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NABOKOV AND HOUSMAN¹

Nabokov published two English translations of Lermontov's 1841 poem "Son" ("The Dream").² His reading of A. E. Housman (1859-1936)³ is reflected in the lexicon and sound instrumentation of the first but not the second translation.⁴ The first translation appeared in November 1941, the centennial year of Lermontov's death, in the essay "The Lermontov Mirage."⁵ It was reprinted under the title "The Triple Dream" in the 1944 and 1947 collections of Nabokov's verse translations from Russian, *Three Russian Poets* and *Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev*.⁶ The second translation appeared in March 1958 in the Translator's

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² See Appendix 1 for the texts of Lermontov's poem and Nabokov's translations. Lermontov's poem «Сон» will be referred to throughout by the transliterated title "Son" rather than by a translated title such as "The Dream," since Nabokov did not use "The Dream" as a title in either of his translations.

³ Housman published two volumes of poetry during his lifetime. Other volumes were published posthumously. His poems are identified here according to their presentation in *The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman* (1965): by the title of the original volume in which they appeared and their number in that volume. *ASL* is *A Shropshire Lad* (1896); *LP* is *Last Poems* (1922); *MP* is *More Poems* (1936); *AP* is *Additional Poems* (1939). Reference is made also to the annotated *Poems of A. E. Housman* (1997), edited by Archie Burnett.

⁴ Zhirmunskii defines "instrumentation" in verse as "patterns in the distribution of qualitative elements of sound" and the "artistic ordering of qualitative elements of sound" (*Teoriia stikha*, 250, 282).

⁵ *The Russian Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 33.

⁶ *Three Russian Poets*, 31; *Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev*, 42. There is a discrepancy between the copyright date of *Three Russian Poets*, 1944, which is the only dating in the volume, and the publication date, February 1945, given by Boyd (*Nabokov, Novels and Memoirs 1941-1951*, 656) and Karshan (*Nabokov, Selected Poems*, 192).

Foreword to Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time*.⁷ The two versions differ to some extent in translation strategy, as is consistent with Nabokov's well-known shift, in the 1950s, away from meter and rhyme and towards literalism in his translation of *Eugene Onegin* (1964, 1975).⁸ The echoes of Housman coincide with departures from Lermontov's phrasing, and are not preserved in the later, more literal version. The motivation for the echoes in 1941 is to be found in the larger context of Nabokov's writing in this period. Nabokov associates Housman with the theme of doomed young men and the related theme of exile. Both themes can be discerned in Lermontov's poem. Both are hallmarks of Housman's verse.⁹ Both are noted in Nabokov's prose references to Housman on the cusp of the 1940s, as Nabokov anticipates his own second geographic and now also linguistic exile.¹⁰

[1] Having first encountered Housman in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Nabokov returned to him in every subsequent decade of his life. He affirmed his permanent admiration for

⁷ See *A Hero of Our Time*, v-vi, and, on the dating of the translation and publication of Lermontov's novel, Boyd (Nabokov, *Novels and Memoirs*, 661-62). Here the 1958 publication date will be used to refer to the second "Triple Dream," though Boyd indicates that Nabokov was working on the translation of the novel as early as 1956, and the editors of Nabokov's *Verses and Versions*, where both translations of "The Triple Dream" are reprinted, give the date of the second as "ca. 1956-57" (298). Pogrebniaia focuses on the 1958 translation in her article about Nabokov's approach to "Son." It should be noted that this translation was not the one that appeared in *Three Russian Poets*, and Nabokov did not publish a later translation of "Son" in 1966 (cf. Pogrebniaia, "M. Iu. Lermontov v perevodcheskoi interpretatsii V. V. Nabokova," 114, 118).

⁸ The critical literature on Nabokov as a translator is vast. See the overview by Beaujour, "Translation and Self-Translation," and for specific and divergent perspectives the more recent studies by Trubikhina, *The Translator's Doubts* (2015) and Shvabrin, *Between Rhyme and Reason* (2019). On Nabokov's pre-*Onegin* verse translations, see, for example, Diment, "Three Russian Poets." O. Ronen contrasts the first period of the "creat[ion] of equivalent substitutes" and the "later stern period of consistent literalism" and elaborates on the implications of each ("The Triple Anniversary of World Literature," 180).

The 1941 translation of "Son" has the metrical, rhymed construction typical of Nabokov's verse translations of this period. It follows Lermontov's iambic pentameter and alternating rhymes (all masculine, by contrast with Lermontov's feminine and masculine rhymes). Nabokov did not abandon meter and rhyme in the 1958 translation, though his use of irregularly mixed iambic pentameter and tetrameter is closer to the practice of the 1964 *Onegin* translation, where he still favored an iambic tendency accompanied by variable line lengths. The rhymes in the 1958 translation of "Son" are abcb (all masculine, as signaled by the lowercase letters).

⁹ Parker, Housman's biographer, writes of *A Shropshire Lad*: "The book certainly takes as its principal subject matter the travails of young men either living in or exiled from the English countryside" (*Housman Country*, 91). He recognizes the connection between exile and death in Housman's poems (316). De Vries mentions Housman's "Arcadian evocations" of Shropshire and identifies "doomed lads" as Housman's "real theme," though he does not link the two themes (*Silent Love*, 112).

