

Annotations to *Ada*

Part II: Chapter 3 October 2020

The Kyoto Reading Circle

The following members of the Kyoto Reading Circle are equally responsible for the text here: 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's works are to the Vintage International edition unless otherwise noted. At our meeting on December 9, 2018, we were fortunate enough to receive again as our guest Brian Boyd of the University of Auckland. We were also visited by Professor Leona Toker of Hebrew University in May 2018, who later read all our annotations put on the website of the Nabokov Society of Japan and kindly sent us her own comments. We are very grateful for their generous contributions, which will be marked “**BB**” for Brian Boyd (colored in blue) and “**LT**” for Leona Toker (in purple).

Part II Chapter 3

347.01: David van Veen: The repetition of “V” as sound and visible letter is conspicuous in this chapter to emphasize Van Veen as well as Villa Venus.

347.02: Flemish extraction: Concerning the Dutch theme in *Ada*, see Brian Boyd's “Ada, the Bog and the Garden: or, Straw, Fluff, and Peat: Sources and Places in *Ada*.” *Nabokov Studies* 8 (2004) 107-33, especially the “Veen, bog, Venus” section (108-15).

347.02: in no way related: BB: Echoes the opening paragraph of the novel: “has little if any relation to the story to be unfolded now, a family chronicle” (3.05-06), as if to emphasize the central relationship of the Villa Venus story to the romance of the “children of Venus,” the Veens' Ardis Hall chronicle.

347.02-03: our rambling romance: follows “space romance” and “scientific romance” in the previous chapter. As romance in the Middle Ages means “an extraordinary story,” “our rambling romance” means “our rambling, extraordinary story.”

347.05: a parked furniture van: A parked moving van appears in the beginning of *The Gift* and moving is a continuous theme that becomes increasingly important as the novel progresses. Moreover, the letters on the truck signify a world existing in another dimension, which points to VN’s conscious use of the van. (3).

347.11: Deuil: (Fr) mourning.

347.16: Note: A reverse of Eton.

347.17-18: the Maritime Alps: Humbert Humbert’s mother died by lightning near Moulinet in the Maritime Alps. “When my mother, in a livid wet dress, under the tumbling mist (so I vividly imagined her), had run panting ecstatically up that ridge above Moulinet to be felled there by a thunderbolt, I was but an infant, and in retrospect no yearnings of the accepted kind could I ever graft upon any moment of my youth, no matter how savagely psychotherapists heckled me in my later periods of depression.” (*Lolita*, Part II, Chapter 32, p. 287)

347.18: Ex-en-Valais: A mountain resort near Brig, Switzerland, near which Aqua stayed in a sanatorium in an attempt to cure her madness, which connects Eric van Veen and Aqua by the theme of madness. Ex is where Aqua dies and where Van was born. Marina stayed there between September 1, 1869 to March 28, 1870 and kept notes in a green album of flowers, some dried, others artificial or made of paper, while visiting Aqua in her sanatorium.

These notes revealed to Van and Ada the truth of their birth (I,1.7.24). “Ex,” meaning “out of,” also refers to “the past” as well as to the dead (Aqua) and implies the secret affair between Demon and Marina resulting in Van’s birth.

348.03: “Villa Venus: an Organized Dream”: It is possible that Van Veen, in place of Eric *van* Veen, dreams the whole chapter because 1) at the end of the previous chapter, Van falls asleep; 2) the following chapter is Van’s lecture on dreams; 3) this chapter is an independent chronicle, which is unique among all the chapters; 4) Villa Venus appears in Van’s nightmare in Part III, Chapter 1: Van had a “verbal” nightmare, caused, maybe, by the musky smell in the Miramas (Bouches

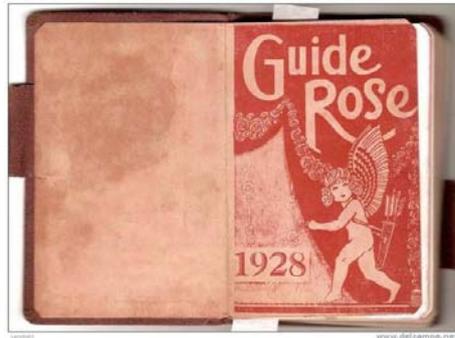
Rouges-du-Rhone) Villa Venus (451); 5) what is narrated in this chapter is too fantastic to be believable even in this novel.

