

Annotations to *Ada*

Part II: Chapter 1 December 2018

The Kyoto Reading Circle

The following members of the Kyoto Reading Circle are equally responsible for the text here: Akitoshi Fukazawa, Mihoko Fukutani, Atsushi Goto, Tomoko Hashimoto, Maya Minao Medlock, Makiko Mieuli, Shoko Miura, Akiko Nakata, Mitsunori Sagae, Richard Smith and Tadashi Wakashima. Page and line references to *Ada* and all Nabokov works are to the Vintage International edition unless otherwise noted. At our meeting on October 27, 2018, we were fortunate enough to receive as guest members Brian Boyd of University of Auckland and Monica Manolescu of University of Strasbourg, who represented the Nabokov Society of France. We are especially grateful for their generous contributions. Brian Boyd's annotations are marked as "BB" in blue. Monica Manolescu's annotations were based on the Pléiade annotations of *Ada* by Marie Bouchet, Yannicke Chupin, Agnès Edel-Roy and Monica Manolescu and will be marked as "MM/Pléiade" in red.

Part II Chapter 1

329.02: the silk hat: **MM/Pléiade:** In French, one expression for a top hat is *huit reflets* because the silk is so brilliant that it is considered to shine with eight reflections. As Demon sits by a mirror, his hat's brilliance is doubled. *Huit reflets* is actually the translation of the phrase "silk hat" in the French translation of *Ada* by Gilles Chahine and Jean-Bernard Blandenier, revised by Vladimir Nabokov.

329.10: smarter (in all senses of the word): Not just "smart" as in "intelligent" and "fashionable" but also "hurting."

329.14: the evil days of 1859: The "L" Disaster occurred before the second half of the 19th century, as mentioned in the first two paragraphs of Part I, Chapter 2.

329.14-15: Gamaliel: See Part I Chapter 2, 14:21-23: "decrepit but indestructible Gamaliel," and Brian Boyd's *Ada Online* annotation (<http://www.ada.auckland.ac.nz/>). The name appears also in 84.7: "(old Gamaliel was by now pretty gaga)."

329.15-16: King Victor: See 140.9 "H.R.M. King Victor," the male version of Queen Victoria of Britain. **BB:** [Queen Victoria was notoriously prudish, unlike this king.](#)

329.16: Cuba or Hecuba: See 152.30. Eleven-year-old Van went to Nice while his

father Demon and Dan were elsewhere. “Demon was having a much better time in Cuba than Dan was at Mocuba.” Hecuba, the name of the Trojan queen when Troy fell, may be for Van a woman rather than a place.

329.17: Lord Goal: DeGaulle was President of France when VN was writing *Ada*. **MM/Pléiade:** This is one example of VN’s awareness of a contemporary event. On July 24, 1967, in his speech during his visit to Quebec, he caused a diplomatic crisis by using the phrase, “Vive le Québec libre!”

329.18: randonnies: (Fr) *randonnées*, meaning excursions.

330.01: James Jones: Also the name of a living American author at the time of VN’s writing *Ada*, the author of *From Here to Eternity* (novel published by Scribner’s, 1951). Its film version (1953) was extremely popular. As VN’s character, James Jones is a detective. A “Hemlock Jones” is a detective parodying Sherlock Holmes in Bret Harte’s *Stolen Cigar-Case* (1900).

330.03: A flurry and flapping: Van senses that Demon has started to become impatient but decides not to act hastily. Demon is called “Raven Veen”; hence the image of flapping wings.

330.18-19: my friend Bessborodko: In Russian *bes* means “devil” but *bez* means “without” and *borodko* means “beard.” *Bezborodko* would mean “beardless.” The historical figure Alexander Andreevitch Bezborodko, succeeded Prince Potemkin after the latter’s death and signed the Treaty of Jassy that ended the Russo-Turkish War (1787-1892). He was a daily adviser on important matters to Russia’s Catherine II. He obtained Turkey’s recognition of the annexation of the Crimea (1783) and other lands obtained by Russia. Bezborodko is also a model for the character Pierre Bezukhov in *War and Peace* by Tolstoy. “Bez” means “without,” “ukho” means “ear.” VN had merely switched “ear” to “beard,” reversing Tolstoy’s dissimulation.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Jassy

<https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Alexander+Bezborodko>



Alexander Andreevitch Bezborodko

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Bezborodko#/media/File:A.A._Bezborodko_a

[fter Lampi \(ca. 1800, Hillwood\).jpg](#)

BB: Besides “Lord Goal” (329.17), there is another Canada (and therefore “Canady”) connection: Vere Ponsonby, (1880-56) the Ninth Earl of Bessborough, was Governor General of Canada, 1931-35.

