Nabokov arrived in 1940, he brought with him at best an arcane reputation limited to émigré circles. He was in desperate straits. Among those prepared to help him were Sergey Rachmaninoff and Serge Koussevitzky, who provided the affidavit. Nabokov's rise to the status of a superstar came when he was in his late fifties. As Stravinsky with the *Rite*, Nabokov was made famous by the surface of a single work, *Lolita*, rather than by the work's greatness and importance as ultimately identified by a common critical consensus. With respect to the *Rite*, the choreography and the spectacular orchestral sonorities and effects generated the scandal. In the case of *Lolita*, the predictably reductive account of the plot and overt subject of the novel, the sexual passion for a "nymphet," made the writer rich and famous—not its language and structure or its many tantalizing asides.

Stravinsky's renown when he arrived in America came about partly through the proselytizing of Nadia Boulanger, with whom Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, and many others had studied, and this identity he retained. Nevertheless Stravinsky, like Nabokov, faced the problem of how to establish himself in America. Robert Craft was central to this process, helping to reinvent the composer's image. Stravinsky was always keenly attuned to the winds of fashion and the critical reaction to his own music. His disappointment at the reception of his 1951 opera *The Rake's Progress*, a work that many have regarded as the culmination of the composer's romance with the "order and discipline" of neoclassicism—understood strictly as evocative of eighteenth-century practices—motivated him to explore serialism, with Craft's help and Ernst Krenek's guidance. The major works of his final serial period, along with Craft's deft handling of the composer as a personality, helped place Stravinsky within the center of American classical musical life. Craft's role made the output of new music possible. Yet despite this remarkable late period, the repertoire that defined the composer's public persona to the end of his life was that written before the American years.

Nabokov did not have a past visible to his new American public. And he did not require a Craft to assist him. Yet, as Nabokov freely admitted, his entry into the American literary world would certainly have been even more difficult than it turned out to be without the critic Edmund Wilson. In the end, however, Nabokov achieved his own carefully crafted iconic status as an American writer through the works he wrote in English. The supposed poetic masterpiece around which *Pale Fire* is constructed is evidence of Nabokov's deep immersion into American life and letters. Nabokov's Russian novels gained a wide reading public only in retrospect after *Lolita*—a pattern between old and new work that is the exact reverse of Stravinsky's.

Nabokov used his American success to withdraw, in part, from America. Living in Montreux for his final sixteen years, he continued to assert his affection and allegiance to America; he maintained his prominence in the world of letters from afar and continued to write in English. "I am trying to develop, in this rosy exile, the same fertile nostalgia in regard to America, my new country, as I evolved

for Russia, my old one."²⁷ His move was only in a minor way a move "back." It ought not be compared to the return to Europe of Thomas Mann, Theodor W. Adorno, or Paul Hindemith—none of whom ever considered America a plausible second home. Craft may have briefly considered getting Stravinsky to move back to Switzerland in the 1960s, but Stravinsky never truly considered returning to Europe after 1945. When he decided to leave the West Coast in the 1960s, he settled in New York. He managed, like Nabokov, to balance his own construct of a lost homeland with affection for his new American home. In the end, however, he was buried in Venice, near Diaghilev.

Method and Influence

Richard Taruskin, in his brilliant, definitive, and exhaustive two-volume account of Stravinsky's career through to the composition of *Mavra* in 1922—with its epilogue on the composer's final masterpiece, the 1964 *Requiem Canticles*—has painstakingly and persuasively described the defining early phases of the composer's career.²⁸ These modes of engagement with Russian traditions and contemporaries shaped the composer's method and aesthetic. Stravinsky's music, from the 1920s to the 1960s, reveals a lasting debt to Russian sources, the Russian context in which he came of age, and the manner in which he transformed Russian elements in the first years of exile in Switzerland.²⁹

Feu d'artifice and *The Firebird* display the young composer's initial debt to a late nineteenth-century aesthetic, an older Romantic nationalism in which folklore was adapted into music for the stage and domestic use—the Kuchkist heritage of the so-called Mighty Five. Stravinsky, as his comments on Tchaikovsky suggest, also sought to prove himself within the Rimsky-Korsakov circle by demonstrating his command of the craft of composition defined in the German-centered "Western European" terms of Glazunov's more conservative formalism. That craft involved the display of symphonic thinking, in which a dynamic if not self-declared organic logic drives the use and transformation of harmony and melody. There, harmony serves a functional purpose in shaping musical time and structure, providing context for the process of thematic transformation, development, and recapitulation. These in turn generate audience expectations and the mechanisms by which instrumental music can appear to mimic narrative patterns in prose. These strategies made it possible for composers successfully to occupy duration and recalibrate long stretches of time.

The Russian music of the 1880s and '90s was Stravinsky's initial formative aesthetic environment. It can be taken, with its nationalist colorings, as the musical equivalents of the literary realism that dominated Russian literature, if not into the early 1900s, then, at minimum, until the mid-1880s, after the death of Czar Alexander II.³⁰ Social and political content and straightforward narrative and plot

structure dominated, whereas matters of style, the self-conscious awareness of form, or any pretense to rendering prose closer to the poetic were subordinated. Literature, notably in the case of Dostoevsky and the later Tolstoy, became a prose forum for ideas—mostly on behalf of social and political changes that could elevate the moral significance and worth of all human beings. Method and form were contingent on a commitment to realism. The spiritual betterment of the reader became a goal. Ideas were rendered through action, description, and dialogue. The reader was drawn in by the writer's manipulation of the illusions of sequential time and pictorial realism. Not surprisingly, one of Nabokov's father's favorite novelists was Charles Dickens.

Although Nabokov was considerably younger than Stravinsky, they both confronted these qualities, colored by nationalist sentiment, as the dominant aesthetic credo of their parents' generation. Whether in prose or in music, the objective was to use aesthetic conventions to master the suggestion and evocation of content whose plausibility was located in methods of persuasion tied to realist criteria. Stravinsky, even when he abandoned the Rimsky-Korsakov model, sustained a nationalist impetus by drawing on more ethnographically authentic sources of Russian folk music. But he located new formal possibilities for music in their melodic and rhythmic elements and articulated a nationalist sensibility less defined by the aesthetics of Romanticism and at once more novel and authentic. His means deviated from the program music tradition and were influenced by the ideas of contemporaries, several linked to the *Mir iskusstva* (World of Art) circle—Serge Diaghilev, Léon Bakst, and Alexandre Benois in particular. The last two were themselves part of the circle of artists around the Nabokov family. The vogue for symbolism and synesthesia, particularly in the work of Bely and Scriabin, also played a role in shaping the path Stravinsky took.

In the *Rite*, Stravinsky used abstraction of the archaic Russian materials he appropriated to achieve an “architectural” rather than “anecdotal” use of musical time. Repetition in the form of sustained rhythmic pulsation was juxtaposed with abrupt harmonic shifts and changes in sonority at odds with the tradition of the symphony. The combinatorial ingenuity Stravinsky revealed (meant here not strictly in the sense defined by Milton Babbitt) employed the octatonic scale and intervallic cells—“a syntax of subsets and super-sets” derived from them.³¹ With that as a base he pursued intentional “simplification”—the abstraction of genuine folk melodic and rhythmic usage. This led Stravinsky to achieve what Taruskin describes as “a hard-nosed esthetic modernism.”³² Harmony was no longer directional and dynamic, but static. The effect was not unlike the visual aesthetic pursued by Nicholas Roerich, the designer of the first *Rite* production. Roerich, working from the suggestion of authentic national antique sources, produced flat, static, frozen imagery further abstracted from any form of realism by the stark uninflected use of color and the reduction of perspective; juxtaposed geometric patterns in the visual frame undercut the nominal suggestion of narrative meaning.³³

By the time he composed the *Rite* Stravinsky, distancing the experience of musical time from traditional expectations, had shifted the relationship of the listener to a musical work away from an analogy with that of a reader following a narrative. In the realist novel, opera, and Romantic symphony, the plausibility of an imagined past, present, and future, occurring in a logical sequence had been enhanced by the realist plainness (or naturalistic resemblance) of prose style (including dialogue) and the manipulation of the narrative voice. In music, these expectations among listeners had been amply met by the techniques of musical usage of both sides of the apparent divide between the circles around Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. But with the *Rite*, anticipation and release as well as recollection during the act of listening were subordinated to the intensity of the momentary encounter with sound and the unprepared contrasts in the sharply delineated sequence of events. Music intensified the experience of time in the immediacy of its encounter, emancipating it from any dependence on recapitulation and foregrounding accumulation. Stravinsky's *Rite* appeared in direct conflict with musical realism's most skilled practitioner of the fin de siècle, Richard Strauss, notably his two last symphonic works, the *Sinfonia Domestica* and the *Alpine Symphony*.

