

## Annotations to *Ada* (24)

### Part I: Chapter 42

April 2017

The Kyoto Reading Circle in Collaboration with Brian Boyd

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The Kyoto Reading Circle is deeply grateful, especially this time, to Professor Brian Boyd for his generous comments and corrections given to us when he came to our meetings in Kyoto for an “on-site” *Ada* Forum on Part 1 Chapter 42 in April 2017. The comments contributed by Brian Boyd are indicated by his initials, “BB,” and colored in blue.

#### Part I Chapter 42

**301.1: a very cruel or very stupid person:** Demon and Daniel, respectively.

**301.2: innocent infants:** Ada and Van before their “fall” by incest. Alternatively, the “innocence” might also be ironic but intended by Aqua without irony.

**301.2: Démonia:** Antiterra is called “Démonia” for the first time here.

**302.13: prunella-shod:** “Prunella” is a “strong heavy fabric of worsted twill, used chiefly for

shoe uppers, clerical robes, and academic gowns”

(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/prunella>, March, 17, 2017).



Prunella boot circa 1835-1840

<https://jp.pinterest.com/pin/573646071256091117/>

The plant “prunella” is a genus of herbaceous plants also known as “self-heals,” “heal-all,” or “allheal” for their use in herbal medicine. It is ironic that the old man’s foot is shod with a heal-all, presumably to ease his gout, before being stepped on.



*Prunella vulgaris* (Common Self-heal)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prunella\\_\(plant\)#/media/File:Prunella\\_vulgaris\\_-\\_harilik\\_k%C3%A4bihein.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prunella_(plant)#/media/File:Prunella_vulgaris_-_harilik_k%C3%A4bihein.jpg)

“Prunella” is also an Italian fairy tale about the young girl Prunella (“Little Plum”), who picks a plum and is captured and raised by a witch who demands impossible tasks. She is saved by the witch’s son who loves her. Italo Calvino collected a variant of the tale in *Fiabe Italiane* (1952), translated into English in 1962. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_Folktales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Folktales).

**302.30: “crumpeter”:** A crumpet-serving café. A “crumpet” is an English griddle cake made of flour and yeast.



Crumpet

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/38/Buttered\\_crumpet2.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/38/Buttered_crumpet2.jpg)

“Crumpet” is also British slang, common in the 60’s, for a sexually attractive female. Joan Bakewell, who appeared on high-brow 60’s BBC discussion shows such as *Late Night Line-Up*, was famously described as a “thinking man’s crumpet.”



Joan Bakewell

<https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/images/ic/1200x675/p01h0kkc.jpg>

“Crumpets” are mentioned again on 303.22-23 where Van mentions that they are better at Chose. In the French translation of *Ada*, VN uses “tarteloir” for crumpets to pun on English “tarts” meaning prostitutes. BB: “Peter,” like “Dick,” has been slang for the male member since the mid nineteenth century,

**302.33: Dr. Platonov:** *Platonov* is the name given to an early untitled play by Anton Chekhov, written in 1878. It is also known as *Fatherlessness* and *A Play Without a Title*. It was the first large-scale drama Chekhov wrote specifically for Maria Yermolova, the rising star of Maly Theatre. Yermolova rejected the play and it was not published until 1923. The lead character is "Mikhail Platonov," a disillusioned provincial schoolmaster, and his name is used for the title in English translations. In addition to the mention of Cordula's mother, the theatre motif appears frequently in this chapter .

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonov\\_%28play%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonov_%28play%29), March 30, 2017).

**303.11: the Frasers:** First mention of the family. Bill Fraser, son of Judge Fraser, later gives his account of Percy's death.

**303.25: *un petit topinambour*:** "a little pun," as Vivian Darkbloom notes. The "tuber of the girasole" is a "pun on 'calembour,' which means "pun" in French." *Helianthus tuberosus*, or Jerusalem artichoke, as it is known in English, is a species of sunflower native to eastern North America. Its edible tubular root is cultivated as a vegetable.



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topinambour>

**303.25: as the Teuton said in the story:** This must refer to something but we could not find it. Can anyone give us a suggestion?

**303.29: Womenses:** Women + Menses, i.e., women's troubles.

**304.2: ravine:** See implications of "ravines" (319:20) and "gulches" (336:10). Percy de Prey dies in a ravine; Aqua dies in a gulch.

**304.3: Jack said when his wife 'phoned':** The last word means "dorophoned." VN tends to play with sound when a person's name does not matter. **BB: Names can be generic and interchangeable in *Ada*.** Jack and John, Cordula's supposed lovers, are used in a similar way (not as real names but any male names, like "X and Y"). The same can be seen in Jack, Jake and Jacques in *Transparent Things*. **BB: But he sets this most ordinary pair of names against the wild and riddling exoticism of the Marquis Quizz Quisana.**

**304.6: Marquis Quizz Quisana:** **BB: Quisisana** is the name of a St. Petersburg restaurant on Nevsky Avenue in VN's story, "Sounds," (p. 76, column 1 in the first publication in *The New Yorker*; and p. 18 in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*).

**304.7: A pine forest fizzled out:** A foreshadowing of Van's burning down of "most of Kalugano's pine forest" (446. 2-3).

**304.14-15: "On n'est pas goujat à ce point":** See 119:21 for a similar French phrase, translated as "there are limits to stupidity." **BB: *Goujat* has a much stronger meaning, a much more offensive tone, than simply *bête*.**

**305.13: The Majestic:** Hotels by this name also appear in *Transparent Things* (*TT*, New York: Vintage, 1989, p. 4) and throughout *Glory*. In both cases they are Swiss.

**305.26: his second walking stick:** Van goes through three walking sticks. In this chapter

many things come in threes (see note to 313.23). Van's second stick is a tool of revenge. Loss of the stick (along with a "dismembered newspaper" (see note 311.21)) suggests castration.

**306.3: so he retraced his steps:** Also in *Transparent Things*: "With an oath and a sigh Hugh retraced his steps, which was once a trim metaphor (14)."