Nabokov's association of each of these themes with Housman persists as late as *Pale Fire* (1962), in allusions to Housman's two best-known poems, "Into my heart an air that kills" (*ASL XL*) and "To an Athlete Dying Young" (*ASL XIX*), the first on the theme of exile and the second on the theme of the doomed young man. Condren refers to "the nostalgic eulogizing of distant imagined homelands (*A Shropshire Lad*)" as a key to Kinbote's interest in Housman in *Pale Fire* ("John Shade Shaving," 133).

¹⁰ See Nabokov's periodization of his life in *Speak, Memory* (275-76).

Housman's work in the 1963 *Playboy* interview (published January 1964), which was reprinted in 1973 in *Strong Opinions*.¹¹ There are references to Housman in the novels *Ada* (1969),¹² *Pale Fire* (1962),¹³ and *Lolita* (1955),¹⁴ and in the memoirs *Speak, Memory* (1967) and its earlier iterations, *Drugie berega (Other Shores, 1954)* and *Conclusive Evidence* (1951; written 1949).¹⁵ In lecture notes dating to the late 1940s Nabokov compared Kol'tsov to Housman, referring to Kol'tsov's "not very strong but very authentic and original genius."¹⁶ In the transitional period of the late 1930s and early 1940s,¹⁷ Nabokov turned to Housman in the novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and the essay "The Art of Translation" as he did in "The Lermontov Mirage"; all three works were published in 1941.¹⁸ In November 1937, in a questionnaire for the publisher Bobbs-

¹¹ *Strong Opinions*, 43.

¹² See Boyd, *ADAonline*. <http://www.ada.auckland.ac.nz/ada13ann.htm#2322>

¹³ Condren notes the "Housman-Kinbote thread that runs through *Pale Fire*" ("John Shade Shaving," 134-35). He focuses on Housman's lecture *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933), identified as a source of Nabokov's images of the tell-tale tingling of inspiration. As Condren shows, the most sustained reference to this source is John Shade's shaving sequence, along with Kinbote's commentary (*Pale Fire*, 66-67, lines 895-938, and 269-70, the commentary to line 920).

The comment by Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev in *The Gift* about the inspirational "tingling sensation in the skin of your brow" may be another reference to Housman's account of the visceral response to the presence of poetry (see *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, 46). This possibility is supported by the immediate context, the protagonist's composition of a poem in which Lethe substitutes for the Styx (*The Gift*, 87). Housman has such a poem, "Crossing alone the nighted ferry" (*MP XXIII*), first published in October 1936, when Nabokov was at work on the first chapter of *The Gift (The Poems of A. E. Housman, xxxviii; Leving, Keys to The Gift, xxi)*. The "tingling" passage occurs at the end of a survey of Russian poetry with particular attention to poets' gaffes. The first example is Lermontov's "znakomyi trup" in the last stanza of "Son," which appears as "familiar corpse" in *The Gift* (85; cf. *Dar*, 84). Nabokov discusses this phrase as a "solecism" in "The Lermontov Mirage" (34) and replaces it in his translation with a Housmanian substitute. Even in the 1958 version Nabokov provides an explanatory gloss rather than a literal translation. The relation between Nabokov's and Godunov-Cherdyntsev's analyses of Lermontov's phrase remains to be explored.

Kinbote's "blue inenubitable Zembla," also in *Pale Fire* (288), has been identified as a reference to Housman's "blue remembered hills" in "Into my heart an air that kills," with "inenubitable" as an interlingual pun indicating "inoublifiable" (see NABOKV-L POST 0015075, WED, 28 MAR 2007 17:42:24 EDT <https://thenabokovian.org/node/18132>). On other Housman references in *Pale Fire* see Pollak, "Kinbote's Remorse, 197, 203-4, 204nn68-71, 211n96. Some of these references are mentioned also in a source I became aware of just before the completion of this article, Kokotov's notes to his Russian translation of Housman (Khausman, *Izbrannye stikhi*, n1).

¹⁴ *Lolita*, 175. Appel identifies the source of *Lolita*'s "bi-iliac garland still as brief as a lad's" as Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" (*Lolita*, 398). That source is recollected similarly by Kinbote (*Pale Fire*, 196). But Appel's annotation is puzzling: Housman never "tried marriage." Perhaps Appel had in mind Cole Porter, another great gay twentieth century lyricist, whose verse has something in common with Housman's: discipline and wit.

¹⁵ References to Housman in Nabokov's memoirs are discussed below.

¹⁶ "On Aleksey Koltsov," *Verses and Versions*, 266.

¹⁷ See I. Ronen's use of the phrase "transitional period" with reference to the time of the composition of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* ("Nabokov's First English-Language Novel," 184).

¹⁸ Of these three works, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* was published last, in December 1941, by New Directions. "The Art of Translation" appeared in the August 4 issue of *The New Republic* (the essay is quoted here

Merrill, Nabokov named Housman's *Shropshire Lad* (1896) a favorite book, along with *Eugene Onegin*, *Hamlet*, and *Madame Bovary*.¹⁹

Nabokov dated his interest in Housman to his years at Trinity College, Cambridge (October 1919-June 1922).²⁰ Housman, as a renowned classical scholar, was the Kennedy Professor of Latin at Trinity from 1911 until his death in April 1936. In the final section of the Cambridge chapter of his two English memoirs,²¹ Nabokov establishes Housman's presence at Trinity (Housman is startled when soup is spilled on him in the dining hall) and his own reading of *A Shropshire Lad* (the book is given to him by his tutor, E. Harrison²²). He describes *A Shropshire Lad* as "a little volume of verse about young males and death."²³ Here is one of the two themes Nabokov persistently associates with Housman.

