

Annotations to *Ada* (10) Part I Chapter 28

The Kyoto Reading Circle
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Page and line references are to the Vintage International edition.

Part I Chapter 28

171.01: the Year 1880 (Aqua was still alive . . .): This remark seems to suggest the linkage between the present chapter and I. 3.

171.02-03: his long, too long, never too long life: A similar phrase construction can be found in I. 8: “his so remote, so near, 1884 summer.”

171.03: He was ten: “ten” is repeated in a curious way in I. 3. (25.05-07): “. . .the Hairy Alpine Rose in *her* album, collected ten years ago’ (showing her ten fingers gleefully, proudly, ten is ten!).”

171.06: an Euler-type problem: Euler equations. Leonhard Euler (1707-83)

171.09: the violet shade of pink cliffs: Anticipates the reference to Tolstoy and his “peasant-bare foot print” (171. 15), for Fyodor says in *The Gift* that “Lyov Tolstoy . . . preferred violet shades and the bliss of stepping barefoot.” “Pink cliffs” are also remindful of “pink cliffs of Zion National Park” in Utah (Brian Boyd, *American Years* 296) and “those pink and mauve cliffs” of “Cedarn in Utana” dreamed by Charles Kinbote.

171.11-13: his father's volitations and loves in another life in Lermontov's diamond-faceted tetrameters: An allusion to *The Demon*, in which an angel falls in love with a human woman. There is a play on the paradox of the demon-angel in Van's father's name.

171.15: AAA: The initials of Van's tutor here funnily coincide with triple A—the American Automobile Association— (related to “a motor court”) and calls attention to the double and triple letters in this chapter and the double and twin theme in the novel.

171.17-19: Utah where he had written the tale of Murat, the Navajo chieftain: Utah seems to blend easily with the Caucasus in Nabokov's mind. Tolstoy here somewhat overlaps with Nabokov working on *Lolita* during his trip to the West. When Humbert was living with Valeria, he says, “I felt like Marat but with no white-necked maiden to stab me” (*The Annotated Lolita* 8:26). In his annotation 26/4, p. 344 of *The Annotated Lolita*, Alfred Appel refers to Jean-Paul Marat (1743-1793), the French revolutionist stabbed to death in his bath by Charlotte Corday. (=Cora Day). Appel explains the name “Murat” in *Ada*—a combination of Murad (from Tolstoy's *Hadji Murad*), General Murat (Napoleon's brother-in-law and king of Naples), and Marat.

171.21-22: Telluride in West Colorado: Telluride comes from the chemical element tellurium (Te). The last scene in *Lolita*, where Humbert hears the voices of children playing, occurs in Telluride, Colorado. Nabokov often went hunting there. Nabokov wrote in 1951 to Wilson,

I went to Telluride (awful roads, but then—endless charm, an old-fashioned, absolutely touristless mining town full of most helpful, charming people—and when you hike from there, which is 9000' to 10,000', with the town and its ten roofs and self-conscious poplars lying toylike at the flat bottom of a cul-de-sac valley running into giant granite mountains, all you hear are the voices of children playing in the streets—delightful!). . . . (No. 231, *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters 1940-1971*, 294)

172.2-4: German musical dramas : Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

172.13: shuler: cf. 175.28: “the German for ‘schoolboy,’ minus the umlaut”; *шуглер* in Russian, a swindler, a sharper. A further allusion to it is in 175.28. Brian Boyd, in “Even Homais Nods: Nabokov’s Fallibility or How to Revise *Lolita*,” (*Nabokov Studies* Vol. 2, 1995, p. 70) calls Van’s opponent and would-be card-sharper “Dick Schuler,” on whose name differing views are given on our annotation **176.12: Lord C.**

172.13-14: gaming conjurers: The theme of illusion pervades.

172.16: Cardiac origin: A perfect choice of word for a card-sharper.

