

Annotations to *Ada* (13)

Part I Chapter 31

May 2007

The Kyoto Reading Circle

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Page and line references are to the Vintage International edition.

Part I Chapter 31

187.2: a diamond necklace: A reminder of Mlle Larivière's "The Necklace" (*La rivière de diamants*).

187.6: yellow-blue Vass frocks: This echoes the Russian expression "Ya lyublyu vas" which means "I love you." cf. Part 1 Chapter 5 (p.37): "a pink-yellow-blue nose-gay."

187.13: Baroness Von Skull: We can detect the name "Von Skull" as that of a villain in the American cartoon, Baron von Skull, in *Samson and Goliath* (1967).

188.12-13: the labyrinth of a nightmare: As this expression suggests, both narrative and conversation begin to sound as if it all happened in a dream.

188.33-34: A fourth maiden in the Canadian couturier's corn-and bluet summer "creation": The first three maidens were introduced as "Three young ladies in yellow-blue Vass frocks."

189.4-5: "I think I am dreaming. I think you are Dreaming Too." "No, I'm Cordula!": In this conversation between Van and Cordula, "Dreaming Too" is meant as a name, and Cordula herself takes it thus, which suggests the possibility that this might be an invented dialogue or a dream conversation.

189.24: a lame horse: The theme of a suffering horse prevails: Countess de Prey tries to sell Van and Ada “a lame horse” (139); Drongo, a black horse, “was a very sick horse” (112); Larivière says, “She [Ada] could break the back of her pony before she could walk” (155).

191.29: “raiding the icebox” as children in old fairy tales: In *The Annotated Lolita*, Nabokov mentions a “high-class’ resort” which advertised “raid-the-icebox’ midnight snacks” (*Annot. Lolita*, 147:15). Humbert looks for hotels which satisfy Lolita’s hankering for “unlimited quantities of M-m-m food” (*Annot. Lolita*, 147:9), evoking the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale.

A family of the 1940s raiding the icebox



<http://www.iloveasta.com/images/icebox.gif>

191.3: the same tartan lap robe. . .the same bench: See 121.9, Van and Ada’s first tryst on the night of the burning barn. This chapter recalls the old treasures of their memory depicted in such chapters as 8, 12, and 19. The references to their first lovemaking suggest that their lovemaking during Van’s second visit to Ardis in 1888 are attempts to recapture their past ardor.

191.17-18: The first ray of the morning dabbed a toolbox with fresh green paint: Cf. “A pointer of sunlight daubed with greener paint a long green box where croquet implements were kept” (53:14), where croquet reminds Van of flamingoes and hedgehogs used in *Alice in Wonderland*.

191.28: a pot of transparent honey: Recalling the “hammock and honey” chapter, Chapter 12, where love-making is associated by Van to Ada’s eating honey (75:9-12).

192.4--9: ‘My sister, do you recall. . .le grand chêne and zee big hill’: This resumes the references to Chateaubriand’s “Romance à Hélène” (138) which are scattered throughout Chapter 8. Cf. 51.15, “the arms of a linden stretched toward those of an oak”; 51.23, “the old oak aches, the old lover aches”; 53.34, “grand chêne which is really an elm.”

192.6: I’ve given up all that stuff—petits vers, vers de soie: See 95.9, (soie meaning “silk”) “Van removed a silk thread of larva web from his lip.” Larva web suggests the childhood and perhaps her fondness for insects (with the implication of incest) which Ada has already grown out of.

192.11: Lucille has become so peachy: Cf. 205.8, where Van says to Lucette, “Cold as two halves of a canned peach.”

192.14: frightened a finch: Cf. 50.16, where Van pitches stones at a hawfinch.

193.2: Krolik’s untimely end: Dr. Krolik died two years before, in 1886. See 219.11.

193.25: you as my house-keeper, I as your epileptic: The “epileptic,” in spite of “as in your Chekhov” that follows, naturally reminds the reader of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*. The “spider” of the wordplay “spider-spinster” and “housekeeper,” as well as “torture,” also makes an allusion to Dostoevsky’s *The Devils*, which Nabokov refers to by its other title, *The Possessed*. Cf. In Part III Chapter 1 of *The Devils*, answering Stavrogin, Lisa says, “Torture me, kill me, work off your spite on me. . . . I don’t want to be a compassionate hospital nurse for you. Perhaps I will really end up as a hospital nurse if I don’t find a way of dying conveniently this very day; but even if I do become a nurse, I won’t be your nurse; though, of course, you need one more than any legless or armless man. I always imagined that you would take me to some place where there was a huge, wicked spider

as big as a man, and we should spend the rest of our lives looking at it and being afraid of it. That's what our love would be wasted on. You'd better go to Dasha: she will go with you anywhere you like" (*The Devils*, translated by David Magarshack, Penguin Classics, 522). As suggested by Lisa, Stavrogin asks Dasha to be his nurse and live with him quietly in Switzerland in his last note (Part III Chapter 8): "At one time you wanted to come to me as my nurse and made me promise to send for you when necessary. . . . Last year, like Herzen, I took out naturalization papers in the canton of Ur, and no one knows about it. I have bought a little house there. I have still got twelve thousand roubles; we shall go and live there. . ." (Ibid, 665).

193.18: spider spinsters: See *Pale Fire* 45.348, "spider redips."

193.26-7: 'we shall see the whole sky swarm with diamonds.': A reference to Sonia's last line in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, "We will see the whole sky in diamonds." The phrase "swarm with" is not in the original text by Chekhov.

194.22: "Guillaume de Monparnasse" (the leaving out of the "t" made it more *intime*): Leaving out of the "t" from Mont Parnasse (Mt. Parnassus, sacred to Apollo, the home of the muses) makes Monparnasse, which means "my" Parnasse, hence "more *intime*" and perhaps even more self-glorifying on the part of Mlle. Larivière. Cf. Part 1 Chapter 13 (85.27): "A pale diaphanous butterfly with a very black body followed them and Ada cried 'Look!' and explained it was closely related to a Japanese Parnassian. Mlle Larivière said suddenly she would use a pseudonym when publishing the story."

194.28: "Bilitis": Cf. 164-5, Lesbian poetess; Mytilene.

195.08: catching a drop of honey on her nether lip: reminds the reader of "Hammock and honey" in Ch. 12. "Nether" lip suggests another place—cf. 75.10: "When I kiss you here. . . ."

195.13: only the truth, and the whole truth, with a hole in the truth: A play on the "whole-hole" pun in the oath taken to testify at court, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

195.23: Six hundred and thirteen times: Does the number have any meaning?

195.25: 'ob-manipulations': "Obman" plus "manipulations." "Obman" means "deceit" in Russian. So does "manipulations." Van tries to emphasize that his being caressed by a number of whores is not important. The first "ob-manipulation" Van experiences, in 1880, is described in Ch. 24: ". . . he had been caressed by ungloved lovely hands more than once himself, which did not interest Ada" (151).

196.4: phantom orchid: *Cephalanthera austini*, a kind of orchid ghostly white in color, an elusive species found in the U.S.A. and Canada.



<http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~brian/phantomorchid.htm>

196.5: bladder-senna: Cf. 128.31, yellow flowers.