330.19: Bessarabia: Bessa in Russian means “fall in stocks” which explains Demon's joy at the “zoom” (330.17), caused by Canady's victory in the war against Crimea.

330.23-4: ‘In a couple of years,’ said Van, ‘I’ll slide into my own little millions’: This means, then, that since Van is 18 at this point in time, at 20, he would reach the age to inherit his mother's wealth.

330.25: we have interrupted our affair for the time being: Van hints ironically at Demon's and Marina's easily interrupting their affair more than once.

330.26: *girlinière*: “A flat for girls,” but sexual meaning hinted since later Demon calls Cordula a “poule.” Play on “garçonnière” (Fr), a single man's flat—therefore, *girlinière* is a single girl's flat).

330.29: Crime Copulate: is a play on “Crimea Capitulates.” “Crime” because James Jones is dressed like a detective. “Cop” is American slang for “policeman.”

330.31: the evasive taciturnity of the Roman rabbi shielding Barabbas: Van evades protest against the insult to Cordula just as the Hebrew rabbi urged Pilate to release Barabbas instead of Jesus. The Hebrew priests (“Roman rabbis”) forced Pilate to grant pardon and release the criminal Barabbas instead of Jesus on the day of the Passover, thus causing Jesus to be crucified, Mark 15:6-11 (*New International Version, The Bible* <http://biblehub.com/niv/mark/15.htm>). See also **91.16: the Roman colonists, who crucified Christian Jews and Barrabits,**

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331.10: *mestechko*: (Rus) a toilet. See 127.15 and also Darkbloom's note on 601.

331.16: Bosch's *Bateau Ivre*: *Le Bateau Ivre (The Drunken Boat)* is a 100-line poem by Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) who belonged to the French Symbolist movement.



Arthur Rimbaud

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Rimbaud

Nabokov translated this poem into Russian in 1928. Darkbloom insists this refers to Rimbaud's poem "sottish ship" instead of "ship of fools" (601). However, see our note **331.18** for refutation of this suggestion.

Dan Veen's favorite painter Hieronymus Bosch (real name Hieronymus van Aken, (1450-1516), was the Dutch painter of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, which will be referred to extensively in Part II Chapter 9, and *The Last Judgment*, as well as *The Ship of Fools*.



Hieronymus Bosch

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hieronymus_Bosch

Dendrochronological study has dated the wood to 1491, and it is tempting to see the painting as a response to Sebastian Brant's *The Ship of Fools*, (see our next note) or *Das Narrenschiff* in the illustrations of the first edition of 1493.

331.18: Brant's satirical poem: Sebastian Brant (or Brandt), (1457-1521) German satirical poet best known for his poem *Das Narrenschiff* (1494), the most popular German literary work of the fifteenth century.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sebastian-Brant>

Bosch painted *The Ship of Fools* as a part of a triptych in 1491 and therefore it is impossible to think, as Dan did, that Brant had influenced Bosch whose poem is dated 1494. VN is of the same opinion.



Brant's *Das Narrenschiff*



Bosch's *The Ship of Fools*

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Narrenschiff_\(Brant\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Narrenschiff_(Brant))

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a2/Jheronimus_Bosch_011.jpg

331.27: another VPL agent, an elderly gent in a bowler, whose matter-of-fact, undertakerish aspect might irritate Mr. Van Veen less: **MM/Pléiade**: The bowler hat and undertakerish aspect suggest a reference to the undertaker in Samuel Beckett's poem "Malacoda" included in the collection *Echo's Bones*, published in 1935. Beckett's undertaker is reminiscent of Malacoda, which means "evil tail", who is the leader of devils guarding bolgia five of the eighth circle of Hell mentioned in Dante's *Inferno*, Canto XXI.

https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=ZutoDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT242&lpg=PT242&dq=Bec+kett+Samuel+Mala+Coda&source=bl&ots=f9euG6P-tF&sig=0V8ZAZ3LRoFODl4gsOeb2oV_M_E&hl=ja&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiB0O2w5uTeAhVIyrvKHWqsAqoQ6AEwChOECAGQAQ

332.24: **when I must have been seven or eight**: See 149.08, "In 1880, when Van was ten." Demon takes Van to "gay resorts in Louisiana and Nevada." Demon is called a

“camler” –a camel driver,” which explains Ada’s mention of “*karavansaray*,” implying a “caravan” of camels.