The Housman reminiscences are connected not only to Nabokov's university years but also to a second layer of the memoir: the return to Cambridge in February 1937, when, forced to leave Berlin with his family, Nabokov sought refuge and employment elsewhere in Europe. Nabokov notes the "dreadful mistake of going to Cambridge again [...] on a raw February day," and the failure to summon, with respect to his Cambridge experience, an "ecstatically reminiscent mood" similar to the one that characterized his relation to his youth in Russia while he was an undergraduate in England. By contrast with the author's present, distant recollections of an idyllic Cambridge spring ("I remember the dreamy flow of punts and canoes on the Cam") that reminds him, in turn, of his even earlier Crimean sojourn ("The air was as warm as in the Crimea"), on the actual return to Cambridge he is able to evoke only a few "fragmentary little pictures."²⁴ The

from *Verses and Versions*). "The Lermontov Mirage" appeared in November in *The Russian Review*, as noted above.

¹⁹ *Think, Write, Speak*, 135. Here and elsewhere Nabokov calls Housman's book *The Shropshire Lad* (see also *Speak, Memory*, 273). Kinbote, too, uses the definite article rather than the correct indefinite article (*Pale Fire*, 269). This point is noted also by Kokotov (Khausman, *Izbrannye stikhi*, n1).

²⁰ *Strong Opinions*, 43; *Speak, Memory*, 273.

²¹ See chapter 13, part 4 of *Conclusive Evidence* and the identical chapter 13, part 5 of *Speak, Memory*; cf. *Drugie berega* chapter 12.

²² The reference is to Ernest Harrison (1877-1943), a specialist in the Roman poet Terence. As it happens, Terence is the name given to the title character of *A Shropshire Lad*, the presumed narrator of multiple poems in the book.

Among Housman's other books, Nabokov also owned *Last Poems* (1922); his copy is held by the Cornell University Library. <https://newcatalog.library.cornell.edu/catalog/1290823>

²³ *Speak, Memory*, 273. The description is not necessarily dismissive. Cf. Nabokov's comment, in a 1964 interview with *The National Observer*, about Robert Frost's then most famous poem: "[...] I believe that rather obvious little poem on the woods is one of the greatest ever written" (Nabokov, "Mr. Nabokov reflects on 'Lolita' and 'Onegin'").

²⁴ *Speak, Memory*, 270, 272. The Nabokov family stayed in Crimea between fall 1917 and spring 1919 before leaving Russia for good (see Boyd in Nabokov, *Novels and Memoirs 1941-1951*, 655).

recollections of Housman are among them.²⁵ The Cambridge visit offered the “lesson of the return” (Nabokov’s emphasis), as Nabokov wrote to Véra Nabokov in a letter from London the next day.²⁶ One should not expect to reconstitute the past by revisiting its locations. Indeed, the possibility of recollection is predicated on the non-return. In a letter to a dear school friend written the following September, Nabokov noted with reference to the Cambridge trip: “But these experiments ought not to be undertaken. By doing this I totally killed my Cambridge memories.”²⁷ As he was able to summon those memories at the further remove of a decade and a continent, the principle of the Nabokovian exile remains intact. The salient feature is not expulsion from, but the impossibility of return to, a beloved place.²⁸ Here is a hint of the second theme Nabokov associates with Housman.

Nabokov does not include the Housman anecdotes in *Drugie berega*. Housman appears elsewhere in the Cambridge chapter of that memoir: as the modern terminus of a series of English poets whose traces Nabokov later discovered in the Russian verse of his student years. Nabokov refers to a “stylistic dependence” (“stilisticheskuiu zavisimost”) on “English poets from Marvell to Housman.”²⁹ In the corresponding passage of the English memoirs the personnel is different; Nabokov mentions the “direct influence” of the “Georgian poets” on his “Russian structures.”³⁰ In an earlier comment, in a letter to Edmund Wilson of August 24, 1942, he specifies the compositions and the poets in question. Of his book *Gornii put’* (*The Empyrean Path*, 1923), which

²⁵ *Speak, Memory*, 273. The Housman anecdotes are the seventh and tenth of a series of ten paired observations.

²⁶ See *Letters to Véra*, 312. This is the letter postmarked 27 February 1937, a Saturday. Nabokov wrote the main part of the letter the day before, i.e., on Friday, and the final “page” Saturday morning. References to events of the past week and the coming days, and the dating of the preceding letter on February 24 (Wednesday) and the chronology therein, lead to the conclusion that the Cambridge trip took place on Thursday, February 25 (*Letters*, 305-13).

²⁷ The letter of September 4, 1937, to Samuil Rozov, is quoted from Leving’s translation (*Keys to The Gift*, 497; see the original passage in Leving’s publication “Palestinskoe pis’mo V. Nabokova” [19]).

²⁸ Cf. Nabokov’s characterization of his years in Europe as “voluntary exile” (*Speak, Memory*, 275). Boym formulates the relation between the nostalgic and the exilic perspectives: “...the nostalgic trails are predicated on the impossibility of homecoming. As the years of exile multiplied, political necessity was transformed into an aesthetic choice. The nonreturn became Nabokov’s main literary device” (*The Future of Nostalgia*, 262).