However fierce the antipathy may have been between the Kuchkists and their opponents (or between the Wagnerians and anti-Wagnerians), the advent of modernism circa 1913 in Stravinsky unmasked what all of these separate camps held in common in terms of the function of harmony and the character of form, and therefore the construct of musical time. Whether formalist (in the sense of Eduard Hanslick and later Stravinsky himself, who in his autobiography never tired of underscoring the idea that music expressed nothing except itself), or blatantly illustrative, as in Wagner's, Liszt's, and Strauss's compositions, musical time had been controlled by convention so as to confirm the apparent reality of a past and present moment, and the existence of a causal nexus analogous to the empirical experience of events or its linguistic representation. Art sought to engender either a remembered, imagined, or implied narrative.³⁴

Stravinsky's achievement in the 1913 *Rite* and more strikingly in 1917 with *Les Noces*—a distillation of a modernist aesthetic out of neo-nationalist material using simplification and abstraction that recalibrated the experience of time and defined a style—can be compared with the project that Nabokov undertook as a novelist in his twenties, after his years at Cambridge and his move to Berlin. Nabokov shared sources of inspiration with his older composer compatriot, notably the *Mir iskusstva* movement that argued the autonomy of the aesthetic and the primacy of matters of style and form against the inherited utilitarian aesthetics of realism. Symbolism and the World of Art movement motivated Stravinsky and Nabokov to question the claim of a correspondence between aesthetic experience and the quotidian encounter with experienced time, both measured and remembered. This challenge to the traditional logic of art extended to a critique of the late Tolstoy's insistence that there be an evident moral and, by implication, redemptive

justification beyond a purely aesthetic one. Stravinsky and Nabokov experimented not only in terms of their engagement with their respective traditions in Russian music and literature, but in terms of the fundamental character, function, and purpose of the work of art and its relationship to its audience, the link between literature and reader or music and listener.

The Gift, Nabokov's last novel from his Berlin years (and for some his finest) is in part framed by two exchanges between the two most sympathetic figures in the book: Fyodor, the nominal protagonist, who writes a satirical, almost Gogol-like biography of Nikolay Chernyshevsky (the arch-realist of the nineteenth century and a favorite of Lenin and the Soviets), and Koncheyev, the poet. In the first exchange Fyodor asserts, quoting Koncheyev, "Yes, some day I'm going to produce prose in which 'thought and music are conjoined as are the folds of life in sleep.'" ³⁵ Thinking in words is idealized by language's musical properties—its sounds and rhythms—not meanings that might be detached from sound and form. For the young Nabokov, the writing of literature was framed by language that revealed a nonlinear temporal logic outside of ordinary time, comparable to the distortion of time in dreams, yet possessed of a precision reminiscent of science and susceptible to being captured in works.

In the second exchange Fyodor picks up this theme (one Nabokov would return to explicitly at the end of *Ada, or Ardor*):

It would be a good thing in general to put an end to our barbaric perception of time. . . . 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 a constant rise between the watery abyss of the past and the aerial abyss of the future. Existence is thus an eternal transformation of the future into the past—an essentially phantom process—a mere reflection of the material metamorphoses taking place within us. . . . The theory I find most tempting—that there is no time, that everything is the present situated like a radiance outside our blindness—is just as hopeless a finite hypothesis as all the others. ³⁶

Nabokov attempted to find the "radiance outside our blindness" by writing a poetic prose that treated language as music—shattering the inherited narrative and structural conventions of the novelistic form of realism and locating in its place an alternate sensibility that transcended the mundane. Despite the evident contrasts, this project took shape in a manner comparable to Stravinsky's evolution from the 1907 *Symphony in E-flat* to the 1917 *Les Noces*. Nabokov experimented not only with language at every point in a novel (or short story)—each unit of which was ultimately contained on index cards—but in the overall structure, routinely divorcing each novel from following an inherited model as a sequential narrative

marked by character development and a clear demarcation of past, present, and future. Stravinsky, by rejecting the symphonic model and the conventions of late nineteenth-century musical continuity, formed what Edward T. Cone identified as a “method” in three parts: stratification, interlock, and synthesis.³⁷ These three terms could also be applied to Nabokov’s novels from the 1930s, particularly *The Gift* and *Invitation to a Beheading*, and those from the 1950s, particularly *Lolita* and *Invitation to a Beheading*.

The privileging of the aesthetic pioneered by the World of Art movement and the symbolists of the Silver Age in Russia offered both Stravinsky and Nabokov ideological bases for shifting the criteria of an artwork from matters of content to those of structure and form. Within formal criteria, style and method were foregrounded. Cone identified the use of successive “time-segments” in the 1920 *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*.³⁸ Each of these is suspended, creating opportunities for their employment in contrapuntal usage. The synthesis comes not in a climax, but in the reduction or the assimilation of one element into another. Bridges and divergences are common. Stratification using discrete musical variables defines Stravinsky’s compositional procedure well into the music of the 1940s; in Cone’s view, it also describes the way in which the strong tonal components of the 1930 *Symphony of Psalms* are organized. Another way of imagining Stravinsky’s method in the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* is, as Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger have argued, to apply the metaphors of montage and collage in which the structural relationship and identity of disparate fragments are altered and manipulated, generating an overarching unified framework in which the discrete elements remain visible.³⁹ Taruskin has perhaps the most elaborate and persuasive way of characterizing Stravinsky’s novel approach to form, for which he uses the Russian term *drobnost*, or “splinteredness,” a “sum of parts.”⁴⁰

The parallels to such procedures can be found in Nabokov in the fragmentation of time, the subtly arranged but sudden shifts in voice, and in the inconsistent presence of the narrator. Nabokov’s “time fragments” are deployed so as to create ambiguities between the real and imagined. The reader is continually alert to the persistent shedding of the illusions of realist narration; just as the listener to Stravinsky is struck by the distinct substance of each musical moment apart from any functional implication backward or forward, Nabokov’s reader is forced to confront sentences and paragraphs as stylistic entities, with significance apart from any overarching narrative frame. Literature, insofar as it is part of “the forces of imagination,” is a “force of good,” Nabokov observed in 1965. Translating *The Eye* more than three decades after its publication, Nabokov confessed he was in search of the “reader who catches on at first”; this reader will derive “genuine satisfaction,” but from more than a story.⁴¹ Nabokov’s ideal reader is asked to jettison the commonsense notion of language as representational or corresponding to an external reality. A different sort of precision is required. Stylistic self-awareness of how observation can be discussed alters the perception of elapsed time and preserves it in memory. The more detailed, the more unusual

and poetic, the more vivid. Through writing fired by the poetic imagination a new reality comes into being that is more real than the “real” itself.