**306.7: Arwin Birdfoot:** Reference to Charles Darwin (D'Arwin) 1809–1882, who was a pigeon fancier (Birdfoot). Darwin was too restrained by the mores of his age to mention homosexuality even in animals (Philippa Hardman <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/gender/2011/02/17/what-can-darwin-teach-us-about-sexuality/>, February 17, 2011). It is therefore ironic that he is one of Captain Tapper's homosexual seconds.

Birdfoot is related to "birdsfoot violet," also known as "bird's foot violet" and "mountain pansy." This would mean both "birdfoot" and "Rafin. Esq." have names related to violets. Violets can be hybridized to make garden pansies. "Pansy" is a slur for a homosexual.



*viola pedata* (birdsfoot violet)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola\\_pedata#/media/File:Viola\\_pedata.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola_pedata#/media/File:Viola_pedata.jpg)

**306.9: a foot-long cigarette holder:** BB: This suggests a slightly feminine affectation. Later indicators of this pair's orientation can be seen when Johnny Rafin says he "doesn't know many people with babies" (306.32) and answers that he is "a confirmed bachelor" (306. 34)

when asked about local brothels. See Darkbloom's notes for 306.

**306.9: Rafin, Esq.:** Vivian Darkbloom says that it is “a pun on ‘Rafinesque,’ after whom a violet is named.” See note 306.7 for more on violets.

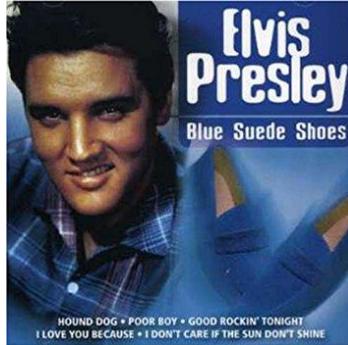
Constantine Samuel Rafinesque (1783-1840) was a French-American botanist, zoologist, anthropologist, geologist and linguist who made a case for the evolution of plants before Darwin's *Origin of Species*. (See [http://www.jstor.org/stable/1634057?\\_redirected#mobileBookmark](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1634057?_redirected#mobileBookmark)). Like John Ray, the “editor” of *Lolita*, Rafinesque is a naturalist. This reference to Rafinesque suggests VN knew the history of naturalists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries very well. Of French and German extraction and widely traveled, Rafinesque ultimately settled in the United States. Like Ada, he began a herbarium at the age of twelve and mastered Latin and Greek by age fourteen. It has been speculated that Rafinesque's fatal cancer may have been induced by his self-medication, years earlier, using a mixture that contained maidenhair fern (see “maidenhair” note, 283.18). The quantity of new taxa he produced, for both plants and animals, made Rafinesque legendary among biologists. VN's use of the name “Rafin” indicates how well-known his name was. The standard author abbreviation “Raf.” is used to indicate Rafinesque as the author when citing a botanical name. BB: Johnny Rafinesque refers to Captain Tapper as “a very refined person” (306.24-25), which Van echoes and mocks: “Did he or the refined Captain know . . .” (306.28), underscoring the hovering pun on “Rafinesque” and the French for “refined,” *raffiné*.



Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, 1783-1840

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rafinesque\\_Constantine\\_Samuel\\_1783-1840.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rafinesque_Constantine_Samuel_1783-1840.png)

**306. 10: dark and dapper and wore blue suede shoes with a dreadful tan suit:** Perhaps he bases his style on Elvis Presley. This is, after all, a chapter abundant in musical references.



Elvis Presley: dark and dapper with blue suede shoes

<https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51rvmJXSk1L. SY355 .jpg>



Two of Presley's "dreadful" tan suits

<http://www.elvisblog.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Two-Jumpsuits1.jpg>

**306.13: his heart belonged to Van's adversary:** This echoes the song, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" composed by Cole Porter in 1938 for the musical *Leave It to Me*. In the film version made in 1960, *Let's Make Love* (starring Marilyn Monroe and Yves Montand), the heroine (played by Monroe) is named Dolly and she says, "My name is Lolita." In the US, *Lolita* was published in 1958.

**306.15: Do-Re-La:** As Darkbloom notes, an anagram for “Ladore” constructed from the “solfège” musical scale (Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti). Because Phillip Rack is a piano teacher, musical references and images abound in this chapter. **BB:** Given Van’s false sense that he will die in the duel, VN is surely playing also with the well-known ballad, now a country and western and folk song standard, “The Streets of Laredo” (first published 1910, authorship claimed by Frank Maynard (1853-1926). The first two stanzas are:

As I walked out in the streets of Laredo  
As I walked out in Laredo one day,  
I spied a poor cowboy, all wrapped in white linen  
All wrapped in white linen and cold as the clay.

"I see by your outfit, that you are a cowboy."  
These words he did say as I slowly passed by.  
"Come sit down beside me and hear my sad story,  
For I'm shot in the chest, and today I must die."

**306.20: finality:** Rhymes with “anality” two lines later.

**306.22: up his gracious anality:** See 201.23 where vulgar Vronsky jokes about sticking a “telegraph pole—where it belongs.” **BB:** Van is making Johnny Rafin, Esq., squirm with a as wounding an insult as possible toward homosexuals.

**306.29: three babies:** See 202.12, “driplets in dry weeks.”

**307.7: flowers in silver vases:** See 31.18, where thirteen-year-old Van visits a shop and sees “Crystal vases with crimson roses and golden-brown asters.”