²⁹ *Drugie berega*, 240. See also Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 171. Housman is included one way or another in the Russian and the English versions of the Cambridge chapter. Marvell, too, is mentioned in both versions of the chapter, though only in its two later iterations, *Drugie berega* and *Speak, Memory* (269; cf. *Conclusive Evidence*, 199). Marvell has a significant place in another work of the mid-1950s, Nabokov’s 1955 essay “Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English” (*The Translation Studies Reader*, 117), and in *Pale Fire*, written approximately six years later, where Sylvia Shade translates his poems into French (58, 240-42).

³⁰ See *Conclusive Evidence*, 196, and *Speak, Memory*, 266. Johnson, noting the difference in the Russian and English versions of the memoir, focuses on the question of the “Georgians” (“Vladimir Nabokov and Rupert Brooke,” especially 178-79; see also “Nabokov and British Literature,” especially 319-20, 327).

included poems written between 1918 and 1921, he notes: “The poems it contains were strongly influenced by the Georgian poets, Rupert Brooke, De la Mare, etc., by whom I was much fascinated at the time.”³¹

Nabokov’s essay “Rupert Bruk” (“Rupert Brooke”), written in 1921 and published in 1922, testifies to his contemporary interest.³² But the scope of Brooke’s influence on Nabokov’s Cambridge poems is open to question.³³ A preliminary investigation with respect to Housman, too, comes up short. In particular, there is little evidence of the kind of formal resonance Nabokov’s description suggests.³⁴ Housman’s phrasing, in mostly end-stopped iambic trimeters and ballad

³¹ *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 87. Johnson’s dating of this letter as April 20, 1942 (“Vladimir Nabokov and Rupert Brooke,” 179) is based in part on a slip by Wilson, noted in the second edition of the correspondence between Nabokov and Wilson (see *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 79n1).

In a letter to Wilson dated November 23, 1943, Nabokov agrees with Wilson’s comparison of Tyutchev to Housman and adds his own observation about “another link with Tewtchev” in Housman’s image of “a dead man whose overcoat is now the terrestrial globe, – quite literally – a huge wrapper” (*Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 123). Nabokov is commenting on the proofs of Wilson’s “Notes on Russian Literature: Tyutchev” (*Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 122); the Housman reference is to “The night is freezing fast” (*LP XX*). Nabokov’s translations of three poems by Tyutchev (“Autumn,” “Last Love,” “Silentium”) appeared following Wilson’s Tyutchev note in *The Atlantic Monthly* in January 1944 (the last two translations are not identical to the versions in Nabokov’s 1944 and 1947 collections; see also *Verses and Versions* [237, 257]).

Wilson’s essay “A. E. Housman” appeared first in *The New Republic* in the issue of September 29, 1937; in the June 1, 1938 issue Wilson reviewed two memoirs about Housman: Laurence Housman’s *My Brother, A. E. Housman* (the American edition of that author’s *A.E.H.*) and *Recollections of Alfred Edward Housman* by Symons et al. (Wilson, “By and About A. E. Housman”). In these publications Wilson paid particular attention to Housman’s temperament and acuity as a scholar and critic. The comments in “A. E. Housman” may be of interest in light of the later break in the Nabokov-Wilson friendship (see e.g. Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 492-99).

³² “Rupert Bruk” appeared in *Literaturnyi al'manakh “Grani.”* The essay included Nabokov’s Russian translations of poems by Brooke. Shvabrin points out echoes of Lermontov in two of these translations, including a quotation of the first line of “Son” in the translation of Brooke’s “Heaven”: “V poldnevnyi chas, lenivym letom” (*Between Rhyme and Reason*, 96, 98). Citations of Nabokov’s essay in English refer to “Rupert Brooke” in *Think, Write, Speak*.

Nabokov ultimately distinguished Housman and Brooke in his own reckoning. Four and five decades after Cambridge, Housman remained “intact” on Nabokov’s list of admired writers; Brooke was explicitly excluded (*Strong Opinions*, 43).

³³ Dolinin mentions, but does not comment on, the influence of the late Victorian and Georgian poets on Nabokov’s early verse. He refers to Tennyson, Housman, and Brooke, among others (“Istinniaia zhizn’ pisatel’ia Sirina,” 15). Johnson finds the influence of Brooke’s verse (and de la Mare’s fiction) not in Nabokov’s early poetry but in his fiction (“Vladimir Nabokov and Rupert Brooke,” 179, 189, 191; see also “Nabokov and British Literature”).

³⁴ Carver argues that formally and thematically Nabokov’s English poem “Home,” published in *The Trinity Magazine* in November 1920, recalls Housman’s verse (Nabokov, *Selected Poems*, 155, 191; Carver, “Cambridge,” 82-83). But the iambic pentameter and enjambed lines of “Home” are characteristic of Tennyson more than Housman, and Housman’s landscapes are generally land-locked: the few ventures seaward are programmatic (“R.L.S.,” *AP XXII*) or allegorical (“Oh were he and I together,” *AP II*). Housman also eschews the fantastical, as Nabokov does not (“Home,” lines 10-13). Echoes of Tennyson’s “Ulysses” (in particular, “Ulysses” lines 3-15) and an allusion to Tennyson’s many brooks, including “The Brook,” can be identified in “Home”: “[...] I dream and roam / O’er sun-tormented plains, from brook to brook, And thence by stone gray thundering cities. [...] / [...] I have roved and raved / In southern harbors [...]” (“Home,” lines 5-7 and 19-20; cf. *The Poems of Tennyson*, Vol. 1, 613-20; Vol. 2, 500-7). Tennyson, like Nabokov, was a student at Trinity College, Cambridge (1827-1831);

meters, is not readily detectable in the often enjambed hexameters, pentameters, and tetrameters of *Gornii put'*.³⁵ Nabokov's retrospective claims of influence may have a different motivation.

