

Summary

Shades and Patterns in Vladimir Nabokov's Novels

SUZUKI AKIRA

The purpose of this paper is to outline the basic methodology for studying Vladimir Nabokov's novels in total. Practically speaking, this type of approach, which nowadays is often undervalued and even considered to be out-of-date, can only be substantiated by the simplest act of reading individual works and writing essays treating them one by one, the example of which being the self-imposed mission for the presenter (SUZUKI) during the past nine or ten years.

In fact, thoughtful analyses of details with view of completeness are essentially requisite for self-consciously constructed artefacts such as Nabokov's *oeuvre*, and this kind of duality we need must be interpreted as reflecting multiple forms of duality found in Nabokovian texts themselves. Needless to say, critics "can tackle Nabokov's entire *oeuvre* issue by issue," but the result is not necessarily "pastiche of quotations from various works" (Naiman 2010: 13). If a "novel-by-novel analysis" falls into insipid repetition, it might be largely consequent upon paucity of ideas. Multiplicity and versatility inextricably associated with single-mindedness are not only counted as some of characteristics of Nabokov's narrative style but also are required in some measure for the so-called good reader's reading practise.

For example, when reading pseudo-autobiography in *Look at the Harlequins!*, it is not enough to define the novel's protagonist, Vadim Vadimovich, as a double of the author. The relationship

ought to be interpreted in connexion with the main theme of the novel: the symmetrical coexistence of possible worlds. *Look at the Harlequins!* is a text full of references to multifaceted and multicoloured shapes (like lozenges suggested by the title itself) and shadings, including spectral distribution of reality and imagination, of which the narrator's dementia (according to the narrator's words, "one of the characters" in his story) possibly caused by his inability to discriminate "direction and duration" (space and time) is a manifest example of realisation.

The reader of novels written by Nabokov can easily detect varieties of densely allusive structure in innumerable cases, of which there are some examples: the theory of laughter propounded by Henri Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (*Le rire: essai sur la signification du comique*, 1900) parodied or employed in *Laughter in the Dark* and *Despair*, and musical references in *The Defense* (*La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi and *Boris Godunov* by Modest Mussorgsky) relevant to the motif of parental solicitude.

We can also find the new ideas Nabokov added while he (with his son Dmitri and other cotranslators) translated his own works originally written in Russian such as "Ultima Thule," which was composed as the first chapter of the unfinished Russian novel *Solus Rex* in Paris. In this controversial story, the most prominent is Nabokov's attitude toward the limitations of spiritualism and insufficient reading.

When translating "Ultima Thule" into English, Nabokov gave names to three originally nameless characters (Falter's sister, his brother-in-law, and an Italian psychiatrist). Two of the names vaguely suggestive of Edgar Allan Poe's two short stories?—namely, "Eleonora" (1841) and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845)—seem to be added for helping to clarify the duplicated structure of "Ultima Thule" and two central motives of this text: the early death and the survival of human consciousness after bodily death.