332.27: *iz ada* : See 29:28-29: “My sister’s sister who *teper’ iz ada* (now is out of hell)” in Part I, toward the end of Chapter 2. The repetition of this phrase shows that this chapter forms a parallel pattern to Part II-Chapter 1 with a duel scene over a woman (Marina, Ada) and a pleading letter (by Aqua in I-2, by Ada in II-1).

333.02: candy-pink and pisang-green albergo: The two colors of pink (or rose) and green are often combined in *Ada*. See quote from Baudelaire in our annotation to Part II Chapter 9, 430.23: “Dawn *en robe rose et verte*.”

BB: In Part I, Chapter 42, 317.8: the “Pisang Palace” is mentioned as a hotel in Los Angeles, a clear reference to the Beverly Hills Hotel, (nicknamed the Pink Palace), whose rooms are decorated with pink wallpaper with pisang green leaves. Pisang is a plantain.

“Albergo” means a hotel or an inn. Ada tried her talent for acting in Hollywood whose landmark Hall of Fame is Grauman's Chinese Theater, which is colored pinkish red and green.



Grauman's Chinese Theater

https://www.google.co.jp/search?q=grauman%27s+chinese+theatre&tbm=isch&source=i u&ictx=1&fir=fesR24awEh35nM%253A%252CIp1SNXtMuQaz4M%252C &usg= K4Z 54VM-9U3GEHFcip8CbDQM7_g%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwix7Lee-pLaAhWCjpQKH SRxABwQ9QELiAEwBw#imgrc=5LfJtfDrTiyS1M:

333.03: where you once stayed with your father: The “gay resort” in Nevada (see our note above, **332.24**, and reinforced by the next two lines. 333.11-12: “the most interesting of Chekhov's Four Sisters.” Chekhov's *Three Sisters* will be expanded in detail in Part II Chapter 9 where Ada talks at length on acting.

333.12: Stan's principle: the Stanislavsky method. The “Stanislavsky system,” also called the “Stanislavsky method,” is “the highly influential system of dramatic training developed over years of trial and error by the Russian actor, producer, and theoretician Konstantin Stanislavsky. He began with attempts to find a style of acting more appropriate to the greater realism of 20th-century drama than the histrionic acting styles of the 19th century. He never intended, however, to develop a new style of acting but rather meant to codify in teaching and performing regimens the ways in which great actors always have achieved success in their work, regardless of prevailing acting styles.” <https://www.britannica.com/art/Stanislavsky-system>

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333.19: not quite gratis: VN often makes humorous distortions of well-known phrases (non-grata) as a pun.

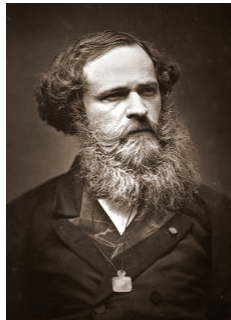
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333.19. Universal City: Hitchcock's film *The Birds* was made in 1963 before VN wrote *Ada*. VN and Hitchcock wrote to each other on whether VN should script Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* (1966, written not by VN but by Brian Moore).

333.20-23: special bungalow. . .the Houssaie atmosphere: The holly plant is *houx* in French; *houssaie* would mean “a place where holly occurs in abundance,” and thus refers to “Hollywood,” the fake setting for making the Western film that Ada has acted in. Hitchcock's *The Birds* (330.28: “a truly marvelous ornithological film” was filmed in Hollywood by Universal Studios where he was given a special bungalow.

Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896) was a French novelist, poet and critic on literature and art. He wrote numerous novels, among which are *La Couronne de bluets* (1836) (see later note) and *Les Trois Soeurs* (1846) (cf. our note 333.12), both relevant to *Ada*. He was editor of *L'Artiste* and became administrator of the Théâtre Français. He lived a Bohemian life in Paris and became friends with Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, who shared his lodging, Theodore de Banville, and Charles Baudelaire, who dedicated the poems of his *Spleen de Paris* to him, although they fell out later. He was director of *La Revue de Paris et de St. Petersburg* (1888).

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ars%C3%A8ne_Houssaye



Arsène Houssaie

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ars%C3%A8ne_Houssaye

For “**bleuets**” (as in Houssaye’s *La Couronne de bleuets*), see Boyd’s extensive Annotation to Part I Chapter 20, 128.22-25 about the flowers caught in the wheels of a buggy, a scene which Darkbloom quotes (595) from “Floeberg’s *Ursula*,” and which, according to BB, is an oblique reference to Flaubert’s “icy objectivity” in *Madame Bovary*. “Bleuets” are flowers (*houstonia caerulea*) native to eastern Canada and eastern U.S. For *Houstonia pusilla*, see also BB:
<http://www.ada.auckland.ac.nz/12824bleuets.htm>



Blueets

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Houstonia_caerulea

333.29: paleotropical sunbirds (look them up!) are “mimotypes” of the New World hummingbirds: VN tells his readers to look up *sunbird* in his favorite Webster's Dictionary, Second Edition, but actually, the meaningful word we should look up is *mimotype*. VN does not guide his readers without a trick. It defines “mimotype” as follows: “A type of animal life resembling in many respects that of a different country but not closely related to it; . . . the hummingbirds of America are *mimotypes* of the sunbirds.”