**307.7-8: receding in the dusk of looking-glasses:** See 494.18: “As she began losing track of

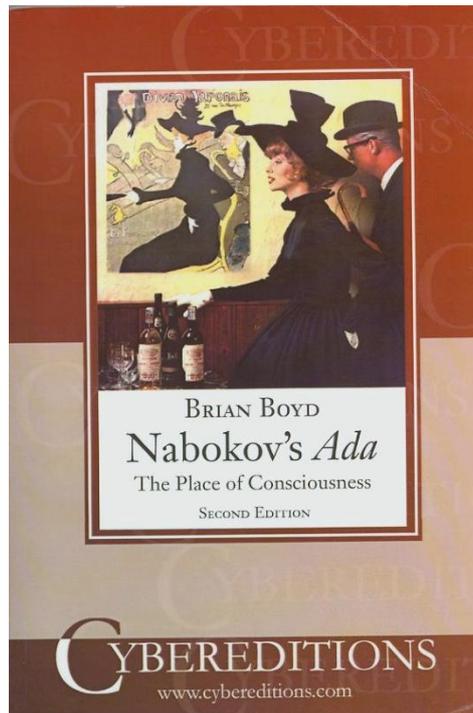
herself, she thought it proper to inform a series of receding Lucettes—telling them to pass it on and on in a trick-crystal regression.” There is a similar passage in *Pale fire*:

He woke to find her standing with a comb in her hand before his [...] cheval glass, a triptych of bottomless light, a really fantastic mirror [...]. She turned about before it: a secret reflection gathered an infinite number of nudes in its depths, garlands of girls in graceful and sorrowful groups, diminishing in the limpid distance, or breaking into individual nymphs (*PF*, 111).

**307.9: Rose? Roza?:** Rose is the schoolgirl in Chapter 4 with whom Van fell in love briefly (31.17 ff). The scene is also recalled by “flowers in silver vases” (see note 307.7). Rose is associated not only with the real, natural rose amongst the artificial ones in the crystal vase but also with a legitimate love Van could have had. Van wonders whether he should have had an ordinary sweetheart like Rose instead of his “fatal” sister.

**307.16: the burning bar:** An after-echo of the “burning barn” scene in Chapter 19.

**307.16: a graceful harlot:** She recalls the woman in black at a bar in Toulouse-Lautrec’s advertisement poster for the cabaret, “Divan Japonais.” Bobbie Ann Mason, in *Nabokov’s Garden*, first cited VN’s reference to the Barton and Guestier poster, a wine advertisement where a woman in black and a man are sitting at a bar and echoing the Lautrec poster on the wall. Brian Boyd uses it as the cover of the second edition of his *Nabokov’s Ada* and discusses it (pp. 130-131). **BB:** [The harlot at the burning bar anticipates Lucette drinking alone at a bar in Paris in Part III Chapter 3. I used the ad as my book’s cover because, in describing Lucette and Van in this scene, Nabokov draws on a Barton and Guestier wine advertisement that appeared in the \*New Yorker\* in the 1960s, including in issues in which his own work appeared, and that playfully echoes and quotes Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s famous poster for Paris’s \*Divan japonais\* cabaret \(Brian Boyd, \*Nabokov’s Ada\* \(rev. 2001 ed.\), 130-31.](#)



Shown with Brian Boyd's permission.

**307.19: In the mirror:** See our note 307.7-8. Also, 119.9-10: “Repeat!” he cried as if she were far away, a reflection in a dark window.”

**308.20: a fey character:** “Fey” and the first three letters of “Dormilona” make “Dorofey.” For more on “dor” wordplay see note for 310.12. “Fey” can mean “effeminate,” “otherworldly” or, in Scottish dialect, “doomed to die.”

**308.21: Dormilona novel for servant maids:** Derived from Spanish *dormir*; the feminine form for “sleepyhead.” It is also the name of a flower, *Mimosa pudica*, whose leaves can be boiled into a tea that helps to induce sleep. **BB:** *Dormilona* is a popular name for the plant *Mimosa pudica*. The name suggests French *dormir* (to sleep) and therefore that such novels seem soporific to Van (and Nabokov), but also that Blanche has to “sleep alone” after her would-be romantic disclosure to Van. The plant’s name in context is highly ironic: its species name, *pudica*, means “bashful” or “shrinking,” and another popular name is “the

sensitive plant,” because of the way its leaves fold in and droop when touched. Blanche is anything but sexually bashful, shrinking, or sensitive, but she is repeatedly infected with sexually transmitted diseases, first gonorrhoea and then perhaps syphilis.



*Mimosa pudica* (dormilona)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mimosa\\_pudica#/media/File:Mimosa\\_pudica\\_-\\_Kerala\\_1.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mimosa_pudica#/media/File:Mimosa_pudica_-_Kerala_1.jpg)

**308.23-24: adored and abhorred:** An echo of the repeated phrase, “arbors and ardors” (54.3-4).

**309.2: ineffable:** This word can also mean “unmentionable” because “Tapper” includes “tap” which may refer to electricity, a forbidden word on Antiterra. Compare with 23.12, “unmentionable Lammer.”

**309.24: Eggbun:** Eggs are Van’s favorite food. See 550.24, “the most exquisite food in the world—a boiled egg.” This may be an autobiographical quirk that VN bestows on Van. VN wrote his own detailed recipe for soft boiled eggs which he named, “Eggs a la Nabocoque” (<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/21/books/nabokov-as-mounted-specimen-a-centennial-celebration-encases-the-writer-s-life.html>, March 30, 2017). VN’s culinary talents did not extend much beyond boiling eggs.

**309.28: Demon's former valet:** Bouteillan is Demon’s former valet.

**309.29: “dor”:** VN continues his “ador”-“dor”-“hydro”-“dorophone” thread of wordplay and

association throughout the chapter. The three shared letters “dor” belong in the most crucial word, “ardor.”

**309.30: Van often had word dreams:** See 292.6-11 where Van has a dream of an avalanche, which turns out to be a “word dream.” In Chapter 16 of *Transparent Things*, an actual avalanche, nightmares and word dreams are also connected in what the narrator calls “verbal colluvia”:

Less frightening but perhaps imperiling a person’s brain to an even greater extent were the “avalanche” nightmares at the rush of awakening when their imagery turned into the movement of verbal colluvia in the valleys of Toss and Thurn, whose gray rounded rocks, *Roches étonnées*, are so termed because of their puzzled and grinning surface, marked by dark “goggles” (*écarquillages*). Dream-man is an idiot not wholly devoid of animal cunning; the fatal flaw in his mind corresponds to the splutter produced by tongue twisters: “the risks scoundrels take” (*TT*60).