172.27: King Wing: ff: 81-24 (I13) Demon’s wrestling master, who taught Van how to walk on his hands.

173.23 a fellow student whom we shall call Dick : Dick Cheshire, a cousin of one of Van’s Riverlane schoolmates who appears in Ch. 4, Part 1: “Cheshire, the son of a thrifty lord(33)” Dick’s name is mentioned again in Ch.3, Part 3, by Lucette: “Your friend Dick Cheshire sends me presents and racing tips(464).”

173.26 tight: drunk

173.29: female fireflies: see 71:28 for a mention of male fireflies.

174.3-4: a fountain pen, thumb-pressing and re-pressing it; Brian Boyd in “Even Homais Nods: Nabokov’s Fallibility or How to Revise *Lolita*,” (*Nabokov Studies* Vol. 2, 1995, 70) points out Nabokov mistakenly made the twins “thumb-press” a fountain pen like a ball pen and suggests that it may also be read as intentional—the twins were so drunk that they may have treated the fountain pen as if it were a ball pen. See further discussion of “pen” in annotation **176.10.**

174.22: Van retired to the W.C.: See 521.14: “I must go to the *petit endroit* (W.C.): Cf. 127.15-16: *mestechko* (Russ.), the “little place.” See also 176.9: **a hot bath (the best adviser, and prompter and inspirer in the world, except, of course, the W.C. seat):** the emphasis on the pun, “double-you-see,” brings focus on many doubles—Venus Villa, Van Veen, the French twins, and the mirror images produced by Dick’s flashing and twinkling surfaces, “the cheated cheater” (176.19), etc. Poe’s short story, “William Wilson,” deals with twins—with a doppelgänger theme—and in a similar scene, the egocentric Wilson’s cheating at *ecarté* is exposed by his good alter ego.

175.22: “rainbow ivory”: Plunkett’s name for joker? Rainbow suggests a free choice of “colors.”

175.33: bewgest: Australian pronunciation of “beau geste” (=a splendid or graceful gesture), a superficial gesture of vanity related to the deception theme in this chapter. Cf. “he would have to move to Australia to make new ones there and forge a few checks on the way” (175.1).

176.4: Rosy aurora was shivering in green Serenity Court. Laborious old Chose: A reference to Baudelaire’s “Le Crepuscule du Matin.” Cf. Part3, Ch.9, “Dawn de Laire” “Dawn *en robe rose et verte* (430).”

L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte
S'avancait lentement sur la Seine déserte,
Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux,
Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.

--"Le Crepuscule du Matin"

The reference is also found in *Lolita* and *Bend Sinister*: “Aurora had hardly “warned her hands,” as the pickers of lavender say in the country of my birth, when I found myself trying to get into that dungeon again, knocking upon its green doors, breakfast-less, stool-less, in despair” (*Lolita* 241-42); “He might add that he had caught a cold in the head during the dumb show. Undine’s pink gill, iced watermelon, *l’aurore grelottant en robe rose et verte*. Her sleazy lap” (103); “[Krug] got up and paced the room. “Some lines need oiling,” he continued, “and I do

not like the colour of dawn's coat—I see “russet” in a less leathery, less proletarian way, but you may be right. The whole thing is really quite wonderful” (*Bend Sinister*; Penguin 1964, 108).

176.10: pen is the word: The hidden pun pen+is is used to reveal the sexual decadence of the Cheshire/Chose clan. The same connotation is behind the choice of the name “Dick.”

176.12: Lord C. (he was a cousin of one of Van's Riverlane schoolmates): A very confusing puzzle of identity. One possible reading is that Lord C. is Van's ironically formal way of referring to Dick. Though the letter inside is an insidious offer to make a trade of an introduction to a brothel for forgetting his cheating and debt, the envelope is probably marked with his ancient title, Lord Cheshire. Because of his dishonorable kind of libertinism, Dick is probably the same person as “Cheshire” in Chapter 4, 33:4: “Cheshire, the son of a thrifty lord,” the boy who helps Van to have his first sexual experience. He is called “milord” (173.26) earlier in this card game scene.