The framing of the novels—visible in the cloaked identity of the narrator in *Invitation to a Beheading*; in the construction of *Pale Fire* out of segments of commentary that follow a text and scramble past, present, and future and the multiple identities of its protagonist Kinbote; in the form of *Lolita* as an account by a man awaiting trial; or in the uncertain connection to dream life and everyday existence in *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, and *Bend Sinister*—suggest parallels to Stravinsky’s procedures of stratifying elements that have been abstracted from otherwise familiar patterns. In music, pitch and rhythm are the elements in play; in prose they are words, plot, time, and character. Nabokov’s method of collage and montage is clearest in his use of time, his layering of perspectives using fragments of memory and distortions of the way time is segmented into a sequence of past, present, and future.⁴² Nabokov’s syntactic inventiveness, his virtuosic use and invention of words, his nearly Shakespearean synthesis of word use and thought, as well as his assemblage of the novel by the ordering of completed units (his beloved index cards) show his literary method as not dissimilar from musical composition as practiced by Stravinsky. Stravinsky’s meticulous habits in the process of composition, as understood by theorists and as evident in the manuscripts of *The Rake’s Progress* and the *Requiem Canticles* (to cite just two often reproduced examples), suggest that Nabokov and Stravinsky shared an innovative combinatorial genius.⁴³

Consider, for example, the elegance, variety, and ingenuity in the disposition of intervals and sonorities in the *Requiem Canticles* as analogous to the illusory simplicity of the relationship of poem to commentary in *Pale Fire*. Kinbote, with knowing irony, speaks early of the one line that “would have completed the symmetry” of Shade’s poem. Nabokov has him end this thought by writing “damn that music. Knowing Shade’s combinatorial turn of mind and subtle sense of harmonic balance, I cannot imagine that he intended to deform the faces of his crystal by meddling with its predictable growth.”⁴⁴ Yet deformation precisely describes what he as a novelist and Stravinsky as composer, in their relationship to the traditions in their respective arenas, actually accomplished. The deformation and meddling were directed at the narrative conventions of form and continuity that derived their power from a presumed correspondence to lived experience that was ultimately banal.

Nabokov was fabled for his visual acuity. His love of Sherlock Holmes rested less on the detective’s deductive powers than on his eye for detail. Nabokov’s meticulous work on butterflies, his fanatical concern for the accuracy of descriptive detail, his poetic response to landscape in his novels all attest to the primacy of attention to the smallest detail in a work of art and the imagination. “I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception.”⁴⁵ No wonder he derided novelists of “general” ideas who penned prosaic sentences filled with the vocabulary of

abstraction. In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov pointed to the moment of intense sight as the means by which the finest that is human can stake its claim:

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, from the mast, from the past and its castle tower.⁴⁶

In Nabokov's writing, the aural experience in the present moment, not only the visual, mirrors "the heightened terrace of consciousness" that can be set to words. At stake is not a talent for synesthesia (as with the Lithuanian composer Mikalojus Čiurlionis, who perceived color and sound at one and the same time) or its ideology (as developed by Scriabin).⁴⁷ Nabokov did, however, recall that the imagining of the outline of a single letter of the alphabet produced a "fine case of colored hearing."⁴⁸ But Nabokov's memories were framed not only by sight but by sounds—a "throbbing tambourine," "trilling" nightingales, the sounds of village musicians, the rhythm of Mademoiselle's speech.⁴⁹ King Charles in *Pale Fire* was a musician. Nabokov routinely praised poetry in terms of music (its "contrapuntal pyrotechnics"), and for its music ("that dim distant music").⁵⁰ Cincinnatus C. recalls the world being "hacked" into "great gleaming blocks" by the "music that once used to be extracted from a monstrous pianoforte."⁵¹

Indeed, for Nabokov, the power of music and of sound—beyond all its links to memory—was that it intensified the ordinary consciousness of time understood as a continuum along the lines of the quotidian.⁵² The short story "Music" revolves around the perception that music easily links present with past.⁵³ At the same time Nabokov grasped the need to deviate from a sense of time located in nature. Music was an art that, like poetry, could expand time. Kinbote, defending his friendship with Shade, credited his short acquaintance with the capacity of the aesthetic to defy the calendar, creating "inner duration," "eons of transparent time" independent of external "rotating malicious music."⁵⁴ Nabokov's view is not entirely dissimilar to Stravinsky's. The composer wrote in his autobiography, "Music is the overarching domain in which man realizes the present." Music's sole purpose was to establish "an order in things" and especially "the coordination between *man* and *time*." Music redefines time in the present and gives "substance" and "stability" to "the category of the present."⁵⁵

Art and Time

Stravinsky and Nabokov shared an obsession with how the aesthetic realm might influence the phenomenon of time perception, despite a surface of divergence between the two: Nabokov struggled against the tyranny of a seemingly objective

and uniform construct of time, whereas Stravinsky attempted to deepen the sense of the present through musical construction. For both, nostalgia and memory were tied to the experience of time, and both struggled to come to terms with the link between past and present. In their various speculations, both also drew on two common sources: Henri Bergson and Andrey Bely. Writing about Stravinsky in 1949, Craft mentions Stravinsky's having read Bergson.⁵⁶ Whether he actually did so or learned of Bergson's ideas from Pyotr Suvchinsky and Paul Valéry in the 1920s, the philosophical connection Bergson forged between the experience of time in the present and the expression of the human creative force left a lasting impression on the composer's beliefs about the character and function of music.⁵⁷ Music, by framing and in fact stopping the ordinary experience of time so that it appeared always in the present, rendered music "petrified" architecture and deepened the consciousness of human creativity. Nabokov, who had a more complex understanding of time, was also influenced by Bergson, whom he admitted reading avidly in the interwar years.⁵⁸

With Stravinsky, musical time—defined as the extension and construction of the present moment—reappears as well in the late work, mostly as a result of his encounter with the music of Anton von Webern. Predominant in this music are silence as a component of compositional structure and the ascetic economic manipulation of sonority, mostly in units of short duration; the result is a heightening and deepening of time in the moment of listening. For Nabokov the issue of time, always present in the novels, took center stage in the 1960s in *Ada*. The "flowering of the present," as Van Veen in *Ada* put it, demanded the awareness that time is "vaguely connected to hearing"; the apprehension of time requires "the utmost purity of consciousness," which is not spatial and visual but aural.⁵⁹

The key is that the "still fresh past" defines the present. The "present" slips in when we inspect "shadow sounds." The "dim intervals between the dark beats" of the authentic rhythm of time offer merely the "feel of the *texture* of Time." Nabokov concluded: "Our modest Present is, then, 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*."⁶⁰ The synchronized flow of time as measured by clocks was itself an illusion, since the boundaries between past and present were if not fluid, interdependent, with the selective consciousness of the past defining the present and then subsequently the reverse, in which the past becomes circumscribed by the sense of the present moment.⁶¹ This fluidity reveals itself in the movement back and forth in time in Nabokov's narrative voice. His characters take the same journey—often so deftly from the reader's perspective that the shifts become noticeable only after the act of reading, making the reader aware of the author's challenge to a reductive realism within his or her own time experience, not merely within the artificial time frame of the novel.

For both Nabokov and Stravinsky, the issue of time and its perception was more than an aesthetic problem. The experience of exile forced a many-sided

dilemma with regard to memory and anticipation. First was the challenge of how to come to terms with the artistic heritage, public, and tradition of which the exile once expected to be part, and from which he was now separated. Second was the need to grapple with the tyrannies of memory—the lacunae, the willful and inadvertent distortions, and the fragments all heightened by discontinuity and distance, the forced separation from the familiar and the illusions of continuity that non-exiles take for granted. Third was the danger posed by the allure of nostalgia, the sentimental distortion of memory, and the exaggerated fear of forgetfulness. To forget was to destroy not merely the past but the possibilities of the present. Yet memory, the driving force of the present and essential to the artist, was constantly at risk in exile, where it became a purely mental property unaided by sight and sound.

