
Transcript of the Ada Forum
Jan.-Mar. 2006 (Part I Ch. 25, 27-29)
Brian Boyd and the Kyoto Reading Circle

This is an edited transcript of the *Ada* Forum held January 14th - March 5th, 2006 over the internet between the members of the Kyoto Reading Circle and Prof. Brian Boyd of Auckland University. It covers the KRC's annotations for Part I, Chapters 25, 27-29.

The annotations by KRC are available in PDF format at The Kyoto Reading Circle page of The Nabokov Society of Japan site (<http://vnjapan.org/main/ada/index.html>). We are thankful to Brian for calling our attention to some minor errors in the KRC Annotations which have been duly corrected. The page and number references to the text, as in the KRC Annotations, are from the Vintage International edition.

We welcome participation by Nabokov readers of *Ada* worldwide on our annotations in the internet Nabokov forum, NABOKV-L. Readers with queries or suggestions for the Circle Annotations who are unfamiliar with NABOKV-L are encouraged to subscribe to NABOKV-L as follows:

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[Brian Boyd]
Dear Akiko and all,

Here are my brief belated responses to your fine notes to 25 and 27-29. It is a pleasure to have you breaking the new ground now rather than me, and whenever I come across something I had not found for myself I will credit you for it in the *Nabokovian* and on ADAonline, though I haven't necessarily indicated where that is below.

Best wishes for a productive 2006!

Part I Chapter 25

After 156.12-13:

[BB] I am not sure what it is in "we noticed" that makes you think they are "flipping through an album of their memories," although this scene is part of Kim's photo album of Ardis 1884, and described in detail at 406.30-407.26). Is it this: the "we" seems to imply Van and Ada, yet Ada is not present in the scene (she is off awaiting Van at Forest Fork)?

[Akiko Nakata] Yes, Van and Ada will be flipping through the actual photo album in Part II,

and the note in parenthesis "among whom we noticed kitchen Kim with his camera" partly alludes to it. However, we thought "Kim with his camera" should not appear in a photo he had taken himself and it would be suitable for them (Van and Ada) to notice Kim in an imaginary photo from their memory. The note is written after they saw Kim's album and "we belatedly noticed Kim always took pictures here and everywhere . . . "

After 157.03:

[BB] A nice point. Although as a Frenchman Bouteillan naturally says "she" (*elle*) of a car (*une voiture, une automobile*, both feminine), the English presentation of the word does seem to imply, inadvertently or not, Ada as well as the car. Certainly in the rest of the speech Bouteillan uses driving as a metaphor for Van's relationship with Ada.

After 157.33:

[BB] I had missed all those parallels. Good work!

Part I Chapter 27

After 167.3:

[BB] figli-migli: a Russian phrase meaning "tricks." *Mimsey* means "prudish."

After 167.09:

[BB] "dressed to kill" seems less an allusion to Lucette than a play on the idiom: the boy is dressed fancily to meet a girl or girl at the "certified" milk bar; Van is in a mood to kill—or at least assault—Cordula when she appears in the next sentence.

After 168.23:

[BB]The Tolstoyan pun is really on "*affaire . . . sale*" (dirty business), which Van then picks up on in a slightly different way.

After 169.24:

[BB] Actually Lucette as she will appear at Ovenman's bar in Paris, not on the Tobakoff.

[AN] You are quite right. I am sorry, members, it is my awful mistake.

[BB] It seems rather odd to say I don't connect this paragraph with Lucette in the bar, since I have mentioned this theme at 129, reproduced the ad at 130, and mentioned it at 137 and 139; at this point in the book, I assume the reader can see the reference; and I include it under the "picture hat theme" which I cross-refer the reader to from "Veen, Lucette" and which also cross-refers to the Divan japonais theme. And I think if you search ADAonline you will see many links.

[AN] Of course, you fully discuss the theme in your book, and probably most re-readers of ADA would not miss Lucette as the lady in black when they glimpse her in this chapter. Still, we thought we had better refer to Lucette-as-the-lady's first appearance just in case. We just mean that you do not mention her as the lady where you quote the paragraph in your book (p.160).

After 169.33:

Finnegan's] Finnegans (VN makes the same mistake in Pale Fire).

Part I Chapter 28

After 171.21—2:

[BB] why Tellurium, when Telluride is so much closer in sense (place name, in Colorado, known to be importantly associated with VN). *Telluride* is a rare ore of gold, after which this mining town was named. Nabokov may have been aware that the “touristless mining town” of 1951 and *Lolita* had already started to become what it is now, a famous ski resort. Ironically, he could not have known when writing *Ada* that the Telluride Film Festival, founded in 1974, would become “world-famous.”

After 172.2-4:

[BB]Mozart's opera is hardly “thundering”!

[Shoko Miura] You are right, Brian. I probably suggested this note although I now can't recall why I identified "thunderous German musical dramas" with *The Magic Flute*. However, VN must have a specific opera in mind since he specifies "giants and magicians and a defecating white horse." I haven't seen actual productions, so I don't know which opera or operas it might be, but Richard Wagner is an obvious candidate because of the mention of "thunderous" and "musical dramas." Wagner is known for his stormy music and the manifesto of music in Opera and Drama, in which he envisioned the complete unity of music and drama. His late Romantic operas and "music-dramas" are attempts at reaching this ideal. Would anyone know which of Wagner's operas would require "a defecating white horse"???