Another reading is that neither Lord C. nor his cousin, “one of Van's Riverlane schoolmates,” is likely to be “Dick C” (176.32), or Dick Cheshire (464.18). It seems unlikely for Van to refer to Dick as “one of Van's Riverlane schoolmates” so late in this chapter. One explanation for Van's receiving a note from Lord C. rather than directly from Dick is that Van could have received an introduction signed by Lord C. to Villa Venus at the request of Dick Cheshire, who would have attached with the introduction his own letter to Van offering it in exchange for Van's cancellation of his debt.

Moreover, if the Riverlane schoolmate is someone we have not been introduced to (Dick's “whole clan” seems numerous), Lord C. can be one of two possibilities: One is Young Cheshire in Chapter 4, who is not Dick but one of his clan. He may have succeeded his thrifty father to the title by the time he and Van were in Chose University. The other possibility is Lord Chose (515:19), a “ former chum of Van's,” the author of *The Chimes of Chose*, that retains its popularity because of “several indecent but very funny references to the Villa Venus.” Note also the initials in “Laborious old Chose” (176.5). The initials “L.C.” might also suggest “Letter of Credit” since Dick proposes to introduce Van to Villa Venus in exchange for canceling his debt.

176.14: Venus Villa Club: The first mention of the exclusive whorehouse called Villa Venus (II.3.347).

177.3: euphorion The name of a Greek poet (ca. 275 BCE – 187? BCE) but is also the name of an Australian butterfly, *Troides Euphorion*, a large species, not at all like the microscopic precious metal. Nabokov has invented.

-- <http://linus.socs.uts.edu.au/~don/larvae/papi/euphor.html>

***Troides euphorion* (Gray, [1853])**

(one **synonym** : *Ornithoptera cassandra*)

Cairns Birdwing

PAPILIONIDAE

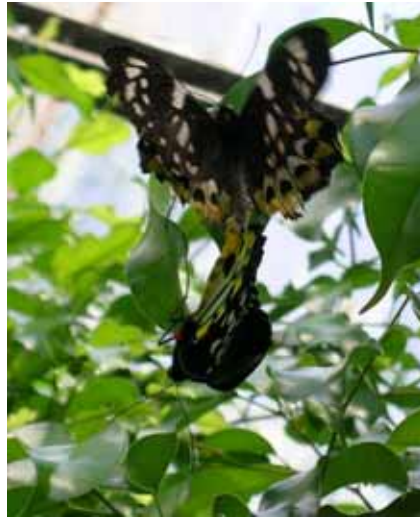
Don Herbison-Evans (donherbison-evans@yahoo.com) & **Stella Crossley** (updated 25 June 2005)



Male ([Australia Post](#), 1981)

The origin of the scientific name *euphorion* for this species may be associated with the figure in Greek mythology: **Euphorion**, who was the son of the gods: Achilles and Helen. The name is nowadays more often associated with the ancient Greek poet: **Euphorion** (born about 275 BC).

The adult males and females are different. The wings of the female are black and white, with yellow spots along the **margin** of each hindwing. The body is yellow, with red under the thorax. The females are larger than the males, and have a wingspan up to 20 cms.



mating pair: female above, male hanging by the tail

(Specimens: courtesy of the [Butterfly House, Coffs Harbour](#))

177.5: one minuscule section of your monocle is made to magnify the mark you make with it: The alliteration of “m” is conspicuous throughout the chapter, especially when it comes to describing Dick’s handling of cards. Cf. “a man of many mirrors” (173.27) “Mark ‘em! Mark ‘em!” (177.9). As with the doubling and tripling letters and images, the repeated “m” may be the echo of Dick’s “flashing” of “mechanical media” that would lead “inevitably to exposure” (172.30), according to Plunkett.