“An Organized Dream” can be an ironic reference to the Jungian Collective Unconscious, following “Mandala” (from Mandalatov) in the previous chapter (344). It is also a reversal of Van’s unvoiced speech to Rack in the hospital in which he uses the word “disorganized consciousness”: “Oblivion is a one-night performance; we have been to it once, there will be no repeat. We must face therefore the possibility of some prolonged form of disorganized consciousness and this brings me to my main point, Mr. Rack. Eternal Rack, infinite ‘Rackness’ may not be much but one thing is certain: the only consciousness that persists in the hereafter is the consciousness of pain” (314-15). Contrastively, Eric’s dream persists after his death in his grandfather’s consciousness.

“An Organized Dream” is also an oblique reference to “The History of Organized Crime,” which at the time of VN’s writing *Ada* was a serial feature of *The Playboy* magazine. Hugh Hefner built more than 40 Playboy Clubs around the world though those clubs are not whorehouses like the Floramors of Villa Venus. Villa Venus Club can be seen as a distorted version of Hefner’s dream.

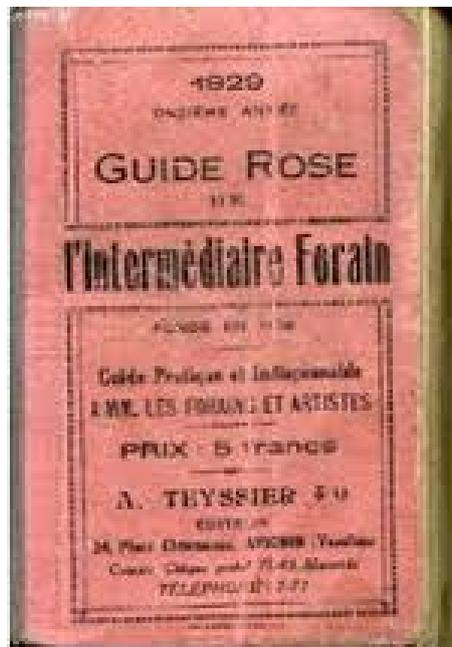
348.16: 3650 guineas: The currency in Antiterra seems to change shapes like other superstructural manifestations. In Chapter 1 of Part II, the currency was in dollars.

349.02: a special Shell Pink Book: As Brian Boyd annotates in his Annotations (light) to later chapters put on *The Nabokovian* website, *Guide Rose*, was “an annual guide to the higher-class Paris brothels in the mid-twentieth century.” Since the Third Republic (from 1870), according to the “atlasobscura” site, “Licentious tourism became a flourishing business, and the bordellos number, quality and originality grew quickly. To find your way, you could buy illicitly the famous *Guide Rose*, a sort of yellow book of lust published every year, referencing all the brothels, their specialities, prices, sometimes even their star courtesans.” (See also our note **351.12-17.**)



Le Guide Rose - 1928

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/paris-from-the-boudoir-the-decadent-journey-in-belle-epoque-bordellos>



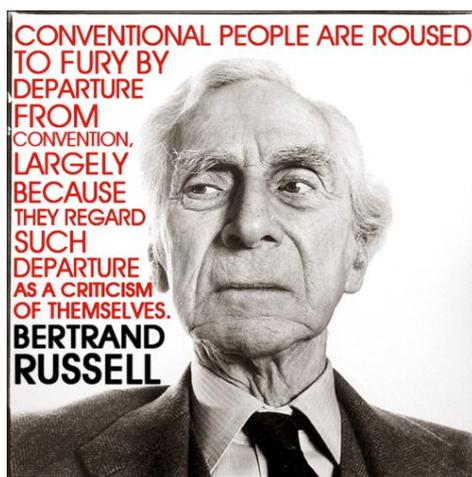
<http://www.priceminister.com/offer/buy/177212996/guide-rose-de-l-intermediaire-forain-1929-11e-annee-guide-pratique-et-indispensable-a-mm-les-forains-et-artistes-de-collectif.html>

349.20: houri: A white-skinned, black-haired woman. A nymph of the Mohammedan paradise, supposed to be created from musk and spices and endowed with perpetually virgin youth and perfect beauty. (*Webster's New International Dictionary*, 2nd Ed.)