Housman was not one of the Georgian poets, though he might have been. He was invited to contribute to the first Georgian anthology, *Georgian Poetry, 1911-1912* (published in December 1912). He declined, saying he was part of a different literary generation ("I do not really belong to your 'new era'").³⁶ But Housman can be linked to Brooke (1887-1915), who had five poems in the collection. In the first of those poems, "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester," the speaker juxtaposes the "here" of a hot Berlin café with the "there" of his cool and beloved Cambridgeshire.³⁷ Brooke's theme of nostalgia for the English countryside echoes Housman's major theme. In multiple poems of *A Shropshire Lad* and other Housman volumes, the protagonist recalls the landscapes and people of his distant Shropshire home from eastward vantage points.³⁸ "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" has been described as Housmanian in this respect.³⁹ The theme

a portion of his archive, known as the Trinity College manuscripts, was donated to Trinity in 1924 (*The Poems of Tennyson*, Vol. 1, xv). Tennyson is the other Alfred singled out by Kinbote for high praise, along with "Alfred Housman (1859-1936), whose collection *The Shropshire Lad* vies with the *In Memoriam* of Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) in representing, perhaps (no, delete this craven 'perhaps'), the highest achievement of English poetry in a hundred years" (*Pale Fire*, 269). The missing (or perhaps not really missing) final line and rhyme of "Pale Fire" turns Shade's Popean heroic couplets into Tennysonian blank verse.

³⁵ However, the possibility of Housman's influence should be explored further in *Gornii put'* and also in *Grozd'* (*The Cluster*, 1922), published a month earlier and containing verse written somewhat later. On the chronology of Nabokov's two early books of verse, see Johnson, "Preliminary Notes on Nabokov's Russian Poetry," 310-11, and "Vladimir Nabokov and Rupert Brooke," 179.

³⁶ In his reply of October 1, 1912, to the editor, Edward Marsh, Housman noted, too, that he had no poems that were published in the last two years, a criterion for the anthology, and that in general he was reluctant to grant permission for publication of his poems (*The Letters of A. E. Housman*, Vol. 1, 297; cf. Marsh's Prefatory Note, *Georgian Poetry, 1911-1912*). As Housman explained to Walter de la Mare in a letter of July 20, 1922, he did not participate in anthologies (*Letters*, Vol. 1, 504-5). See also Parker, *Housman Country*, 9, 90-91, 134, 197.

³⁷ Brooke's poem was published in *Georgian Poetry, 1911-1912*, 33-37 (it had appeared in two other venues earlier in 1912; see Archer, *Rupert Brooke and The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*, 20). The "here" / "there" comparison occurs in the first section of the poem. Nabokov discussed "Grantchester" in his essay "Rupert Brooke" (*Think, Write, Speak*, 23-24).

³⁸ The poet's Shropshire is not Housman's native place. Housman was born and raised in the neighboring county of Worcestershire.

³⁹ Parker discusses Brooke's long admiration for, imitations of, and intersections with Housman's work. He calls "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" a "poem of exile" and puts it in "Housman country" (*Housman Country*, 197-200).

Like Housman, Brooke was associated with Cambridge, beginning in his undergraduate years at King's College (1906-1909) (see Johnson, "Vladimir Nabokov and Rupert Brooke," 183, 188). Brooke's war sonnets and his death at twenty-seven en route to the battle of Gallipoli link him to the *Shropshire Lad* theme of "young males and death" that Nabokov referred to in his memoirs (*Speak, Memory*, 273; cf. de Vries, *Silent Love*, 111-12). Housman too was considered a "war poet," although the war of his first book was not the World War. *A Shropshire Lad* was published in 1896, and its war poems referred to Britain's South African wars. Parker notes with reference to the later reception of Housman's book, the only one published before 1922: "It was the [world] war itself that

of exile justifies the commutability of the two poets in Nabokov's memoirs and provides a possible motivation for Nabokov's claims of influence discovered in his nostalgic Cambridge verse.⁴⁰

[2] Nabokov associates Housman with this theme in the three aforementioned prose works of the transitional period. In all three he quotes Housman's famous poem of exile "Into my heart an air that kills" (*ASL XL*) in the context of cross-cultural connection and loss.⁴¹

In "The Art of Translation," Nabokov uses the third line of Housman's poem, "What are those blue remembered hills [...]?", to show the complications of poetic translation given the non-correspondence of lexical fields across languages. Comparing Housman's "remembered" to Pushkin's "pomniu" in "Ia pomniu chudnoe mgnoven'e" ("I remember a wonderful moment"), Nabokov reports that he managed with difficulty to translate Pushkin's poem ("I did translate it at last"), but apart from the first line quoted here he declines to include his English version in the essay.⁴² The meaning of "pomniu," particularly as juxtaposed to "chudnoe," cannot be accurately represented by English "remember." And "inversely," Nabokov writes, Housman's "remembered" has no counterpart in the Russian past participle based on "pomnit" – even less so in its association with blueness. Nabokov does not mention the common theme of the two poems, both of which consider the possibility of return through recollection. Housman's "I see it *shining plain*" is

made Housman a war poet" (*Housman Country*, 288). But war was not the only cause of untimely death in Housman's poems.