The verbal avalanche in Van’s reconstructed dream consists of distorted versions of the word “ardor” in the book’s title: “dor,” “adored,” etc., connecting the ardor of Van and Ada’s love with the fatal water in which Lucette dies.

Another example of distortion by word dreams is the “scream” in Van’s nightmare in Part 1 Chapter 41 which is derived from the words “slight creak” (292.11). A slight creak can literally sound like a scream when sleeping. A revealing example of a word dream can be found in Van’s narration of a “professional dream” in Part 2 Chapter 4 of *Ada*:

I would be hurrying to a reading I had to give—would feel exasperated by the sight of the traffic and people blocking my way, and then realize with sudden relief that all I had to do was to strike out the phrase ‘crowded street’ in my manuscript (360.15-9).

The “dream-man” realizes that he is dreaming and can manipulate what happens in his dream just like a novelist. Van realizes “a soft deep link” between word dreams of his pubescence and his “still-muted genius” (360.25) as a writer.

**309.3-4: the Sorrows of Young Veen:** Reference to *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe [which ends in the hero's suicide for love \(BB\)](#).

**309.5-6: Our torrid affair:** See 253.15: *A Torrid Affair* appears as a film title.

**309.32-310.1: a structurally perfect stool:** Impressively, Van remembers this stool four years later when he has a second “structurally perfect stool (its cruciform symmetry reminding him of the morning before his duel)” (389.13-15). Perhaps the “cruciform symmetry,” not mentioned the first time, can be interpreted as an omen. [BB: By emphasizing that he had an even better-than-normal stool, Van is hinting that he was not frightened by the prospect of the duel.](#)

**310.12: Dorofey Road:** See note to 309.29 for “dor” associations. See 312.17 for further implications of the name “Dorofey.”

**310.17-8: a transparent white butterfly floated past:** Suggests death in VN's other novels also. In *Pale Fire* a white butterfly suggests the presence of Hazel's ghost.

**310.29: by practically all Russian novelists of gentle birth:** A self-reference. There are not many Russian novelists of “gentle birth” who have written about duels except for Pushkin and Nabokov who described a duel in detail in his *Commentary on Eugene Onegin*. There are many other references to this work in this chapter.

**310.34: It was not the chocolate-muncher in Cordula's compartment:** The little boy, Russel (the name appears on 319.2), witnesses Van's assaulting Captain Tapper from the train.

**311.21: Newspapers were dismembered:** VN often uses words of physical incapacitation usually applied to humans for inanimate objects, e.g., “crippled tour book” in *Lolita* (156).

When Van loses his second walking stick with a sharp point capable of gouging out Rack's eyes (305.30), he loses his capacity to take revenge. VN seems to be fond of the metaphoric use of the word "dismembered." In *Speak, Memory* "a dismembered newspaper stirred on a bench" (*SM* 146). VN refers to a "dismembered" correspondence in a letter: "It lay on the floor, dismembered" (*NWL* rev. ed., 2001, 148).

**311.26: macintosh:** Ada wore a macintosh when she came home from the gynecologist (230.10).

**311.29: Lakeview (Lakeview!):** Ironic comment on the hospital which is actually not scenic. Lakeview may refer to the beautiful Lake Kitezh "near Luga, comprising, and practically consisting of, that rare, oddly rectangular though quite natural body of water which a perch he [Daniel Veen] had once clocked took half an hour to cross diagonally and which he owned jointly with his cousin, a great fisherman in his youth" (5.10-13). VN's use of parenthetical asides reveals that it is an addition by the narrator in the real time of narrating. The name may evoke a nostalgic memory in the narrator Van. Similarly, in Chapter 2 of *Transparent Things*, Hugh Person revisits "Ascot Hotel (Ascot!)" (*TT*, New York: Vintage, 1989, p. 3). He repeats this tic once more while in the hospital, on 312.4, "(visit Kalugano!)."

**311.33: palata:** Russian for "hospital" and related to "palace"—again, an ironic comment because a hospital room is not palatial. The best they could do was a copy of his room at the Majestic, a "huge old pile" (305.13).

**312.4-5: His new quarters, where heart-broken kings had tossed in transit:** へーッ : 15

Possible reference to Kinbote of *Pale Fire*, who is heartbroken because he has lost his kingdom.

**312.5-6: a replica in white of his hotel apartment—white furniture, white carpet:** Possible reminder of the fateful white butterfly.

**312.7: Tatiana:** Reference to Pushkin's heroine in *Eugene Onegin*, possibly connected by the theme of dueling.

**312.12: reminded him of Ada:** See へーヅ : 16

199.19-22. When Ada puts on her cap for swimming, it “gave an unfamiliar, vaguely clinical look to her neck...as if she had obtained a nurse's job and would never dance again.”

**312.17: Dorofey, a beefy-handed male nurse:** VN uses “Dorofey” too often in this chapter to escape notice. へーヅ : 16

There is also “Dorofey Road” (310.13 and 313.14), where Rack used to live, and which leads Van to his dueling spot. The syllable “dor” is a part of this chapter's “dor” pattern (see note 309.29). The “doro” may also relate to “dorophone.” In this sense, a water image, a road image and a male nurse are connected by sound. Thus, the male nurse's name may be apt because he acts as “coachman” in taking Van to Rack's bed in Ward Five. In Russian, *doroga*, is “road.” “Road” is an anagram of “ador.” In Russian pronunciation, “Ad,” the Russian for Hell, is also in Ada's name.

**312.25-6: she wrote him a charming and melancholy letter in red ink on pink paper:** Reference to Tatiana again in *EO* who also writes a charming and melancholy letter to Onegin (Chapter 3, Stanza 2). On 208.12 Van sees Rack carrying “a mysterious pink paper tube” which turns out to be the piece of music Rack wrote for Ada.