349.23: the old but still vigorous Dutchman with his rugged reptilian face and white

hair, designing with the assistance of Leftist decorators the thousand and one memorial floramors he resolved to erect all over the world: Another sarcastic reference to the liberal British (not Dutch) philosopher Bertrand Russell. Russell could be called a “Dutchman” because Brussels, the capital of Belgium, used to belong to the Netherlands before 1830. VN leaves us a hint—Russell’s first name starts with a “B” which combines with his family name to suggest “Brussels.” VN disliked Russell for his opposition to the Vietnam War, that is, to the eye of Nabokov, his lack of criticism of the Soviet Union (“brutal Tartary”). “Bernard Rattner” is Van’s closest friend at Chose and his uncle is referred to by Van as “the great Rattner” who “has most honest standards . . . but I am going to demolish him soon,” presumably in Van’s novel (317:11-12). Paul Johnson in his book, *Intellectuals*, described the circle of intellectuals who gathered around Russell: “Many well-to-do progressives, . . . [Rupert] Crawshay Williams, Arthur Koestler, Humphrey Slater, the military scientist *P.M.S. (later Lord) Blackett* and the economic historian *M.M. Postan*, settled in this beautiful neighbourhood [a fantasy Italian village], to enjoy life and plan the socialist millennium. Russell was their monarch, and to his court came, in addition to the local middle-class intelligentsia, a host of pilgrims from all over the world, seeking wisdom and approval, as their predecessors had.” Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (Harper Perennial, 1988, 2007, 219, originally published in 1988.)

https://archive.org/stream/intellectuals4/Paul%20Johnson%20-%20Intellectuals%20%281988%29_djvu.txt



Bertrand Russell

<https://www.pinterest.com/kasidahb/bertrand-russell/>

349.26: —perhaps even in brutal Tartary: **LT:** I read Tartar camps as Soviet Gulag camps. See 315.13: “Nameless tortures in Tartar camps.” VN identifies Tartary with the Soviet Union.

349.27: Americanized Jews: Bertrand Russell commented on the conditions of the Soviet Union to a friend, Ottoline Morell, after his visit to a sick friend there: “Partly owing to his illness, but more because I located the Bolsheviks, the time in Russia was infinitely painful to me, in spite of being of the most interesting things I have ever done. Bolshevism is a close tyrannical bureaucracy, with a spy system more elaborate and terrible than the Tsar’s, and an aristocracy as insolent and unfeeling, composed of Americanised Jews.” Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1914-1944*. London: Little, Brown & Co., 1968, p. 172.

349.28: “Art redeemed Politics”: Brian Boyd states in his Annotations (light), “In Nabokov’s own copy of *Ada*, [he] glossed: ‘Bertrand Russel[l]’s idea” (n. 800). In addition, **BB explains about VN’s gloss that there is an arrow pointing to the phrase, “rugged reptilian,” so the idea in question relates to the “assistance of Leftist decorators” or to “brutal Tartary,” which he thought was ruled by “Americanized Jews.”**

349.30: Robert Adam-like composition: Robert Adam (1728 – 92) was a Scottish neoclassical architect, interior designer and furniture designer.



Kedleston Hall. The south front by Robert Adam,
based on the Arch of Constantine in Rome.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Adam

349.32: Madam-I’m-Adam: a well-known palindrome. Cf. “Well--why did I? Do you know that, mad Adam?” *Bend Sinister* (145).

349.32: Rodos Island: Rhodes Island is in the Aegean Sea in Greece and the State of

Rhode Island is in the U.S.A. Cf. Rodosia in Part II Chapter 2 (345).

350.06: millions of guildens: See our note 348.16 for “guineas” as one variety of currency in Antiterra.