⁴⁰ On the theme of exile in Nabokov's verse, see Scherr, "Poetry" (616). Johnson makes a connection between the Nabokovian theme of exile and Brooke's nostalgic representation of Grantchester ("Vladimir Nabokov and Rupert Brooke," 186-87; see also "Nabokov and British Literature," 324), and he mentions nostalgia as "a central theme" of *Gornii put'* ("Preliminary Notes on Nabokov's Russian Poetry," 310). However, Nabokov's comments about Brooke's influence on his early poetry suggest something more than a thematic connection.

⁴¹ While *A Shropshire Lad* does not follow a consistent plot, the micro-context of "Into my heart an air that kills" shows that the speaker's departure from home is permanent. The poem appears in a sequence beginning with "As through the wild green hills of Wyre" (*ASL XXXVII*), which Parker calls the "hinge" of the book with respect to the theme of exile from the countryside (*Housman Country*, 88). Here the speaker travels by train from Shropshire to London. The speaker indicates that a return is impossible, and that the next stop after London is death. Thus the line "And cannot come again" in "Into my heart an air that kills" sums up the speaker's situation rather than introducing a new perspective. A similar reading is possible for *ASL XXXVIII*, *XXXIX*, and *XLI*. An "exception that proves the rule" is "When I came last to Ludlow" (*ASL LVIII*), where the returning protagonist (who is probably the Shropshire Lad rather than the poet) finds everything in his hometown changed except the "moonlight pale."

⁴² "The Art of Translation" (*Verses and Versions*, 9). According to Shvabrin, the extant draft is a literal one, unlike most of the published translations of this period. It was found on a note card in Nabokov's copy of Pushkin (*Between Rhyme and Reason*, 271-72). The existence of a translation was apparently not known as of the 2008 publication of "The Art of Translation" in the edition by Boyd and Shvabrin (*Verses and Versions*, 394).

equivalent to Pushkin's "I vot opiat' *iavilas'* ty," though Pushkin frames the phenomenon as a resurrection and Housman frames it as a death.⁴³

Thus too Housman's "blue remembered hills" and other images from his poem are taken up along with images from Brooke's "Grantchester" as the stock of recollections available, directly or indirectly, to the exiled Russian writer in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and "The Lermontov Mirage." In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, which Nabokov began writing in December 1938 and completed the following month, Housman appears twice with Brooke in excerpts from an autobiographical novel by the title character, a Russian émigré.⁴⁴ In one passage, the narrator of the novel mentions his "Housman moods" and his "Rupert Brooke moods" in remarking on his strong feeling for "the country which was [his] home"; here he offers a set of English vignettes.

⁴³ The participial phrase "shining plain" may refer to φαίνεσθαι 'to appear', which is derived from PIE ***bha-** (1) "to shine" (<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=phenomenon>) and which is lexically though not etymologically related to Pushkin's "iavilas'" ("you appeared"; see Vasmer, s.v. явить <https://lexicography.online/etymology/vasmer/%D1%8F/%D1%8F%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%8C>).

⁴⁴ There are parallels and coincidences linking Sebastian Knight's biography and his death in January 1936 with Housman's biography and his death in April of the same year. In each case there were assiduous efforts by a brother, a writer six years younger, to reconstruct a life: "bit by bit" or "stage by stage," in the words of Sebastian's brother V., or in "sections" or "separated periods," in the words of Housman's brother and literary executor Laurence Housman (1865-1959) (see *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 33, 53, and *A.E.H.*, 11). The circumstances necessitating this approach were apparently similar for the two biographies. V. reports that Sebastian was hardly in touch with his family after starting at Cambridge (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 23). Laurence Housman (1865-1959) writes in his 1937 memoir that he "knew very little of [Housman's] life in its day-to-day activities after he left home for Oxford" (*A.E.H.*, 11). Sebastian's brother V. "thoroughly [...] disapproved" of Mr. Goodman's comprehensive biography (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 56). Laurence Housman rejected the possibility of a "full biography" of his brother and "deprecate[d]" any attempt at one (*A.E.H.*, 12). V. saw an increasing resemblance between himself and his brother, to the point of complete identification by the end of the book (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 204-5). Laurence Housman was not infrequently taken for his brother (see, for example, his memoir "'Shropshire Lad' Year – and After," in Symons, *Alfred Edward Housman: Recollections*, 49). This confusion extends to the entry for "Houseman, Laurence" (sic) in the index of the Nabokov-Wilson correspondence (*Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 123; uncorrected from the first edition). The conveniently "bookish" name that contributed to the misidentification of V.'s brother on his deathbed (Barabtarlo, "Taina Naita," 274-75) was the first part of the compound surname of Charles Kegan Paul, the publisher of the first edition of *A Shropshire Lad*.