**312.28-30: the stick, however, could not be located (it must be climbing nowadays Wellington Mountain...:** Reference to Arthur Wellesley, the First Duke of Wellington, the Field Marshal who defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Wellington is an

even more famous military hero in Britain than the Duke of Marlborough. Marlborough (or Marlborough—see our note 288.15) is to Percy de Prey what Wellington is to Van’s heroic picture of himself. Van, in the form of his lost second stick, is climbing the mountain with the heroic name to defeat his enemy. Wellington is the capital of New Zealand and Wellington Mountain is also a mountain in Tasmania, another instance of the cosmic scale of Antiterra’s geographic references to the earth. Judge Fraser, Bill’s father, is “of Wellington” (319.13).

**312.30-1: helping a lady to go "brambling" in Oregon:** Ada goes “brambling” in Ch. 40. The word is a portmanteau meaning “botanical rambling” (285). Ada’s long “brambles” suggest lovers should beware of having sex in the bushes.

**312.31-2: the Third Cane:** Capitalized to emphasize the number three in Rack’s “driplets” and Ada’s three lovers. For more on the “threes” theme, see comments for 313.23. Another reason may be a play on the films “The Third Man” and “Citizen Kane” directed by Orson Wells. To lead up to this word play, see “Wellington” on line 30 and “Oregon” on line 31, the parts of which can be combined as “Or”son “Well”s.

**312.32: knotty, cherry-dark thing with a crook:** Phallic description, apt for Van burning with revenge against his rivals for love.

**312.34: a solid black-rubber heel:** His wish for revenge seems to have been tamed, or “castrated” in this image, since the second cane had been pointed.

**313.2: Doc Fitz:** VN characterizes Dr. Fitzbishop’s speech as American. Such expressions as “the poor guy” and “his old pal” are American; hence the “folksy” Americanized nickname.

**313.07: Sonorola:** a kind of radio. VN had no ear for music, one of many autobiographical

quirks he bestows on Van. As recorded in *NWL* (rev. ed. 2001) VN was hospitalized in 1945 with acute stomach pains caused by a sausage. According to his doctor he suffered a strain of food poisoning called “hemor colitis” (148). VN described American hospitals “where the radio kept emitting hot music, cigarette ads (in a juicy voice from the heart)” (149).

**313.9: “Ward Five”:** Van initially assumes this is the name of a piece of music, probably because it has a number in the title, although it suggests Anton Chekhov’s short story, “Ward Six.”

**313.19: frog-green faeces:** See description of Rack as amphibian as he comes out of the pool with “an amphibious heave” (202.3). Also, note how Van, rather proudly, compares Rack’s “frog-green faeces” with his own “perfect stool” (310.1).

**313.23: Yes, triplets:** へーっ : 18

There are repeated references to the number three in this chapter. Triplets are born to Rack; Van makes three parenthetical exclamations in Lakeview hospital (see note to 311.29); Van’s “third action,” (312.2); “the Third Cane” (312.34-5); Van finds Rack on the third hospital bed (314.1). A possible reason is that Ada has three lovers—Van, Percy and Rack. Another may be the love triangle between Van, Ada, and Lucette.

**313.26-7: he'd better apply a bit of voodoo, ha-ha, on his own flesh and blood:** Stephen Blackwell mentions in *The Quill and the Scalpel* that couples in VN’s fiction rarely have children and if they do, the children tend to die. See *Laughter in the Dark*, *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire*. Rack’s triplets die, too.

**313.31-2: a metal-handled black lid:** *Ada’s* French translation by Gilles Chahine with collaboration of Jean-Bernard Blandenier (published by Fayard), and reviewed by VN, translates this as “un funèbre couvercle,” the lid of a coffin (*Ada ou L’ardeur*, Fayard 1975,

p. 377).

**313.34: *priehali* (we have arrived):** In VN's *Commentary to Onegin*, (Princeton, 196) *Variants* (cancelled drafts) Chapter 1, L.52, line 11, VN comments on the word and the scene which he alludes to here. Onegin, hearing that his uncle is dying, hurries to his bedside. Pushkin writes, "And with this I began my novel." Upon arriving, Ivan, Onegin's coachman, says, "Here we are." The meaning seems to be "we have arrived" or "here we are" –at death. As Onegin goes to visit his dying uncle, Van goes to visit dying Rack. This word does not appear in Pushkin's completed poem. It appears in the cancelled drafts and belongs to the imagined, but not actual, world, in the same sense as "I am Van Veen" (See our note 314.5).

**314.4: *Golos* (*Logos*):** *Golos*, <sup>へ</sup>—<sup>ジ</sup> : 19

"voice" in Russian, is an anagram of *Logos*, "word." *Golos* was a newspaper published in St. Petersburg from 1863 to 1883. *Golos-Logos* suggests dismembering of the word since VN has mentioned "dismembered" newspapers.

**314.5: "I am Van Veen":** There is a similar scene in *The Gift* : When Fyodor talks with Koncheyev for the second time the reader is led to believe that the dialogue really occurred. However, the whole conversation is revealed to have been imagined. When Van tears up his prepared speech and says, "Mr. Rack, open your eyes. I'm Van Veen. A visitor" (315.26), there is a circular movement back to the beginning of his speech.

**314.9: *tvoyu mat'*:** Although VN's note on this phrase ("Thy mother": the end of a popular Russian oath, p. 600), does not mention it, if the word "*yop*" is used before these two words in Russian, it is a common curse phrase approximating "Fuck your mother!"

**314.13: Professor Lamort:** (Fr) "*la mort*" means "death."

**314.28: Mr. Rack:** Rack is linked to “Dack” by sound and also by being German (199.10). Also, Rack’s death is foretold by Ada: “I am dying, yes?” “You are dead, Mr. Rack,” said Ada (202.26-28). ページ : 20

*Rak* in Russian means “cancer.”