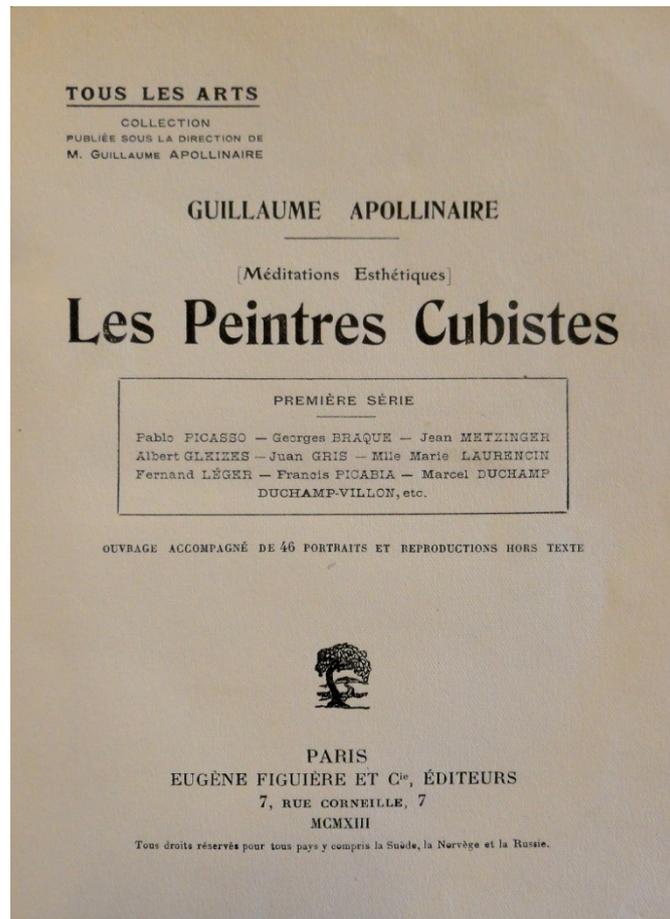
350.17: Guillaume de Montparnasse: Guillaume Apollinaire is the pseudonym of Guillelmus (or Wilhelm) Apollinaris de Kostrowitzki, (born August 26, 1880, Rome?, Italy—died November 9, 1918, Paris, France), “poet who in his short life took part in all the avant-garde movements that flourished in French literary and artistic circles at the beginning of the 20th century and who helped to direct poetry into unexplored channels . . . with Picasso, he applied himself to the task of defining the principles of a Cubist aesthetic in literature as well as painting. His *Peintures cubistes* appeared in 1913 (*Cubist Painters*, 1944).”

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Guillaume-Apollinaire>

However, since VN disliked Cubism (cf. Gerald De Vries and Donald Barton Johnson, *Nabokov and the Art of Painting*, Amsterdam University Press, 2005, p. 135), we should take this passage as ironic. In Ada’s last letter to Van in Part II Chapter 5, she writes of Andrey Vinelandier who had proposed to her, “He owns horses, and Cubist pictures, and ‘oil wells’ . . . (385.9).

350.23: chaos of Cubism: Guillaume Apollinaire wrote the defining principles of Cubism in *Les Peintres Cubistes, Méditations Esthétiques* (English, *The Cubist Painters, Aesthetic Meditations*), between 1905 and 1912, published by Eugène Figuière Éditeurs, Collection “Tous les Arts,” Paris, in 1913. Apollinaire discusses nine painters of the Cubist period: Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Marie Laurencin, Juan Gris, Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp. As Picasso's closest friend and Marie Laurencin's lover, Apollinaire witnessed the development of Cubism firsthand.

<https://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520243545>



(Title page)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Guillaume_Apollinaire%2C
Les_Peintres_Cubistes%2C_1913.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Guillaume_Apollinaire%2C_Les_Peintres_Cubistes%2C_1913.jpg)

350.26-27: the *maisons closes*: See our notes 349.02 and 351.12-17 on *Le Guide Rose* and architecture of Belle Epoque bordellos. Houses of prostitution in France which were legalized in the 19th century under strict health control by the government until 1946 when they were made illegal. They were recognizable to those who knew by the unusually large street number on the plaque, the shape of the windows or certain details of decoration on the building: “les maisons closes arboraient le plus souvent une plaque de numéro de rue plus grande, la forme des fenêtres et certains détails de décoration pouvant aussi donner un indice aux personnes intéressées.”

<https://www.paristoric.com/index.php/paris/inclassables/358-les-maisons-closes>

350.27: Lubetkin: Berthold Romanovich *Lubetkin* (14 December 1901 – 23 October 1990) was a Russian émigré *architect* who pioneered modernist design in Britain in the

1930s. BB: Although this is a genuine name, in this trilingual milieu “Lubetkin” suggests Russian “lyubit” (loves) + English “kin” or “incest.”

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

350.28: Dudok in Friesland: Willem Marinus *Dudok* (6 July 1884 - 6 July 1974) was one of Netherlands' most influential Modernist *architects*.

<https://www.archdaily.com/777559/willem-dudok-meet-the-father-of-dutch-modernism>

Friesland is an actual province in the Netherlands. Also see BB’s Annotations (light).

351.03: arbutus: A genus of 12 accepted species of flowering plants in the family Ericaceae, native to warm temperate regions of the Mediterranean, western Europe, the Canary Islands (Teneriffa) and North America.