The identification by V. of an "occult resemblance between a man and the date of his death" (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 183) would, if extended beyond *The Real Life*, support a connection between the fictional novelist and the real poet. The use of the number 1936 as a motif in Nabokov's novel has been noted, e.g., by Alexandrov (*Nabokov's Otherworld*, 155) and Meyer (*Nabokov and Indeterminacy*, 34). Nabokov also connected 1936 retrospectively with the composition of the novel, which, twice in a letter to Wilson of October 21, 1941, he placed "five years" earlier (*Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 57-58). According to Karlinsky, Véra Nabokov called Nabokov's dating a "memory lapse, because the apartment where the novel was written was rented only in 1938" (*Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 58n2). But the lapse seems programmatic, if not necessarily planned. It makes sense that in looking back on the book as it neared publication (in a letter of October 20, Wilson mentioned having "just read" the proofs [55]), Nabokov might have associated its composition with its focal year, which was the year of two writers' deaths.

In another passage, the recollections irrealistically assigned to the “banished man pining after the land of his birth” are derived from English poems, including “Into my heart an air that kills” and “The Old Vicarage, Grantchester”: “I would have liked to show him straining his memory to the utmost in a continuous effort to keep alive and bright the vision of his past: the blue remembered hills and the happy highways, the hedge with its unofficial rose and the field with its rabbits, the distant spire and the near bluebell....”⁴⁵ That series of quotations is echoed in “The Lermontov Mirage.” Brooke’s and Housman’s images – “[a]n ‘unofficial English rose,’ or ‘the spires and farms’ seen from a hillside in Shropshire”⁴⁶ – appear among scenes from English and Russian sources that in their idiosyncrasy and sensual detail, as Nabokov conceives it, testify to the writer’s European “love for the native countryside.” Lermontov is identified as European in this respect,⁴⁷ while as a Russian writer he has the distorted vision characteristic of the exile – whether or not he has been expelled from his homeland (“The Russian poet talks of the view from his window as if he were an exile dreaming of his land more vividly than he ever saw it [...]”).⁴⁸

The title Nabokov proposes for his translation of “Son” in the Lermontov essay – “[it] might bear the title: A Dream in a Dream of a Dream in a Dream”⁴⁹ – echoes the complaint of

⁴⁵ *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 68-69 and 26-27. Boyd identifies Sebastian Knight’s sources and discusses the relevance of the Brooke reference, among others, to the theme of the poet’s longing for home (Nabokov, *Novels and Memoirs 1941-1951* and *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 182-83; see also de Vries, *Silent Love*, 17-18). As for the “field with its rabbits” that is linked to the Brooke-inspired “hedge with its unofficial rose,” there are hares in the field in “The Old Vicarage, Grantchester” (“And after, ere the night is born, / Do hares come out about the corn?”), but no rabbits.

⁴⁶ Nabokov’s phrase “[a]n unofficial English rose,” which appears also in his Russian translation in “Rupert Bruk,” is a misquotation of Brooke’s more unusual “an English unofficial rose” (noted also by Shvabrin, *Between Rhyme and Reason*, 220). Brooke’s word order is restored by the translators of “Rupert Brooke” (*Think, Write, Speak*, 23).

⁴⁷ The essay was originally framed as one of a series of lectures delivered at Wellesley in fall 1941 and spring 1942. The prompt for the series, provided to Nabokov by Wellesley president Mildred H. McAfee, was “The Great Russian Writers and Their Importance and Influence on European Culture.” (Thus the source of the essay was a lecture designed for a general audience. Cf. Diment’s doubts about the appropriateness of “The Lermontov Mirage” for the scholarly *Russian Review* [“Uncollected Critical Writings,” 737]). Nabokov’s subjects included poets as well as prose writers, and his take on the prompt had a slightly different emphasis. The title of the second lecture was “Lermontov as a West European Writer” (the first and third lectures were devoted similarly to Pushkin and Gogol). See Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 27, 35, 36, 39.

⁴⁸ “The Lermontov Mirage,” 35. Nabokov barely alludes to Lermontov’s own Caucasian exiles, in 1837-1838 and again in 1840-1841. Cf. “He spent the best years of his short life in the Caucasus” (“The Lermontov Mirage,” 31).

⁴⁹ “The Lermontov Mirage,” 33. In another possible example of the influence of “Son” in Nabokov’s novels, Sklyarenko argues that Lermontov’s poem is a structural model for *Ada* (“*Ada* as a Triple Dream,” 17-21).

Nabokov’s focus on dream visions in Lermontov’s poetry may owe something to Mirsky’s commentary on Lermontov, which Nabokov cites approvingly in the Biographical Notes to his 1944 translations (*Three Russian Poets*, 38; see also *Pushkin Lermontov Tyutchev*, 39). Mirsky writes: “[Lermontov’s poetry] is not occasional. Reality is an accident. There are permanent visions, permanent knots of emotion, by which he is obsessed; he cannot be at rest until he has freed himself of them” (*A History of Russian Literature*, 141). Mirsky is discussing

Sebastian Knight's former lover about that exiled, doomed character: "[...] she had had quite enough of hearing him talk of his dreams, and the dreams in his dreams, and the dreams in the dreams of his dreams."⁵⁰ Her comment links Nabokov's Housmanian protagonist with Lermontov's dreamer, completing the connection between Lermontov and Housman in Nabokov's prose of the transitional period.

