

Annotations to *Ada* (14)

Part I Chapter 32

August, 2007

The Kyoto Reading Circle

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Page and line references are to the Vintage International edition.

Part I Chapter 32

197.01: The shooting script was now ready: The film theme from the previous chapter continues. “The script” refers both to the “real” script, which Marina is to read with G. A. Vronsky, and to the other one that is ready for a film starring Van and Ada.

197.06: Pedro: Alfred Appel, Jr. presents in *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* a couple of episodes from Nabokov's Hollywood days: “At one gala party the Nabokovs met the actress, and the spectacle of her frantic, open pursuit of her French leading man may have influenced Nabokov's portrait of Ada's insatiable star Marina Durmanov, whose actor/gigolo Mexican lover (p. 197)”; “. . . and although Nabokov's butterfly-hunting in the Hollywood hills was fairly unproductive, his field observations of Hollywood starlets, agents and producers were labeled and filed for future use in *Ada* (see Chapter Thirty-two, the Hollywood swimming pool scene).” *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, 236.

197.13: Philip Rack: One of Ada's lovers unknown to Van. His full name is presented for the first time.

197.14: on the whole: The “hole” theme from the previous chapter also continues. Cf. “a Doughnut Truth: only the truth, and the whole truth, with a hole in the truth” (195. 12-13).

198.01: dollied: A film-shooting jargon.

198.19-20: Now that I am writing this: In this chapter, Van narrates in the first person without parenthesis.

198.23: Or was he dreaming now that he had been dreaming?: The whole scene of the poolside that we are reading could be a dream.

198.24-25: *Les Enfants Maudits*: alludes to *Les enfants terrible* (1929) by Jean Cocteau and its film version (1950) directed by Jean-Pierre Melville. We can see Jean Marais, Cocteau's favorite actor (but he does not appear in the film) and protégé, in the description of Pedro's features though Marais was intelligent and sophisticated unlike Pedro. In *Les enfants terrible*, the heroine secretly has incestuous affection on her brother. Unlike in *René*, her affection leads him to kill himself, who is unaware of her secret love until the end of his life.

198.26-27: the original Book of the Fortnight: A pun on The Book of the Month Club.

198.31-32: what begins with a "de" and rhymes more or less with a Silesian river ant?: Deodorant. There is a river called the Oder in Silesia. De + Oder + ant.

199.07-08: The actor, who quite likely would run into somebody's fist in a forthcoming scene: It is not clear whether this is a direction from the script or a description on the actual person in the novel.

199.11-12: "accursed children": The script.

199.14-15: a Nurjinski leap: puns on Nijinski. Cf. "My next bullet caught him somewhere in the side, and he rose from his chair higher and higher, like old, gray, mad Nijinski, like Old Faithful, like some old nightmare of mine, to a phenomenal altitude, or so it seemed, as he rent the air..." (*Lolita* II. 35, 302). There also appears Diaghilev as "a fat ballet master, Dangleleaf" (*Ada* II. 9, 430).

199.16-17: Was she really beautiful? Was she at least what they call attractive?: echoes the beginning of Ch. 9: "Was she really pretty, at twelve? Did he want—would he ever want to caress her, to really caress?" (58).

199.18-19: an unfamiliar, vaguely clinical look to her neck, with its odd dark wisps and

strags, as if she had obtained a nurse's job and would never dance again: In Ch. 42, Van meets a nurse who strangely reminds him of Ada in a hospital, to which he is taken after the duel with Captain Tapper. "Inset, so to speak, was Tatiana, a remarkably pretty and proud young nurse, with black hair and diaphanous skin (some of her attitudes and gesture, and that harmony between neck and eyes which is the special, scarcely yet investigated secret of feminine grace fantastically and agonizingly reminded him of Ada, ..." (312). The nurse theme follows the previous chapter.

199.20: a hole above one hip: The hole theme.

199.23: nenuphars: leads to "He was emphatically not Japanese" on the bottom of the page.

199.23: like mad Ophelia: alludes to Lucette's death.

199.26-27: We move back to the lip of the pool: As if a film shooting were going on...

200.04: a small stink bomb: A stinkbomb has been mentioned in Ch. 12. ". . . a former summer guest, . . . had awoken once because a stinkbomb had burst among the instruments in the horsecart. . ." (72).

200.21: leetle aperture; 200.25: hole in her swimsuit: sexual reference of "hole" continued from the previous chapter. Pedro inspires a series of openly sexual puns such as "screwdriver" (200.33), "*fleshbeck*" (201.5), "a nice cold Russian *kok*" (202.4), and "Get yourself a cocoanut" (202.5).

201.7: "Renny, or what's his name, René ...": Renny, "lover number one" in the script being discussed by Marina, resembles Van, Ada's lover number one. Lover number two probably is Rack, whom "she is trying to get rid of" and whose "fubsy and frumpy" (201.33) wife's acceptance of "the situation" puzzles Ada (201.27-28) and number three may be Percy, "the gentleman farmer."

201.23: telegraph pole: a British expression; in the U.S., "telephone pole."

201.27-28: the second guy's wife: Elsie, Rack's wife.

201.30: *Prichyom* . . . situation: “Why should we call it a situation?” Perhaps a pun on “sit-shit”?

202.6: “Get yourself a cocoanut”: vaguely reminds us of a Hamlet’s line: “Get thee to a nunnery,” accompanied by a mention of Claudius and Ophelia in the same paragraph.

202.9-10: The melancholy young German was in a philosophical mood shading into the suicidal: belongs to the *Hamlet* theme.

202.11: Elsie: another borrowing from *Hamlet*, which is set in Elsinore.