A last dilemma for exiles, and a consequence of all the difficulties already alluded to was how to find an alternative to the tacit assumption of continuity—an effective means to forge an ongoing connection between past and present—something thoughtlessly possible for those not displaced. Indeed, the definition of the present—the temporal frame for the making and experience of art—became more complex since the significant past was ever harder to keep “still fresh,” and its capacity to “slip” into the present and define it was steadily weakened. At risk was the very capacity to grasp the present, to intuit the texture of time sufficiently to allow the imagination to take flight.

Nabokov’s approach to the issue of time was influenced by Bergson, but it was the thought of Bely that most directly shaped the way Nabokov considered his craft and vocation as a writer and his approach to aesthetic questions.⁶² Writing in 1907, Bely argued against a “synthesis” of art forms (despite his early admiration for Wagner). Rather, the purpose of art reflected an underlying unity in the arts. “Is it simply so that we may transform a few hours into a dream, only to have the dream destroyed again by the intrusion of reality?” Bely asked. His answer was that the creative act was, in Kantian terms, “cognition for its own sake,” an intuitive form of engaging time without any purpose or object. The “method of creation” becomes “an object in and for itself.” The result was the “extreme form of individualization.” The process of artistic creation demanded that each artist “become his own artistic form.” The categories of time were artificial subjective conventions for framing reality and must be rethought. Bely termed new art as “the past that is reborn,” where “we find ourselves at the mercy of the cherished dead.” In a manner reminiscent of Nabokov’s own speculations Bely argued, “We must forget the present. We must re-create everything and in order to do this we must create ourselves.”⁶³

The interconnection of a construct of the past—the task of reassembling the past, or in Bely’s terms, re-creating it—requires that conventions about understanding the “present” be set aside. Forgetfulness is a prelude to the restoration of memory. The sense of time is not connected to a cognitive correspondence between external

reality and consciousness but a function of a highly individualized creative act, using the aesthetic medium—the musical, the poetic, and the visual—to redefine consciousness and time. These claims connect directly to the innovations of both Nabokov and Stravinsky.

For Bely—as well as Nabokov and the mature Stravinsky—the key to escaping the notion that art was a mere illusory respite from an objective reality was the recognition that the form in which the creative act expressed itself generated an alternate reality, an experience of time located in the human possibility of individuality for the author and his public that vindicated life. In moral terms, the most significantly true reality came into being through the forms of art in a manner that transcended, with considerable precision, the mundane understanding of real time and experience. This mundane understanding was itself the result of an impoverished use of language. Placing art before any notion of “life,” Bely concluded “in art, in life, things are more serious than we think.”⁶⁴

The most “serious” realization—one crucial to Stravinsky and Nabokov—was Bely’s idea that “if words did not exist then neither would the world itself.” Bely put forward a notion of “living speech,” which was the “very condition of existence of mankind itself.” And since “mankind’s purpose lies in the living creation of life,” by hearing speech that is “imagined” and “living” we are led to new words and word constructions that in turn lead to “the acquisition of new acts of cognition.”⁶⁵ The next step was from words to music.

Bely’s privileging of language as the mother of thought, as his Viennese contemporary Karl Kraus put it, was not new. But there was a metaphysical premise in Bely that justified a scientific precision in the use of language particularly dear to Nabokov. Language, especially poetic language, created the reality we define as “living” relationships, including the future creation of language. Within the linguistic realm, and within art, for example, the coincidence of vocabulary (as Bely discussed in the case of Kant and Hanslick) suggested that within this ever-expandable universe of linguistic invention were scientific criteria of truth, a “real dimension.”⁶⁶ Nabokov’s distaste for conceptual language, the vocabulary of ideologies—in Marx and Freud—derives from Bely’s skepticism that there is false language, language that is wholly unreal, detached from the “direct expression of life.” Naming becomes crucial since it creates that which would otherwise not exist. “The word is the sole real vessel on which we sail from one unknown to another—amidst unknown spaces (called “earth” “heaven” “ether” and so forth) and amidst unknown temporalities.” The “firework” displays of words “fill the void surrounding me.”⁶⁷ Bely’s vision veers close to a method of musical composition using intervals and sonorities in a novel fashion, much like Stravinsky’s procedures.

Poetry for Bely and Nabokov is the highest form of word usage; it is the source of the creation of language and the purely “imaginal combination of words.” Indeed, in historical moments of decay, poetry’s importance is at its highest, for it

lets us “recognize the meaning of new magical words” by which to “conjure the gloom of night hanging over us.” In moments of despair, “we are still alive, but we are alive because we hold on to words.”⁶⁸ This thought succinctly described Nabokov’s commitment to his vocation as a writer, particularly considering his keen sense of the darkness of the era in which he lived. For Nabokov, Bely’s observation that “mankind is alive, so long as the poetry of language exists,” was a genuine article of faith.⁶⁹

For Bely, all this was contingent on a belief in the necessity of form and the capacity to locate objective criteria for understanding aesthetic form within all the arts. Formalism was not derivative of tradition or a distillation of historical practice—a deduction resulting from the imposition of norms of judgment onto an empirical base of past practice, such as the manner in which theorists establish norms of sonata form. Bely, an accomplished mathematician, was in search of a priori axioms. Predictably, his source was mathematics and physics. Bely’s translation of scientific modes of thought into aesthetics was distinctive and may have provided the young Nabokov a suggestive model of how to link his fascination with nature and with butterflies to his ambitions as a writer.

For Bely there was no division between content and form: the way in which the concrete materials of art are considered constitutes the subject of form. Form was the “governing” principle in all art and protected art from descending into meaningless chaos and “tendentious encroachments.”⁷⁰ Bely’s principles were framed in terms of Newtonian laws. First came a hierarchy of the arts. He posited an “inverse proportion” between space and time in the ranking of the arts. This made music the highest of the arts, since in it all spatial and visual elements were abstracted. Music possessed no spatial dimension. It was the means by which pure temporality was expressed. Only through “vague” analogies could “visual and spatial” meanings be attributed to music. For Nabokov, as for Stravinsky, aesthetic judgment required the subordination of the spatial and visual to the temporal, for it strengthened the idea that art was autonomous and ought not be tied to a vulgar sense of the real, to any illusionism or pictorial realism. Music was the art of time, understood as the “art of pure motion,” with a precise truth-value akin to science.⁷¹

For Bely, poetry came next after music. “Poetry views the visible world musically, like a veil over an unspoken mystery of the soul. . . . Music is the skeleton of poetry. If music is the common trunk of all creation, poetry is its leafy crown.”⁷² Although Nabokov derided his own connection to music, his notion of poetry and the nature of his prose, when considered in light of Bely’s premium on word creation and the novel combinations of words, are like musical renderings of a world imagined. Painting, predictably, occupied the lowest rung of Bely’s ordering of the arts.⁷³

Bely’s formalism was further understood in terms of the natural law of conservation, defined as the conservation of creative energy. In a proper artistic form that aesthetic energy needed to be expended in proportional manner to

overcome “stasis” in the very materials of creation. The aesthetics of form possessed its own “law of equivalents” by which the creative energy of the result matched that of its components and creation. Bely’s effort to establish a non-arbitrary parallel between the laws governing energy with those governing art led him to assert that aesthetics could be an “exact science” with unlimited competence in the sense of the natural sciences.⁷⁴ Here again can be found the sources of the conceits of Stravinsky and Nabokov, particularly Stravinsky’s explicit appeal to the primacy of the “Apollonian” dimension in art. Indeed, Stravinsky’s turn to the ideal of neoclassicism reveals a debt to Bely.

Using a single-minded emphasis on form, Bely formulated his own answer to the question of the connection between truth and beauty. Unlike the normative philosophical discourse of the eighteenth century that posited the link as between aesthetics and ethics, Bely’s was a direct, unmediated link between the truth content in descriptive aesthetics and science.