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arbutus>

351.04: the sore from the rose: “sore-eros-rose” anagram cluster, e.g., 367.11: **Arts that our marblery harbors: Eros, the rose and the sore.**

351.12-17 Whether nestling in woodland dells . . . the guests and the guards had keys: See our previous note **349.02** for reference to *Le Guide Rose*. VN’s description of Villa Venus Floramors closely resembles the fashionable bordellos in Belle Epoque Paris described by Laetitia Barbier, “Paris, From the Boudoir: Atlas Obscura’s decadent journey through Belle Epoque bordellos” (January 17, 2013): “The establishments were soon competing in a delirium of voluptuous theatricality. As Paul Teyssier noted, it was an astonishing example of “inverted architecture”: totally invisible from the street, with the inside structure arranged as an erotic funhouse, a

labyrinth of hidden paths, dedalic stairs and two way mirrors opening to endless sensual possibilities. Everything was made so a visitor could see without being seen. The interior architecture of the bordellos became themselves an immersive experience of sexual fantasy. Sex made structure. ”

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/paris-from-the-boudoir-the-decadent-journey-in-belle-epoque-bordellos>

351.26-28: he was the only cock in the coop . . .when a hitch occurred: “Hitch” and “cock” implies an allusion to the unfortunate combination in the name of the film director Alfred Hitchcock who made a film of a rape of a woman entitled *Marnie*. In analyzing the film in 2013, *The New Yorker* film critic Richard Brody points to a hidden side of Hitchcock’s character: “The film is, to put it simply, sick, and it's so because Hitchcock was sick. He suffered all his life from furious sexual desire, suffered from the lack of its gratification, suffered from the inability to transform fantasy into reality, and then went ahead and did so virtually, by way of his art.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock#Representation_of_women

Allusions to Hichcock’s films often occur in *Ada*.

352.13: I counted: A shift from third-person “Van” to the first person “I” in the narrative voice. This chapter reveals who is narrating for the first time on this line. The narrative voice shifts back to Van (351.33) and then reverts to “I” (354.5) until 355.6 when Van returns and continues as third person until the end of the chapter.

352.28: Azzuroscudo: In Italian, “azzurro” means “blue” or “azure” and “scudo” means “shield” (also name of the currency which was used in Portugal and a few other countries). As Brian Boyd points out in his Annotations (light), it is a disguise for Baron Rothschild’s name which means “red shield” in German.

353.09: a triplet of charming twelve-year-old daughters, Ala, Lola and Lalage: The names of VN’s Ada and Lolita converge here. The alliterative names of triplet sisters also appear in Washington Irving’s *Tales of Alhambra* (1832) in which Zayda, Zarayda, and Zarahayda are triplet daughters of an over-anxious King of Alhambra who had them locked in the Tower of the Infants in the palace grounds.

354.31: The lorry had gone or had drowned: An allusion to Hitchcock’s film *Psycho* (1960).

355.28: an ironic Hesperus rose in a milkman's humdrum sky: On our earth, Hesperus is the evening star, the planet Venus, but in Van's Anti-terra where most things are reversed, Hesperus rises with the dawn when the milkman goes his rounds. Venus as the morning star is called Lucifer, which here (since Lucifer is another name for Satan) suggests the Demonic element in the Veens. Milkmen used to deliver milk to homes in the dawn hours; the Milky Way has here become "a milkman's humdrum sky."

356.30: candle: Together with "window ledge" in the next line and "couch" on 357.16, they allude to the first time Van and Ada make love (116-17).

356.33: pregnant: In the following chapter, Ada gives birth to another Ada.

357.08-10: the naked sea, . . . dully boomed, dully withdrew its platter of pebbles: Cf. Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867), third stanza, a landmark poem for the spiritual decline of western civilization, in which "the Sea of Faith" retreats, revealing "naked shingles of the world."

Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

357.09-10: not seen but heard as panting space separated from time: Van isolates time from space, which we usually perceive visually. Cf. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Part I Chapter 3, where Stephen Dedalus closes his eyes to hear his steps on the shore's pebbles, thinking of "nacheinander" (time) as against "nebeneinander" (space).

357.18: florinda: suggests "floris [Latin, "of a flower"] in Ada." The "younger sister or cousin" suggests Lucette, thought to be Van's younger cousin, but actually his half-sister, whose defloration never happens.

357.29: the faded bathing suit: Her [Ada's] faded, bluish-gray, one-piece swimsuit (199.22).

358.03: twenty-first of July: Ada's and VN's father's birthday.

358.12: his forever discarded half-mask: Cf. "masked and caped grandees" (351.18).