202.11: Doc Ecksreher: a part of the theme of “X.” cf. Dr. Aix (505)

202.12: driplets: Later in Part 2, ch.5, we will meet the following passage: “Driblets? Driplets? Now who pronounced it that way? Who? Who? A dripping ewes-dropper in a dream? (381)

202.15: Organs: plays a pun on the musical instrument with the human body organs, especially the sexual organs.

203. 21-23: reversing the action of Dr. Ero: pursued by the Invisible Albino in one of the greatest novels of English literature: In the last chapter of H.G.Wells’ *The Invisible Man*, Dr. Kemp, chased by the Invisible Man, “ran round by the side gate to the front of the house” of Mr. Heelas and “so into the hill-road.” The following passage seems to be what Nabokov had in mind here:

Emerging into the hill-road, Kemp naturally took the downward direction, and so it was he came to run in his own person the very race he had watched with such a critical eye from the belvedere study only four days ago. He ran it well, for a man out of training, and though his face was white and wet, his wits were cool to the last. He ran with wide strides, and wherever a patch of rough ground intervened, wherever there came a patch of raw flints, or a bit of broken glass shone dazzling, he crossed it and left the bare invisible feet that followed to take what line they would.

In chapter 27 of *The Invisible Man*, the second policeman says, “Doctor Kemp’s a hero,” possibly dropping his “h” in a cockney way, which produces the “Dr. Ero.” The name may also be an echo of Dr. Moreau.

203.3-203.32: her chubby fingers grew like pink mushrooms: A case of metaphor transmogrified into the real thing. The chubby fingers like pink mushrooms belong to Mlle Lariviere who was dozing in a deckchair but later (203.32), Lucette examines “a bunch of pink mushrooms that clung to the stump, snoring.” 203.21-23 “Reversing the action of Dr. Ero” also may be seen as “pink mushrooms” word-play reversing the line of metaphorical logic so that the reality is made to resemble the metaphor.

203.24-25: Lucette, in passing, stopped to pick up her sister’s cap and sunglasses: reminds the readers of “en passant,” a chess term referring to “the capture of a pawn as it makes a first move of two squares by an enemy pawn in a position to threaten the first of these squares” (Webster’s third).

203.25-26: the sunglasses of much-sung lasses: apparently includes the dark glasses of Annabel and Lolita (*The Annotated Lolita*, Vintage 39).

203. 28: an empty beer bottle: Van has been “drinking beer from a bottle” on the previous page. The reader is led to believe that the empty beer bottle is the same that Van has been drinking from. However, it is unlikely that Van would have carried the beer bottle all the way here. Nabokov uses a familiar film trick of sequential association. The same trick is used in Chapter 34 (cf. 212:11). The empty bottle motif seems to coincide with the presence of Lucette. Cf. **an empty medicine bottle** (145); **an empty little bottle** (146); **an empty beer bottle** (148).

204.14-5: it’s all sunk and dead: Lucette-Ophelia connection.

204.17-19: the great weeping cedar whose aberrant limbs extended an oriental canopy (propped up here and there by crutches made of its own flesh like this book): like the Veen family tree, with “aberrant limbs” of incest “made of its own flesh.”

204.23: Van, sprawling supine: Cf. Chapter 14, 91.19 where Van shows Lucette what crucifixion looks like. Also, cf. Chapter 16, 101.13, where Ada anoints him with her paintbrush in the semblance of an ancient Estotian “sign of the cross.” Together with the Ada-Mary Magdalen connection, Van is seen in the role of Christ.

204.24: Lebanese blue: “Lebanese” suggests Lebanon cedar, treasured in such ancient civilizations as Egypt, Israel, and Sumeria for burning sacred fires, for resin for mummies, and other purposes.



Lebanon Cedar

Here, the blue sky is seen through its branches; the connection is made to “oriental canopy” (204.18). Blue recalls Princess Sofia Temnosiniy (meaning “dark blue”), the first Veen in the family tree, and the echoing blue in the names of Aqua and Marina. The “great weeping cedar” also recalls the shattal tree, suggesting a Tree of Knowledge of Eden National Park in Chapter 15, which Ada and Van climb.

204.28-29: her mournful Magdalene hair hanging down (in sympathy with the weeping shadows): Ada is depicted as a woman of sin like Mary Magdalen. As Jesus says to Simon, Mary Magdalen washed his feet with her tears and wiped them clean with her hair (Luke 7:44). She asks him if he were “cross” (205.2), another oblique reference to Christ.

205.16: they lived in Bryant’s chateau; 205.25: bats flying one by one out of a turret’s *oeil-de-boeuf* into the sunset: See 139.8-9: “They walked up the hill to the black ruins of Bryant’s Castle, with the swifts still flying around its tower.” However, this time, it is not swifts but “bats.”

205.24: artistic blunders are fainter than very fugitive bats in an insect-poor wilderness of orange air: Bats are not wont to fly in “an insect-poor wilderness”—artificially created cardboard bats in a blaring orange sunset. The “sunset” metaphorically indicates Van’s age—the “ultimate twilight.”

205.30: jolt my present pencil: The aged Van's potency in both sex and creativity.

205.32: The crushed flower: The helleborine here may allude to Bloom admiring his own potency as a "flower" in his bath in *Ulysses*.

206.2: a black mask over his carnival nose: Van's member is hidden under his black trunks.

206.6: the same completely unwarranted tears that Ada had once shed: Lucette was at first innocently playing with Van but discovers for the first time that she has participated in stimulating Van's desire. Her reaction is the same as Ada's discovery of Van's sexuality in Chapter 13.27, where Ada writes in "a later note," "I felt there was something dreadful, brutal, dark, and, yes, dreadful, about the whole thing."

206.6-7: the mauve-winged arms: Mlle Lariviere is wearing "mauve flounces" (198.5).