In Nabokov’s case the connection to Bely is even more striking. Using elaborate diagrammatic schemes, Bely argued that one could measure and describe the harmonious balance between content and form in a lyric poem; one needed a theory of rhythm and “instrumentation” so as to study word choices. Bely dissected a poem by Nikolay Nekrasov, separating its “experiential” from its “ideational” content.⁷⁵ He compared the rhythmic complexity of early and late Pushkin in order to grasp the “how” of words and sounds. An intensely descriptive science, including a taxonomy, was required to grasp the beauty of poetry, hence:

Every lyric work demands a basic commentary. In commenting on a poem we are decomposing it, as it were, into its constituent parts and looking carefully at the means of representation, at the choice of epithets, similes, and metaphors in order to characterize the content. We feel the words and look for their mutual rhythmic and sonorous relations. In thus reorganizing the analyzed material into a new whole, we often can no longer recognize a familiar poem at all. Like the phoenix, it arises anew out of itself in a more beautiful form, or, conversely, it withers away. In this way we come to recognize that a comparative anatomy of poetic style is truly necessary, that it is the ultimate stage in the development of a theory of literature and lyric poetry, and finally that it represents a *rapprochement* between these two disciplines and the various fields of scientific knowledge.⁷⁶

There could be no more persuasive source for Nabokov’s *Eugene Onegin* project, his structural choices in *Pale Fire*, or his suspicion of anything but literal translation. The purpose for this exact analytical science rested first in precision in the variables of art—words, colors, and pitches—and second in the inherent objective logic of their use and elaboration. The pure aesthetic that such analysis

could reveal was an authentic realism of the imagination beyond the realism of the visible. “Reality is not how it appears to us. . . . Reality as we know it is different from reality as it truly is,” Bely concluded.⁷⁷

In Bely’s terms, Nabokov, by first approaching language as poetry, aspired to the state of music. “I have never been able to see any generic difference between poetry and artistic prose,” Nabokov once observed.⁷⁸ Since all art shares features with music, and music “unites and generalizes” all art, owing to its status as purely about time, “the profundity and intensity of musical works give us, according to Bely, a hint” that through the aesthetic imagination, composer and listener, writer and reader can begin to remove “the deceptive veil” that covers the “visible world,” and demolish the “deceptive picture” with which we live.⁷⁹ Nabokov’s intensity of visual and oral observation, shorn from a conventional narrative or obvious temporal context, cast in rich and original poetic language (invented words and startling juxtapositions), invited his reader to lift the veil and penetrate beyond the deceptive picture.

Stravinsky’s connection to Bely was certainly less direct, but equally significant. The influence of Bely’s notions of form and his views on music—and indeed the centrality of art—were most powerfully communicated through the World of Art movement, by the painters and poets who were his contemporaries. But the link to Stravinsky’s mature positions on the nature of music was profound. Perhaps the most oft-cited claim Stravinsky made can be found in his autobiography:

For I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood and phenomenon of nature, etc. . . . *Expression* has never been an inherent property of music. That is by no means the purpose of its existence. If, as is always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality.⁸⁰

A corollary of this formalist claim is the assumption that the formal character of a piece of music has an objective character that can be exactly described and rendered. Bely’s synthesis of natural science and aesthetics was a source of Stravinsky’s intense disparagement of the practice and justification of subjective interpretation by performers and his personal affinity first for the pianola, and subsequently for recording technology, through which exact and objective representations of a musical work could be transmitted.

Art and Consequences

Stravinsky shared with Nabokov the belief that the work of art held its value in its aesthetic and formal properties. Art was powerful to the extent it contested commonsensical notions of the real and categories of space, time, and causality.

Nabokov once observed, “Both memory and imagination are a negation of time.”⁸¹ Nabokov and Stravinsky held on to a belief in valid norms of aesthetic value that allowed for individuality while at the same time they mistrusted a view of art as mere subjectivity, of art without objective criteria of judgment. Precision and exactness were indispensable attributes. In the end, however, such exactitude and precision were inevitably compromised by Stravinsky’s concession that even in music, the least “realistic” of the arts, something other than itself always seems to be expressed.⁸² Stravinsky was aware that the actual social function of music—its reception—derived from the assignment of meaning on the part of the listener, intended or not: the listener ascribed to music meanings both symbolic and literal that, strictly speaking, did not reside in the work itself.

For Stravinsky, this was actually a convenient error, one with which, for practical reasons, he could readily reconcile himself. At best, a truly informed aesthetic response to art permitted the listener to make legitimate contact with a religious sensibility—a communion, as Stravinsky concluded in 1939, with a generalized notion of humanity, “our fellow man” and with the “Supreme Being.” Thus for Stravinsky the formal power of art did in the end connect with faith through some perhaps quasi-mystical religious feeling not contained in the music itself. In this manner the theologian Jacques Maritain influenced Stravinsky in his Paris years. Maritain reconciled “art for art’s sake” and the premium on form with ethics and the suggestion of content: art, by being just art, mirrored the divine. Despite Stravinsky’s vigorous distaste for communal ideologies, his 1939 Maritain-inspired evocation of the divine recognition that derived from music had much in common with Romain Rolland’s suggestion in the late 1920s of the possibility of “an oceanic” feeling that might be a force for good. Both mirrored in different ways the interwar search for spiritual solace in the wake of the Great War. Stravinsky had no use for Rolland. Neither did Nabokov or Nabokov’s least favorite theorist, Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Nabokov’s hostility to Freud rested in the writer’s mistrust and contempt for a reductive causality about creativity, his denial of a deeper reality beyond the visible empirical world unmediated by the individual imagination, and therefore the freedom of the individual imagination. But Freud’s criticism of Rolland did not redeem either Freud or Rolland for Nabokov. And for Nabokov, the religious issue—the stuff about an “oceanic” sensibility or a divine “Supreme Being”—was a matter of silence, beyond words.⁸³ For Stravinsky, however, a quite conventional appeal to religious justification remains buried beneath his denial of music’s power to express.

For Nabokov the formal virtues of art, properly grasped by the reader, did more than lead the reader into a vague humanism or Stravinsky’s moment of spiritual recognition. Implicit in the act of reading literature, particularly poetry and prose written in a modernist style defined by the attributes of poetry (as in Bely’s *St. Petersburg* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*) was a potency that could prevent the reader from denying the power of art. Art contested the utterly mundane, so that the

aesthetic did more than merely conform to the ordinary experience of reality. Indeed the artwork, by its formal greatness, could stop readers in their tracks. True art in the medium of literature provided writer and reader an escape from the tyranny of experience that emanated from everyday life. Here was a form of deception: experience transfigured by the imagination, a reality consciously protected from barbarism and vulgarity. For Nabokov the making of art and its proper appreciation was at its best a purely inner moral act of rescue, a route for individuals to confront freedom and the paradox that human decency—culture notwithstanding—is endangered.

Nabokov undermines the act of reading as a passive experience in the same way Stravinsky demands the concentration of the listener. The recollection of details, the passage back and forth in the narrative, force the reader to reflect and piece together fragments, to reconsider and remember, creating within the present moment the allure of a complex interpretation. Nabokov and Stravinsky found comparable ways for an aesthetically generated control, distortion, and manipulation of elapsed time to define present experience.

Thus the structure of a Nabokov novel can be said to share formal aspects similar to those used in music, particularly Stravinsky's. Repetition, abrupt transitions, modulations, fragmentation, inversions, cross-references abound, as do excursions into intense counterpoint with multiple subjects placed in discrete units. Nabokov's methods resemble Stravinsky's insofar as the elements of the composition are not present or utilized as placeholders for other meanings or expressive of something other than themselves. Even when words are set to music, as in Stravinsky's settings of texts, from the *Three Japanese Lyrics* (1912) to *The Rake's Progress*, they are used as sound elements, with syllables manipulated as musical elements.⁸⁴ The attempt to "set" the meaning of the words or illustrate them in a Wagnerian manner reliant on ordinary diction is subordinated. Stravinsky's procedure in 1912 already bears comparison with the purpose and method of the relationship between text and music articulated by Arnold Schoenberg that same year in the essay "The Relationship to the Text."⁸⁵ Even when linguistic meaning is presumed—as in song or opera—the text is used musically and proceeds independently of any "meaning." The parallel in Nabokov occurs when the presumed reality of the narrative object of the novel—its setting and character—is put in question by the defiance of a single familiar perspective. The argument or plot of the novel is disconnected from a fabric of continuity and displaced from the reader's attention. Rather, the act of writing, the craft of writing, and the predicament of the writer take center stage within the text itself.