333.30: (look them up!): MM/Pléiade: Another of VN’s intentional misdirections. The French translation is “(cherchez-le dans Austin!)” referring to Oliver L. Austin (1903-88), French ornithologist, author of the tremendously popular *Birds of the World*.

334.08: The fire you rubbed: Sexual images such as this and others in this chapter-- “the red rash,” “your sting,” “horn”--emphasize Ada's ardent narrative of their affair. Fire also connects this chapter to the barn-burning scene in Part I, Chapter 19.

334.20: yew: Play on the tree, “yew,” and “you.” The yew tree bears fleshy red fruit as in the photograph below:



Yew fruit

https://www.google.co.jp/search?q=aril+vew+flesh&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiWiP7ttYnaAhUEObwKHWh3DycQ_AUICigB&biw=985&bih=420#imgre=1zO0kA2VihNN

334.20: Cinderella de Torf (now Madame Trofim Fartukov): This is where the fact that Blanche married Trofim Fartukov, the Veens' driver, becomes clear. (See previous hint on p. 300)

334.23: je suis sur la verge: Word play on the English phrase “on the verge” and *verge*, French for “penis.”

334.28: burning tip of Patagonia: As Darkbloom's note for p. 334 explains, Jules Verne makes a point in his *Captain Grant's Children* by paying attention to “agonie” as a part of “Patagonie.” VN makes frequent word play with “agony”: Cf. Patagony (136.13), Agony (481.3) and Patagonia (582:10). In Russian, *ogon'* means “fire.”

335.10: Thargelion: A month in the Greek calendar. *Thargelia* in honor of Apollo is the 11th month according to the Athenian Calendar but the first month begins after the summer solstice. Thus, it is supposed by many sources to be a spring month between April and June. “*Thargelion* owes its name to the verb 'warm' ('therein') and the name of the Sun (Helios), meaning the warming by the Sun. Thus the relevant festival was held in honor of Apollo, as the god of the sunny warmth, with the power of which the fruits grow. *Thargelion* was considered as the birth date of Apollo in Delos. “ www.epistemeacademy.org/calendars/documents/Thargelia.pdf

335.12: the sister of your Blanche: Madelon is Blanche's younger sister, who had been seduced and deserted by Percy and who wrote the note revealing Ada's affair with Percy to Van (299.16).

335.12: a stable boy: The youngest of Blanche's sisters who had dressed herself as a stable boy to deliver a letter to Van (299.18-21).

335.12: the three demoiselles de Tourbe: Blanche and her two sisters' home is in Tourbiere.

335.22: [sic! “run” in her blue stocking. Ed.]: See 49.4-6: “Mlle Larivière called her [Blanche] “Cendrillon” because her stockings got so easily laddered . . . and because she broke and mislaid things, and confused flowers.” See also 165.17-19: Van tells Cordula that Ada is “A trifle on the blue-stocking side, perhaps, and, at the same time, impudent and capricious—but, yes, sweet.” A “bluestocking” is an educated, intellectual woman, originating from the name of an eighteenth-century English society of such women called “The Blue Stockings Society.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Stockings_Society

336.9-10: the little gulch in which Aqua died and into which I myself feel like creeping some day: “gulch,” ravine,” and “gully” are words associated with death because Aqua died in a gulch. See 28.22: “a suitable gulch in the chaparral.”

Ada acted in a Western movie. Western movies are third rank in Lolita’s favorite film genres—another link between these two novels. Words such as “gulch” and “chaparral” suggest desert landscape of the Wild West often described in Westerns. In Part II, Chapter 3 of *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert mentions a town called “Roaring Gulch” in a Western movie that he and Lolita saw during their first trip across the U.S.A.:

Finally there was the mahogany landscape, the florid-faced, blue-eyed roughriders, the prim pretty schoolteacher arriving in Roaring Gulch, the rearing horse, the spectacular stampede, the pistol thrust through the shivered windowpane, the stupendous fist fight, the crushing mountain of dusty old-fashioned furniture, (*The Annotated Lolita* 170-71).