**314.31: we simply cannot expect a *second* nothing, a second void:** VN’s *Speak, Memory* begins with the following words:

The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness. Although the two are identical twins, man, as a rule, views the prenatal abyss with more calm than the one he is heading for... (19)

Van does not accept the second abyss, the void of the hereafter. He insists on “some prolonged form of disorganized consciousness” (314.34 – 315.1).

**315.4-5: The little Rack of today is the infinite Rack of tomorrow:** Van’s notion of an afterlife is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept/ thought experiment of the “eternal recurrence,” the notion that one ought to live on the assumption that every moment in life will repeat indefinitely. Van is very much like the “demon” of the following passage:

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more' ... Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? (*The Gay Science*, 341])

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal\\_return#Friedrich\\_Nietzsche](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_return#Friedrich_Nietzsche) April 4, 2017)

**315.5: *ich bin ein unverbesserlicher Witzbold***: “I am an incorrigible joker” in German.

**315.8: the here-and-there-after**: A combination of “here and there,” (haphazardly placed) and “the hereafter” (the afterlife), repeated in “toothaches here...nightmares there.” Space and time are combined in one hyphenated phrase to create the impression of particles of “Rackness” being scattered throughout space-time.

**315.13: nameless tortures**: A pun on Rack’s name.

**315.13: in Tartar camps**: To the Russian imagination, Tartar camps are an image of Hell.

**315.18: panic and pain**: One of VN’s favorite alliterating pairs, used also in *Pnin* (London: Penguin, 1957, p. 23).

**315.23: a chance intruder**: Van refers to himself. This speech itself is like a “chance intruder.” Also, within this dramatic situation, the reader is led to think a real intruder may have appeared and interrupted the speech. With Dorofey within earshot, this speech is dramatically improbable. The speech is imagined to convey Van’s loathing of Rack, and his cruelty. Before this speech, Dorofey is reading the newspaper “*Golos (Logos)*” (See our note 314.4). *Golos* means “voice” in Russian and therefore it is a puzzle intended by Nabokov. This speech, the reader is led to believe, is the “voice” of Van, but actually it is merely the “words” of an imagined speech. Van “tore up his prepared speech” only figuratively.

**315.24: not unfamiliar gesture**: He has recently torn up his letter to his father—therefore, “not unfamiliar.” Also it is possible to interpret this as a reference to Van’s composition of *The Texture of Time*, tearing up pages of his draft. This points to Van’s development as a philosopher and writer.

**316.9-10: A Clever Piggy (from the memoirs of an animal trainer):** A possible reference to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in which clever pigs ultimately rule over the other liberated farm animals. an allegory of Soviet oligarchy.

**316.10-11: "The Crimean War: Tartar Guerillas Help Chinese Troops.":** According to Zimmer's *Geography of Antiterra* ([www.dezimmer.net/ReAda/AntiterraGeography.htm](http://www.dezimmer.net/ReAda/AntiterraGeography.htm)), as in our 20<sup>th</sup> century, east and west are in political conflict on *Antiterra*. Tartars invaded Russia and Russians emigrated to America-Canada in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, like the Russian émigrés in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The "Allies" (English and Americans) invaded the Crimean peninsula and recaptured Bessarabia and Armenia from the Tartars (the Soviet Union). The Cold-war alliance between the Soviet Union and China is suggested by the alliance of the Tartars with "Chinese troops."

**316.16: "Have they all gone to Hollywood already?":** Rack heard what Marina said at the picnic: "After that we shall go to Houssaie *Gollivud-tozh*." "Gollivud" is the Russian for "Hollywood."

**316.20: I sent my last flute melody:** See 208.13: ページ : 22

Rack brings his composition of a flute melody, "his mysterious pink-paper tube."

**316.31: Lovely Tatiana:** See our annotations for 312.7 and 313.34.

**317.9: Bernard Rattner:** ページ : 22

Nephew of the philosopher Rattner who is modeled after Bertrand Russell who co-authored, with A. N. Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica* (*Principles of Mathematics*, 1903). Whitehead's name appears in a title, "Whitehead's Bright Fringe," in Part V, Chapter 5 (579). In addition, in 319.2, Dr. Platonov's grandson is named "Russel." Nabokov conflates, on Demonia, the Crimean war with the Vietnam War which still raged during *Ada's*

composition. Van intends to “demolish” Russel (317.13), possibly because Bertrand Russell opposed the Vietnam War. VN was in favor. Brian Boyd writes: “Unlike most other American intellectuals, Nabokov thought of Vietnam almost entirely in light of the crushing of freedom that the region would suffer after any extension of Soviet influence.” He sent President Lyndon Johnson a telegram at the time of his gall-bladder operation wishing him “a speedy return to the admirable work you are accomplishing” (*AY*, New Jersey: Princeton, 1991, p. 503).

In his book, *Book Business: Publishing Past Present and Future* (Norton 2001), Jason Epstein, who was a long-time friend of VN and an editor at Doubleday, mentions the same telegram (77). Epstein fell out with VN over their political differences and VN dismissed him from the board of his literary trust. In *Playboy*'s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Lolita* issue (December 2005), Epstein narrates that, on one evening, in order to provoke him, VN made a toast to Nixon, causing Vera to fear a scene. Epstein quietly raised his glass (104). In a letter dated July 11, 1970 (Berg Collection, New York Public Library), VN wrote to Epstein offering to make peace. Epstein accepted.

Nabokov might have had philosophical differences with Russell rather than purely political ones. However, in an interview with the *Paris Review*, VN says:

In home politics I am strongly anti-segregationist. In foreign policy, I am definitely on the government's side. And when in doubt, I always follow the simple method of choosing that line of conduct which may be the most displeasing to the Reds and the Russells.

(<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4310/vladimir-nabokov-the-art-of-fiction-no-40-vladimir-nabokov>, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

**317.11: uncle has most honest standards:** As Darkbloom's note points out, the original word is “principles” in *Eugene Onegin*, not “standards.” Perhaps “Uncle” Sam is being implied, given the political overtones of this passage.