This approach elevates Nabokov's prose to the status of music. Nabokov, like Stravinsky, calls explicit attention to the craft and method of his compositions. In order to foreground the act of writing Nabokov asks for a reader more akin to the listener imagined by Stravinsky—a person who can follow the musical logic and smile, when necessary, at complex structures and the elegance with which past

tradition becomes part of the present moment, as in the 1924 Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments, and the 1931 Violin Concerto, with their evident allusions to Bach. Nabokov's writing is often about other writing, just as Stravinsky's music, particularly in the 1920s, has as its premise music from the past. Both Nabokov and Stravinsky, as exiles, used the aesthetic tradition in which they worked against itself, albeit respectfully, cloaking the new with evocations of the past.

It is not surprising that from their shared heritage both artists, skipping over the tastes of the previous generation, were particularly attached to Pushkin. The tradition they drew on was in that sense pre-modern, at the intersection of eighteenth-century classicism and early Romanticism. Furthermore, Pushkin, like Tchaikovsky later in the century, represented an ideal synthesis of the Russian and the Western. Yet his star began to fade even towards the end of his career. Those who regarded themselves part of the intelligentsia were, to quote D. S. Mirsky, "indifferent" or "hostile" after 1860; whatever surviving cult of Pushkin remained became "the religion of a paradise lost."⁸⁶ Nabokov idealized the poet who was neglected in the literary age of realism and social utility. He and Stravinsky identified with the very quality in Pushkin that outraged the older Tolstoy of the 1890s—the focus on an elite readership and the absence of a moralizing agenda. Pushkin's use of language defined what was distinctive about Russian poetry and the musical and expressive possibilities of Russian speech, even as he found a means for their expression in Western forms.⁸⁷ Stravinsky lamented that for "foreigners" Pushkin was little more than "a name in an encyclopedia." Yet for these two exiles of an aristocratic sensibility and inclination, Pushkin's "nature, his mentality, and his ideology" was "the most perfect representative of that wonderful line which began with Peter the Great . . . and has united the most characteristically Russian elements with the spiritual riches of the West."⁸⁸

Stravinsky turned to Pushkin, first during the composition of *Les Noces* and then explicitly with *Mavra* in 1922.⁸⁹ Stravinsky sought to signal a shift away from the patterns of late nineteenth-century Russian musical nationalism. He reinvented a lineage for himself located in Glinka and Tchaikovsky—a lightness, economy, and elegance reminiscent of Mozart and explicitly defiant of Wagnerism and post-Wagnerian German modernism. Following Pushkin—and Tchaikovsky—he would attempt a synthesis of the Russian with the refined Western sensibilities derived from the era during which aristocratic patronage dominated musical culture, the age before the death of Beethoven. Stravinsky recalled with regard to *Mavra*:

This poem of Pushkin led me straight to Glinka and Tchaikovsky, and I resolutely took up my position beside them. I thus clearly defined my tastes and predilections, my opposition to the contrary aesthetic, and assumed once more the good tradition established by these masters. Moreover I dedicated my work to the memory of Pushkin, Glinka, and Tchaikovsky.⁹⁰

Nabokov did not share Stravinsky's enthusiasm for Tchaikovsky. He disdained Tchaikovsky's operatic version of *Eugene Onegin* for what he regarded as its mawkish sentimentality, "cloying banalities," and bowdlerization of Pushkin's text.⁹¹ This disdain rested in the recognition, extensively argued by Bely, that in the streamlined elegance of Pushkin's verse the full power of Russian rhythm and usage was exploited.⁹² (Well before Nabokov, Pushkin's work was known to resist proper translation.) Pushkin, by being tied to the West while remaining the greatest exponent of the distinctive qualities of the Russian language, emerged as a matter of some obsession for the exiled Nabokov and as a powerful anchor for the emigré Stravinsky.⁹³

As Stravinsky observed, "the national element occupies a prominent place with Pushkin as well as with Glinka and Tchaikovsky."⁹⁴ In exile, Nabokov and Stravinsky found in Pushkin a mirror of their dual condition: in possession of a uniquely Russian instrument (language for Nabokov, source material and harmonic usage for Stravinsky) but trapped in a Western context. That "fortunate alloy,"⁹⁵ as Stravinsky termed Pushkin's synthesis, remained present in the work of both men to the end. It is even visible in Nabokov's American novels but dominant in his translations of his earlier works into English. The synthesis of the Russian and the Western is audible, for example, in three of Stravinsky's later works, the *Canticum Sacrum*, *Babel*, and the *Requiem Canticles*.⁹⁶

Nabokov and Stravinsky called on their respective publics to confront the method and materials of their work—the self-conscious distinctive style they developed in the making of art. The listener to Stravinsky's music, from *The Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces* through the finest of the late works, was confronted with intense moments, abrupt changes in sonority without conventional preparation, and complex but unified contrapuntal combinatorial elaborations. All these were independent of a late-Romantic reliance on duration and structural devices based on habitual expectations or derived from practices dependent on easily located thematic expositions, repetitions, variations, recapitulations, and transitions.

Stravinsky's and Nabokov's initial sources were Russian but their audiences—certainly after 1940—were not. They embedded in their styles what for them was distinctly and irreducibly Russian—not the Russian of the late nineteenth century but of Pushkin and, in terms of humor, Gogol. By recasting that aspect of tradition they engaged in their own distinctive manner of nostalgia—a nostalgia that suggested a highly conservative but idiosyncratic and imaginary past, inherently critical of aspects of modernity and modernism fashionable during the mid-twentieth century. Stravinsky may have employed his own version of serialism, but after 1939 kept his distance from the radical experimentalism of Pierre Boulez (with whom Stravinsky had a complex relationship), Olivier Messiaen (whom Stravinsky disliked), or John Cage (whom Stravinsky dismissed), just as Nabokov, despite a commitment to modernism, disparaged most if not all of his contemporary "modern poets" (T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, for example).⁹⁷

At the same time both men shunned populists, particularly the writers and composers in the Soviet Union. Stravinsky's appreciation for Schoenberg and Webern derived from his recognition that they too drew from an idealized pre-Romantic tradition located in Viennese classicism. Nabokov had contempt for the books sent to him in the 1950s and '60s and resisted the academic enthusiasm for and literary emulation of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

The legacy Stravinsky and Nabokov shared helped inspire them to produce a body of work tied to a mythical past kept fresh in their minds in exile, yet stylistically modernist in an individualist manner. They remained independent of dominant modernist trends such as the derision of style per se, the devaluation of ornament, and the suspicion of complexity. Their distinctive modernism stood apart from any reactionary embrace of the strategies of narrative realism and Romanticism. Their appropriation of sources from a vanished past permitted them to develop formal strategies to turn the reader into the listener. The temporal frame of an encounter with music came to define the aesthetic experience of reading. Stravinsky put the idea of the reader as listener into succinct terms: "Music is based on temporal succession and requires alertness of memory."⁹⁸ Yet Stravinsky was never a literary composer in the Wagnerian sense. And Nabokov, his protestations to the contrary, turned the encounter with prose into an act of intense musical listening in which meaning derived from the formal properties and use of words that framed the reader's encounter, her perception of time, memory, and her construct of meaning—all sealed within the framework of a work of art, an imagined abstraction from the shared encounter with ordinary reality.