During Humbert’s second trip across the U.S.A., in the Elphinstone hospital scene in Part 2, Chapter 22 of *Lolita*, “Roaring Gulch” is again mentioned:

Not without a secret flow of dreamy *malice*, visionary Mary (next time it will be *une belle dame toute en bleu* floating through Roaring Gulch) plucked me by the sleeve to lead me out. (*The Annotated Lolita* 244).

Gary Scharnhorst, in his biography of Bret Harte, points out that Nabokov combined the titles of two of Harte’s stories in “Roaring Gulch”:

“The Idyl of Red Gulch” (December 1869) juxtaposes a wanton westerner, the dissolute miner Sandy Morton, with a genteel easterner, the chaste schoolmarm Miss Mary, who is the lineal ancestor of such civilization as Molly Stark Wood in Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* and Amy Kane (played by Grace Kelly) in the movie western *High Noon*. Vladimir Nabokov also refers in *Lolita* to the “prim pretty schoolteacher arriving in Roaring Gulch”—a transparent allusion to Harte’s story, even as he conflates “Roaring Camp” and “Red Gulch.” (Gary

Scharnhorst, *Bret Harte: Opening the American Literary West*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2000, p.45)

Also, "In a Ravine," or "In the Gully," as Nabokov translated the title from Russian, is a short story by Anton Chekhov (1900), a shockingly tragic story of a village family and a baby killed because of the struggle among its members and their mutual deceit. Nabokov rates this story highly in his *Lectures on Russian Literature*, pp. 164-174.

336.17-19: The expansion of the past, the luxuriant growth of memory had magnified that number to at least fifty: A concrete example of how memory magnifies the past to prove Van's theory that time (**BB and MM/Pléiade**) is experienced and recalled: not by clockwork, but by the emotional value of one event to another. This logically connects to 337.10-14 on Van's book, *Texture of Time*.

337.04: one gold dollar: The currency of Antiterra, or at least Ardis, is in gold dollar coins.

337.07: a lunar volcano: In *Strong Opinions*, VN tells of his excitement at the moon landing of Apollo 11, which succeeded in 1969, the same year that *Ada* was published:

Did you sit up to watch the Americans land on the moon? Were you impressed?

Oh, "impressed" is not the right word! Treading the soil of the moon gives one, I imagine (or rather my projected self imagines), the most remarkable romantic thrill ever experienced in the history of discovery. *Of course*, I rented a television set to watch every moment of their marvelous adventure. That gentle little minute that despite their awkward suits the two men danced with such grace to the tune of lunar gravity was a lovely sight. (*Strong Opinions* 149-50 [An Interview by James Mossman on Sept 8, 1969, for *Review*, BBC-2 (Oct 4)])

VN cabled a more compact reply to the same query, using the word "Terra."

TREADING THE SOIL OF THE MOON PALPATING ITS PEBBLES TASTING
THE PANIC AND SPLENDOR OF THE EVENT FEELING IN THE PIT OF
ONES STOMACH THE SEPARATION FROM TERRA THESE FORM THE
MOST ROMANTIC SENSATION AN EXPLORER HAS EVER KNOWN"
(*Strong Opinions* 217 ["Letters to Editors"])

Brian Boyd in his biography of VN points out the importance of the moon landing to VN's imagination while writing *Ada*:

He had set *Ada* on Antiterra partly in response to his sense of the romance of space travel. As a boy he had been exhilarated by voyages of discovery; as a man

he had written a play about Captain Scott, a story about exploring the jungles of South America, a novel that follows an explorer into the mountains of Central Asia, and another story that launches its hero toward an unnamed planet. Now he rented a television set to watch every moment of the “marvelous adventure” of the first moon landing.” (Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991, 569-70)

337.10-14: when working on his *Texture of Time*, Van found in that phenomenon additional proof of real time’s being connected with the interval between events, not with their “passage,” not with their blending, not with their shading the gap wherein the pure and impenetrable texture of time transpires: See our note 336.17-19. The “texture” of time grows into a major theme as we get into Part III.

337.17: his live foe ever will be: Van’s hidden wish to “live forever” is hidden behind these words.

337.18-19: a seventh letter (transmitted to him by Ada’s and his half-sister, at Kingston, in 1892): How Lucette hands him Ada’s last letter is told in Part II Chapter 5.

337.21: érable: (Fr) maple tree. The color matches Lucette’s hair.

337.24: paranymp: A bridesmaid or a spokesman or friend for a bride or bridegroom. According to the Merriam Webster website, “At one time, the word **paranymp** also was used for a person who solicits or speaks for another that is, an advocate, but that sense is now very rare.”

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paranymp>