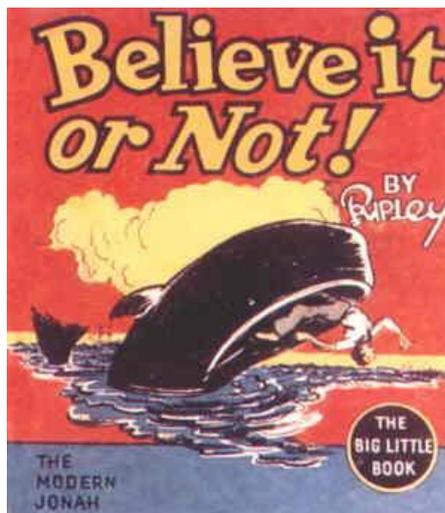
317.17: *arethusoides*: Arethusa is an orchid, which connects the poison to Ada—"the poisoned point of Ardis. Arrowhead Manor..." (318.6).

317.21: *poshlyak* ("pretentious vulgarian"): ページ : 23

This word is discussed in VN's *Nikolai Gogol*:

From the various examples...it will be clear that *poshlust* is not only the obviously trashy but also the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive. A list of literary characters personifying *poshlust* (and thus the male in Russian *poshlyaki* in the case of males and *poshlyachki* in the case of females—and rhyming with "key" and "latchkey" respectively... (*NG*, New York: Penguin Classics, 2011, p. 70).

317.28: **Ripley**: British comics writer Robert Leroy Ripley (1893–1949) wrote up true stories that were hard to believe as comic strips. The comic series "Ripley's Believe it or Not" began in 1918. Any event that seemed unbelievable could be called a "Ripley event." The concept was adopted by radio programs later.



<http://www.toonopedia.com/believit.htm>

317.28: "The Structure of Space": In *Look at the Harlequins*, Vadim writes about the

“Substance of Space” (*LATH*, Vintage, p. 189). When Vadim has his future wife read it she tells him he is confusing space with time.

**317.29: its phoney formulas:** Pun on “phone.” See Charles Nicol’s article on *Ada’s* Terra-Antiterra theme in *Nabokov’s Fifth Arc: Nabokov and Others on His Life’s Work* (Univ. of Texas Press, 1970). Nicol points out that Antiterra is Van’s fantasy.

**318.6-7: the poisoned point of Ardis. Arrowhead Manor. *Le Château de la Flèche*, Flesh Hall :** See ページ : 25

225.21. “Ardis” means “the point of an arrow” in Greek. In 288.1-2, “The pain from the fang bite was now reaching his heart.” The metaphors of poison and arrowheads combine. Also the “arrow” and the “flesh” are linked in “Flèche” which is French for “arrowhead.” **BB:** [Quilty asserts incidentally that “A Frenchman once translated my Proud Flesh as La Fierté de la Chair \(\*Lolita\* 296\).](#)

**319.10: more and more dreadful details with every telling:** Many of the details in the story told by Bill Fraser are impossible for him to have seen or heard. Bill is a totally unreliable narrator, according to Cordula, and his story changes with each telling. Fraser is a pun on “phraser,” defined as a “deviser or user of (especially distinctive or striking) phrases—a phrasemonger. In later use also: a person who shapes musical phrases (well, badly, etc.)” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/phraser>, April 2, 2017).

**319.15: cornel:** See 185.24-7: Rita, a Crimean cabaret dancer performing with Van in Mascodagama shows, is a “pretty Karaite from Chufut Kale,” who recalls nostalgically “the Crimean cornel, *kizil*, bloomed yellow among the arid rocks. She bears an odd resemblance to Lucette as she was to look ten years later.”

**319.24: as we fainted, too:** This passage (up until the parenthetical “One wonders...” ) is a

paraphrase of what Van hears from Bill Fraser.

BB: This is Van interpolating an authorial “we”: he too fainted after receiving his pistol-shot wound from Captain Tapper: “He dreaded losing consciousness, but maybe, did faint briefly, because next moment . . .” (311.08-11)

Following up BB’s significant interpretation above, KRC later compared translations of *Ada* in several languages—French, Russian, Italian and Spanish and found interesting differences.

“As we fainted, too” is translated in the French version as “ (*comme Fraser le fit lui aussi*)” meaning “as Fraser also did (=fainted)” (*Ada ou l’ardeur*; trans. Gilles Chahine with collaboration of Jean-Bernard Blandenier, “traduction revue par l’auteur,” or translation reviewed by the author, published by Fayard, p. 384).

However, in the Russian translation, which was not reviewed by Nabokov, the authorial “we” is used, meaning Van (как и в нашем случае) . The publication data in Russian is as follows: В.Набоков.Ада или радости страсти.Семейная хроника в переводе Сергея Ильина. Собрание сочинений американского периода в пяти томах. СПб. 1999. С.310.

In the translations into the other two languages, the authorial “we” is interpreted as Bill Frazer as in the French version. The different placement of parentheses also adds different shades of interpretation. In the Italian translation (Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada o ardore*, trans. Margherita Crepax, Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 333), the parenthesis which begins the paragraph is gone, and “as we fainted, too” is in parentheses. The translation means “as we, too, fainted,’ said Fraser.”