Yet, for all the common ground between them in method and procedure, key differences remain in the ethical substance implicit in their work—in how they, as artists, construed modernity. At stake were not merely the predicament of the artist, but the proper purpose and character of the intended response. The experience of exile, and the distance it created from any semblance of home, rendered ordinary history and even the fragments of biography—for both, based in Russia—ultimately as fanciful as Kinbote's Zembla. For Nabokov, that uprooted existential circumstance turned out to be the most reasonable vantage point from which to observe human nature and to write within the most noble and beautiful traditions of his craft. By moving back to Montreux, he secured the necessary distance vis-à-vis his new home, America. That distance found the possibility that, at best, he could sustain in his writing the "precision of poetry and the exactness of science."⁹⁹ The precision and exactness were located in the use of words, the acuity of observation, and his art's penetration beneath the surface to confront the moral circumstances of the individual.

Stravinsky shared Nabokov's allegiance to an art of precision and exactness and to an art located in a Russian tradition mediated through Western European practice. But he was rather impervious to the moral crisis represented by fascism and Communism, by the terror, barbarism, and slaughter they inspired.¹⁰⁰

Nabokov (as he never tired of asserting in the face of the scandal surrounding *Lolita*) remained a moralist with eighteenth-century values located in the love of individual freedom, art, and science.¹⁰¹ “Actually I’m a mild old gentleman who loathes cruelty,” he told an interviewer in 1962.¹⁰² He sought to engage his best readers in confronting, albeit indirectly, the threat evident in the course of twentieth-century history. Deftly woven within all his novels is the recognition of the nearly irresistible pressure on each individual, practical and psychological, to succumb and conform, and therefore the powerlessness of individuals to resist, escape, and reject the allure of entrapment and collaboration with cruelty. Only in the temporal realm of the imagination could the human possibility of decency find its voice.

This aspect of Nabokov helps illuminate the link between his writing and his work with butterflies. The butterfly, much like the nymphet, has a brief moment of detailed and uniquely differentiated beauty that emerges from the uncanny camouflage of the ordinary. The temporal frame of that beauty is brief, comparable to the act of writing, the act of listening, and the act of reading. It is a revealing coincidence that in concentration camps that held children, the children spontaneously drew on the walls pictures of butterflies as emblems of hope.¹⁰³ Reading Nabokov and perhaps listening to Stravinsky—despite the absence of any comparable admirable intentions on the part of the composer—permits us the same fleeting hint of hope and beauty expressed by the children as their own pasts were obliterated and the present brought them only nearer to their deaths.¹⁰⁴

NOTES

1. Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 171–72. Brian Boyd’s two-volume biography, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* and *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990–91), is a necessary and indispensable source. The subject matter in this essay has been treated provocatively by Daniel Albright in the chapter on Nabokov in *Representation and the Imagination: Beckett, Kafka, Nabokov, and Schoenberg* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 52–94; and in his discussion of Stravinsky in *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

2. See Stephen Walsh’s account of Craft’s role. Although it contradicts Craft, it seems both balanced and persuasive, given Stravinsky’s past practices in the publication of opinions and books. See *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934–1971* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 398–99.

3. *Ibid.*, 399.

4. See Sergej Davydov on *poshlost’* in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir E. Alexandrov (New York: Routledge, 1995), 628–32.

5. See Valérie Dufour, *Stravinsky et ses exégètes (1910–1940)* (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2006), 51–79; and Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 397–98.

6. See Valérie Dufour, “The *Poltique musicale*: A Counterpoint in Three Voices,” in this volume.

7. For Nabokov on music see, for example, *Strong Opinions*, 35. See also Charles Nicol, “Music in the Theater of the Mind: Opera and Vladimir Nabokov,” and Nassim W. Balestrini, “Vladimir

Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* and Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka*," in *Nabokov at the Limits: Redrawing Critical Boundaries*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (New York: Garland, 1999), 21–42 and 87–110, respectively.

8. Nabokov, "Playboy (1964)," in *Strong Opinions*, 35.
9. Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 35; and Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 151.
10. Nabokov approved of Appel's *The New Republic* review of *Speak, Memory*. See "Nabokov's Puppet Show: Parts I and II," *The New Republic*, 14 January 1967 and 21 January 1967.
11. Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years* and *Nabokov: The American Years*, passim.
12. See Tamara Levitz, "Igor the Angelino: The Mexican Connection," in this volume.
13. Vincent Giroux, unpublished drafts of a forthcoming biography of Nicolas Nabokov; Nicolas Nabokov, *Old Friends and New Music* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1951), 190–204, 209–11; Nicolas Nabokov, *Zwei rechte Schuhe im Gepäck: Erinnerungen eines russischen Weltbürgers* (Munich: Piper, 1975), 208–27, 357.
14. See Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years*; and Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 1:77–162.
15. Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years*, passim; and Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 71.
16. Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 40; and Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 171.
17. See the discussion of Stravinsky's engagement with Tchaikovsky's work in Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 1:2–5, 2:1529–1618.
18. This was a favorite term of Nabokov's. It means "corny trash, vulgar clichés, Philistinism in all its phases, imitations of imitations, bogus profundities, crude, moronic, and dishonest pseudo-literature." *Strong Opinions*, 101.
19. See Robert Craft, "Jews and Geniuses" *The New York Review of Books*, 16 February 1989, and Richard Taruskin and Robert Craft, "Jews and Geniuses: An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, 15 June 1989. On Stravinsky's eagerness to curry favor with the Nazis, see the letters to Willie Strecker in *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*, ed. Robert Craft (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 3:235, 236, 243, 244, 251, 265–66.
20. Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 61.
21. *Ibid.*, 157.
22. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 343.
23. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 71–72, 85–86.
24. See Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).
25. See Will Norman's discussion in his book *Nabokov, History, and Texture of Time* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 104–29.
26. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 302.
27. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 49.
28. This essay is indebted to Richard Taruskin's brilliant and detailed analysis of Stravinsky, especially in *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*. His portrait of the history, his analytical accounts of the music and the biographical claims form an indispensable basis for anyone writing on Stravinsky.
29. In addition to Taruskin, see Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Octatonic Pitch Structure in Stravinsky," in *Confronting Stravinsky*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 154–56.
30. This comment uses realism as a general term from literary history. It is not being used in the specific sense in which Carl Dahlhaus and others speak of musical realism. For example, I am not referring to the analysis of Musorgsky as a model of musical realism. The idea here is more general, in that the relationship of the audience to the musical experience—the fundamental sense of syntax, continuity, shape, and the rhetorical parallels to emotion and illustration—ran in tandem with the expectations and tastes of readers at the end of the nineteenth century. The point in this sense is not a technical one within a scholarly debate about a category in music history. The other analogy would be between musical practice and genre and historical painting, and with the pictorial

illusions of realism at the end of the nineteenth century, as argued in my essay, "Music as Language of Psychological Realism: Tchaikovsky and Russian Art," in *Tchaikovsky and his World*, ed. Leslie Kearney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 99–144. See also D. S. Mirsky, *Contemporary Russian Literature, 1881–1925* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926).

31. See Allen Forte, "Harmonic Syntax and Voice Leading in Stravinsky's Early Music," in Pasler, *Confronting Stravinsky*, 129.

32. Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 1:950.

33. See the two-volume set *Nicholas Roerich*, edited by Yevgeny Matochkin and Lisa Korshunova (Samara: Agni, 2011); and Richard Tauruskin, "From Subject to Style: Stravinsky and the Painters," in Pasler, *Confronting Stravinsky*, 16–38.

34. See Pierre Souvtchinsky, "La Notion du temps et la musique (Réflexions sur la typologie de la création musicale)," *La Revue musicale* 191 (1939): 70–81; repr. in Souvtchinsky, *Un Siècle de musique russe, 1830–1930*, ed. Frank Langlois (Paris: Actes Sud, 2004), 239–52.