[AN] Only one thing for which I am responsible. I did say the opera must be *The Magic Flute*. Not for the adjective "thundering"--I agree with Brian about it--but for "giants and magicians and a defecating white horse," especially the last one seemed decisive to me. I have never seen actual performances either, but I cannot forget the defecating white horse in *Amadeus* directed by Milos Forman. I am sure anybody who had seen the film would remember the scene! (I don't remember what the horse was like in Bergman's film, though). It might be too rough to say the extraordinary "musical drama" has also "giants and magicians." It is possible VN has in mind more than one opera here, probably Wagner's as Shoko suggests. I think *The Ring* would satisfy both "thundering" and "giants and magicians." If my memory is correct, there appear horses too--but defecating??

After 172.13:

[BB] My “Dick Schuler” was nothing more than a moment of inattention.

After 172.16:

[BB] Nice comment: especially as “hearts” are in many games including poker the most powerful suit.

After 176.12:

[BB] Not so puzzling. Dick Cheshire is Lord Cheshire, and the name comes as a nice shock at this point in the chapter, despite the vaguer “milord” earlier (which can mean merely “nobleman” or “immensely wealthy man”) and even “the desperately flashing and twinkling young lord” at 175.10-11. The messenger of course announces the sender of the message as “Lord Cheshire,” which Van mockingly abbreviates as if to protect his identity (cf. the opening of *The Gift*: “on April the first, 192- (a foreign critic once remarked that while many novels, most German ones for example, begin with a date, it is only Russian authors who, in keeping with the honesty peculiar to our literature, omit the final digit”), while disclosing it obliquely now (“a cousin of one of Van’s Riverlane schoolmates”) and directly, later (464.18).

[SM] Although we may have read too much into this part, we still don't have the answer to why Van should refer to Dick at this late stage as "one of Van's Riverlane classmates." However, this may be just to alert those of us who had forgotten about Dick.

Part I Chapter 29

After 178.12:

[BB] Nothing particularly modest here: *golubyanka* means any Blue.

After 179.03:

[BB] I do not understand why “Boucher” is glossed as “Dear Bout (Cher Bou?).” Van simply uses the name Boucher as a mnemonic because he read Ada’s telegram under the Boucher ceiling of his father’s breakfast room.

[SM] I believe we simply connected why Van chose "Boucher" to the succeeding scene with Bout and Blanche. We caught the Boucher plafond connection in another chapter, I think.

After 179.25:

[BB] No Buck Rogers.

[SM] There is a Buck Rogers. (Cf. <http://www.buck-rogers.com/>) but VN wouldn't have known about this American space hero because the TV version was aired in 1979.

[BB] "Buck Rogers" was the hero and title of a daily comic strip in US newspapers from 1929, a long-running radio program (1932-1947), movies in 1933 and 1939, a TV series in 1950, and so on. He was the most famous hero in science fiction. See Wikipedia.

After 180.15:

[BB] Not icebergs (which are only at sea) but simply snow (or, if you like, glacier, which is permanent snow: but there would also be fresh and largely impermanent snow that would be even more highly reflective).

[SM] Sorry. We meant "glaciers."

After 180.18:

[BB] Kohl is not German “coal” but English *kohl* (W2): “A preparation, as of antimony, or soot and other ingredients, used by women of the East to darken the edges of the eyelids.” (The “East” here means more or less “Middle East.”)

After 180.21: bluebeard’s virility as reflected in morose Van: Like Bluebeard and Lermontov’s Demon, Van seems to exhibit his father’s tendency to kill his women.

[BB] Justification?

[SM] There should be quotation marks around "kill." We meant it metaphorically. In the same sense that Demon is responsible for the death of Aqua, Van is responsible for Lucette's death. The demon lover in Lermontov's *The Demon* kills Tamara with a fatal kiss. The rouged "temporary Tamara" who accompanies "Raven Veen" with his "blacker black" hair and blue-ocellated wings project a total image of the demon lover. But I'm sure you knew that, Brian. If you meant something else, could you clarify your question?

[BB] "Tendency to kill his women": this is plural, and only Lucette dies because of her involvement with Van and Ada. If responsibility is to be assigned, it would seem to belong more with Ada, who arranges for Van to fondle her in 1888, and seduces her herself shortly thereafter, initiates the menage a trois scene. A "tendency to kill his women" is a long way from a part (but not the main) share in someone's decision to commit suicide. Demon's culpability in Aqua's case is much more direct.

[SM] I see the difference between Aqua and Lucette, and I think Demon Veen's appearance with a cheap new mistress is meant to be a direct contrast to the ultra-passionate love shown in Van and Ada's tryst. But I think VN mentioned Van as inheriting the bluebeard virility of his father because of their part in making women unhappy. They were both dashing "lady-killers," as people used to call such men in the 50s and 60s, and I don't think VN meant this connection to be simply flirtatious behavior but a more serious crime against women.