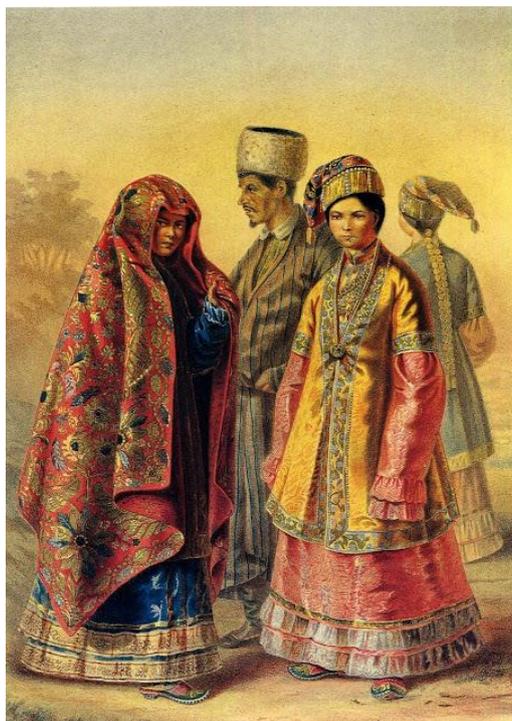
In the Spanish translation (Vladimir Nabokov. *Ada o el ardor*; trans. David Molinet, Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 267), the parenthesis beginning the paragraph is taken out, as is also the parenthesis before “One wonders” and at the end of the paragraph. It puts parentheses around “as we fainted” and translates back into English, “as did Frazer.”

These differences lead to a logical supposition: Since the French translation which was reviewed by Nabokov came out first, the later translations must have followed its

example. The Russian translator obviously did not depend on the French version. KRC had at first checked the French translation only and, although puzzled by the plural “we,” we had interpreted it to mean Frazer also. BB has given us a revealing solution.

**319.28: another casualty was resting comfortably:** Although Percy does not recognize him, this is cowardly Bill Fraser, who looks on instead of trying to help his countryman crawling toward him.

**319.31: *beshmeŭ*:** A native Tartar costume of the northern Caucasus region worn by both men and women, with a stand-up collar, and appears often in Russian literary works that deal with costumes of Turkish and Caucasus cultures (Р.Кирсанова. *В русской художественной культуре 18- первой половины 20 вв.* 1995. М.С.41.).



Painted by Gustav Feodor Pauli, 1862

<http://folkcostume.blogspot.jp/2011/05/traditional-costume-of-Tartarstan.html>

**320.1: “Karasho, karasho ne bol’no (good, good),” said the kindly old man:** In Tolstoy’s “A

Prisoner in the Caucasus: A True Story,” which Brian Boyd has linked to this episode in another passage (320.14), the rich Tartar Abdul-Murat, who buys the Russian prisoner Zhilin from the red-bearded Tartar Kazi-Muhamed, treats him well because he hopes to get a ransom for him and often says, “Me good, you good,” the only Russian words he knows. “Harasho” is often pronounced as “Karasho” among Tartars today.

**320.4-22: One wonders . . . a stab of Ardis:** In *Pnin*, when Pnin remembers Mira’s death, a similar process occurs—narrating the death of someone without the necessary information. In *Pnin*, the many possible ways in which Mira may have died are imagined by Pnin but not described in such detail as in Van’s “suppositions” of the stream of consciousness in Percy’s mind at the instant he was killed.

And since the exact form of her death had not been recorded, Mira kept dying a great number of deaths in one’s mind, and undergoing a great number of resurrections, only to die again and again, led away by a trained nurse, inoculated with filth, tetanus bacilli, broken glass, gassed in a sham shower bath with prussic acid, burned alive in a pit on a gasoline-soaked pile of beechwood. (*Pnin*, 134)

**320.14-5: daughter with pitcher:** In Percy’s last thoughts, he imagines the daughter of the kind Tartar bringing a pitcher of water for him to slake his thirst.

According to Brian Boyd’s note in the Library of America edition, this is a reference to Lev Tolstoy’s short story, “A Prisoner in the Caucasus: A True Story” (1872). A Russian officer named Zhilin is caught by the Tartars. He is thirsty and is given water to drink by a young girl named Dina, the daughter of the Tartar Kazi-Muhamed who had captured him. Zhilin tries to escape twice. The first time, he is caught and the Tartars plan to kill him but the second time Dina helps him escape successfully. The following is the description (translated by Angus Roxburg ) of Zhilin’s first sight of Dina and her father.

Then he saw a young Tartar girl coming up the hill, wearing a colorful, ungirt blouse, trousers and boots. She had a caftan draped over her head, and her back was taut as

she carried a large tin pitcher of water on top of her head and led a shaven-headed boy, dressed only in shirt, by the hand. The girl took the water into the hut, and then the red-bearded Tartar of the previous day came out, wearing a quilted silk *besbmet*, sandals on his bare feet, and a silver dagger slung from his belt

(<http://predki.314159.ru/tolsty1.htm>, April 4, 2017)

**320.16: Broken-Arm Bill:** A suitably pseudo-native-American name in the context of the Tartar's "quasi-Red Indian little wrinkles." The Tartar's "Red Indian" face and American blue-jeans are motifs of romantic (or pastiche) Americana. They may also suggest the story of Captain John Smith saved by the Indian chief's daughter Pocahontas. Bill Fraser's wishful thinking is shown in picturing himself wounded. See 320.17-20, "the pitcher peri."

**320.16: his Roman deity:** "By Jove," "By Jupiter!" etc.

**320.19: pitcher peri:** See 19.21-3: Demon sees his wife and his mistress as "twin peris, an Aquamarina both single and double, a mirage in an emirate, a geminate gem, an orgy of epithelial alliterations." In Persian fairy tales, a "peri" is a beautiful fairy.

**320.20: stab of Ardis:** Another *double entendre* combining Ardis, the place, with the word's original meaning, "arrowhead." The arrow metaphor is repeated again in **320.24: Ada's lethal shafts.**

**321.17-8: *encore un petit enfantôme*:** *Enfant* and *fantome*. Infant and phantom. A dead baby's ghost.

**321.19: Did I say anything wrong?:** へーッ : 29

Though Van denies it, Cordula's casual mention of "another abortion" obviously bothers him, otherwise she would not have asked the question. The only scene that seems to

suggest another abortion is when Ada comes back from her gynecologist reeking of cigarette smoke (234.26+) and Van suspects she has had a secret tryst with a rival. Here, Van may also be bothered by remembering Rack's dead triplets.