35. Nabokov, *The Gift*, 71.

36. *Ibid.*, 342.

37. Edward T. Cone, "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method," in *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 156.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, trans. Jeff Hamburg (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 160–64.

40. On *drobnost'*, see Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 1:951–65 and 2:1677.

41. Nabokov, *The Eye* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), introduction (n.p.).

42. See the analysis in Michael Wood's brilliant study of Nabokov, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

43. See, for example, Maureen Carr, *Multiple Masks: Stravinsky's Neoclassicism in His Dramatic Works in Greek Studies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

44. Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 10.

45. Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 95.

46. *Ibid.*, 34.

47. On Ciurlionis and synesthesia, see Dorothee Eberlein, "Ciurlionis, Skrjabin und der osteuropäische Symbolismus," in *Vom Klang der Bilder: Die Musik in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Karin v. Maur (Munich: Prestel, 1985), 340–45.

48. Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 21.

49. *Ibid.*, passim.

50. Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 194, 226.

51. Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 93.

52. In *Pale Fire*, for example, the use of musical metaphors, references, and analogies abound. See esp. 10, 12, 13, 20, 21, 86–88, 100, 103, 105, 150–51, 153–55, 159, 165, 172, 188, 204, 219–20, and 226.

53. Vladimir Nabokov, "Music," in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 332–37.

54. Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 13.

55. Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 54.

56. Robert Craft, *Chronicle of a Friendship, 1948–1971* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 10.

57. Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 2:1125–26; Dufour, *Stravinski et ses exégètes*, 52–86 (Suvchinsky), 119, 138 (Valéry). See also Tamara Levitz, *Modernist Mysteries: Perséphone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

58. Leona Toker, "Nabokov and Bergson," in Alexandrov, *Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, 367–74.

59. Nabokov, *Ada, or Ardor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 543–44. These are the words of Van Veen, whom I do not assume to be Nabokov.

60. Nabokov, *Ada, or Ardor*, 548, 550.

61. See Natalie Reitano, "Our Marvelous Mortality: Finitude in *Ada, or Ardor*," *Criticism* 49/3 (2007): 377–403.
62. See Vladimir E. Alexandrov, "Nabokov and Bely," in Alexandrov, *Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, 358–66; on Bely, see Ada Steinberg, *Word and Music in the Novels of Andrey Bely* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Roger Keys, "Bely's Symphonies," in *Andrey Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, ed. John E. Malmstad (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 19–59; Vladimir E. Alexandrov, *Andrei Bely: The Major Symbolist Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); and John E. Bowlit, *Moscow and St. Petersburg 1900–1920: Art and Culture* (New York: Vendome Press, 2008), 89–91, 208–13.
63. Andrey Bely, "The Art of the Future (1907)," in *The Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*, ed. and trans. Steven Cassedy (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 198–202.
64. *Ibid.*, 202. Two Years later, in "The Magic of Words," Bely wrote "either life must be transformed into art or art must be made living." In Cassedy, *Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*, 100.
65. Bely, "The Magic of Words," 93–96.
66. *Ibid.*, 100. On art and science in Nabokov, see Leland de la Durantaye, "Artistic Selection: Science and Art in Vladimir Nabokov," in *Transitional Nabokov*, ed. Duncan White and Will Norman (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 55–66.
67. Bely, "The Magic of Words," 103.
68. *Ibid.*, 110.
69. *Ibid.*
70. Bely, "The Principle of Form in Aesthetics (1906)," in Cassedy, *Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*, 205.
71. *Ibid.*, 208.
72. *Ibid.*, 208–9.
73. *Ibid.*, 209–10. Bely's writing on Pushkin and on rhythm in Pushkin's poetry appear to have been influential. See "Lyric Poetry and Experiment (1909)," in Cassedy, *Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*, 222–73; and Bely, *Ritm kak dialektika i "Mednyy usadnik"* (Moscow, 1929)—this book makes a cameo appearance in *The Gift*.
74. There are parallels between Bely and Bergson's notion of "vital" creative moment and both men's engagement with science. Bely, "Lyric Poetry and Experiment," 225. A telling example of Nabokov's obsession with the precision of language and its parallels in the conduct of science is the episode about Fyodor's father in chapter 2 of *The Gift*. Nabokov writes there of the dangers of "secondary poetization which keeps departing from that real poetry with which the live experience of these receptive, knowledgeable and chaste naturalists endowed their research" (139).
75. *Ibid.*, 232.
76. *Ibid.*
77. Andrei Bely, "The Forms of Art," in *The Dramatic Symphony, a Novel, with an Essay: The Forms of Art* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 175. *Dramatic Symphony* is translated by Roger and Angela Keys, the essay by John Elsworth.
78. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 44.
79. Bely, "The Forms of Art," 178.
80. Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 53.
81. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 78.
82. Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 53–54.
83. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 45.
84. See the discussion in Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 1:820–48. See also Peter Dayan, *Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art, from Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 119–46.
85. In Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (London: Faber & Faber, 1975).
86. D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature: From Its Beginnings to 1900*, ed. Francis J. Whitfield (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 102; see also Mirsky, *Contemporary Russian Literature*.

87. There are many sources for Nabokov's veneration of Pushkin; see for example, in *The Gift*, 148–49. See also Sergej Davydov, "Nabokov and Pushkin," in Alexandrov, *Garland Companion to Nabokov*, 482–95. It should be noted that Nicolas Nabokov's elegy in three movements for high voice and orchestra of 1964, *The Return of Pushkin*, used poems translated by Vladimir Nabokov. See Nicolas Nabokov, *The Return of Pushkin* (Bonn: M. P. Belaieff, 1966). The texts are given in Russian, German, and English. The presumption is that both the German and the English versions are credited to Vladimir Nabokov.

88. Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 97. See also Jonathan Cross's essay in this volume.

89. See Simon Karlinsky, "Igor Stravinsky and Russian Preliterate Theater," in Pasler, *Confronting Stravinsky*, 5; Martha Hyde, "Stravinsky's Neoclassic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107–9; Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 1:1549–585.

90. Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 98. See also Stravinsky's unpublished program note about *Mavra* in "Who Owns *Mavra*? A Transnational Dispute," in this volume.

91. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 266.

92. See Bely, "Lyric Poetry and Experiment."

93. See Yuri Leving, "Singing *The Bells* and *The Covetous Knight*: Nabokov and Rachmaninoff's Operatic Translations of Poe and Pushkin," in White and Norman, *Transitional Nabokov*, 205–25.

94. Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 97.

95. *Ibid.*

96. Karlinsky, "Igor Stravinsky and Russian Preliterate Theater," 15.

97. Boyd construes John Shade's poem in *Pale Fire* as "a deliberate challenge to Pound and Eliot." Boyd, *Nabokov: The American Years*, 439, and Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 43. See also Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues* (London: Faber, 1968), 58–59, 69; Stravinsky and Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 127–30; Stravinsky, *Themes and Conclusions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 30–31, 109. See also Walsh's discussion of Stravinsky's relationship to Boulez in his *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, *passim*.

98. Stravinsky, *The Poetics of Music*, 37.

99. See the interview "Nabokov and the Moment of Truth," available on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3fSL4Bw9w>.

100. See the nostalgic aside in *Pale Fire*, 188.

101. See Norman, *Nabokov, History, and Texture of Time*, esp. 118–29.

102. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 19.

103. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, lecture at the University of Zurich. See *Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: Dem Tod ins Gesicht sehen*, a film by Sefan Haupt, Edition Salzgeber DVD D256.

104. As the Stravinsky letters reveal, he wanted his works performed in Germany until 1940, after the invasion of France. He, like Richard Strauss, thought of himself as better than any regime, and all he appeared to care about was getting his works performed and earning money from them. Stravinsky apparently reacted to America's entry into the war in 1941 by thinking only about himself and where else he might be able to move. See comment in Tony Palmer's film *Stravinsky: Once, at a Border . . .*, TP-DVD126, Voiceprint Records, 2008.