[3] The connection is justified by the situation of the speaker in Lermontov's "Son," who shares two features with the typical protagonist of Housman's poems: his solitary recumbent position ("Lezhal odin ia" / "Alone I lay") and his vision of a far-away homeland ("v rodimoj storone" / "in the land I knew," or – the 1958 version – "in my native land"). These features appear in Housman's poems, separately and together. A typical combined example occurs in Housman's "Far in a western brookland" (*ASL* LII), where the speaker's nocturnal thoughts all stray from the city to his distant home: "[...] No more remembered / In fields where I was known, / Here I lie down in London / And turn to rest alone."⁵¹

Whereas exile is the primary theme associated with Housman in the three prose works of 1941, the focus of the Housman subtexts of Nabokov's "Triple Dream" is the figure of the "lad" or "man" laid to rest. Relevant quotations from Housman appear in the second and third lines of stanza five:

For in her dream she saw a gorge, somewhere
in Daghestan, and knew *the man who lay*
there on the sand, the dead man, unaware

Lermontov's well-known reuse of passages from his own poems, but the motivation he proposes is reminiscent of Nabokov's account of the representation, in Lermontov's poetry, of the "dreams of which [reality] consists" ("The Lermontov Mirage," 32). Mirsky's reference to the "central, small, but priceless, visionary core of Lermontov" (*A History*, 142) is consistent with Nabokov's motif of "mirage" in the Lermontov essay. Nabokov's contrast between the "commonplace of mysticism" at the basis of *Demon* and the "bright pigments of definite landscapes" that "save [...]" the poem recall Mirsky's comments about the "famous descriptive passages" of Lermontov's *Mtsyri* by contrast with the "vague" landscapes of the early drafts ("The Lermontov Mirage," 34; *A History*, 141). Nabokov echoes Mirsky's language: "This vision of a 'distant land' of eternity shimmering through the visions of this world" (*A History*, 142) becomes, in "The Lermontov Mirage," "distant lands" and "sham shimmer" (33, 32).

⁵⁰ *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 159. De Vries compares these words to Nabokov's analysis of "Son" in the Translator's Foreword to *A Hero of Our Time (Silent Love)*, 62). The opening phrase of the 1941 translation, "I dreamt that..." which has no counterpart in Lermontov's poem, represents the first layer of Nabokov's construction of the poem as a series of embedded dreams.

⁵¹ See the full text of "Far in a western brookland" in Appendix 2.

of steaming wound and blood ebbing away.

The second stanza of Housman's poem "It nods and curtseys and recovers" (*ASL XVI*) is a source of the most obvious departures from Lermontov's text: the appositional repetition of a noun phrase in combination with enjambment, and the substitution of "(dead) man" for "familiar corpse."⁵²

It nods and curtseys and recovers
When the wind blows above,
The nettle on the graves of lovers
That hanged themselves for love.

The nettle nods, the wind blows over,
The *man*, he does not move,
The lover of the grave, the lover
That hanged himself for love.

In avoiding the phrase "znakomyi trup,"⁵³ Nabokov repeats "man," which is a key word in "It nods..." and in Housman's lexicon more generally.⁵⁴

Nabokov's phrase "dead man" is also marked in Housman. It appears three times in *A Shropshire Lad* and twice in Housman's posthumous collections. In two instances it refers, as it does in Nabokov's translation, to the speaker, representing, as "znakomyi trup" does in

⁵² Because of these and other departures from the original, the line-to-line parallelism between stanzas 1 and 5 in Lermontov's poem is not as conspicuous in Nabokov's translation. The use of parallelism between first and last stanzas to indicate crucial change, as in "Son," is a signature of Housman's verse (often in two-stanza poems).

⁵³ "The Lermontov Mirage," 34; see note 13.

⁵⁴ "It nods and curtseys and recovers" depends on the shift from the plural "lovers" in the first stanza to the singular "lover" in the second, which reveals that the "lovers / That hanged themselves for love" are not star-crossed couples but, like the solitary "man" in stanza 2, "lover[s] of the grave." Housman's characteristically freighted use of the word "man" as "person" and as "male person" at the same time can be found in "Because I liked you better" (*MP XXXI*) and "It is no gift I tender" (*AP IV*).

Lermontov's poem, a vision of the speaker's own death. One of those instances occurs in the final poem of *A Shropshire Lad* (LXIII).⁵⁵

I hoed and trenched and weeded,
And took the flowers to fair:
I brought them home unheeded;
The hue was not the wear.

So up and down I sow them
For lads like me to find,

When I shall lie below them,
A dead man out of mind.

Some seed the birds devour,
And some the season mars,
But here and there will flower
The solitary stars,

And fields will yearly bear them
As light-leaved spring comes on,
And luckless lads will wear them
When I am dead and gone.

Nabokov's sequence "the dead man, unaware" is a quotation of the type Sergei Bobrov called "zaimstvovanie po ritmu i zvuchaniuu," or, as paraphrased by Kiril Taranovsky, the

⁵⁵ The other instance of "dead man" representing the speaker's vision of his own death occurs in "Because I liked you better" (this is in addition to the use of "man" mentioned in the preceding note). The phrase occurs also in "On moonlit heath and lonesome bank" (*ASL IX*), "Is my team ploughing" (*ASL XXVII*), and "In midnights of November" (*LP XIX*).

“borrowing of a rhythmic figure and the sounds contained therein.”⁵⁶ Nabokov substitutes “unaware” for the rhythmically comparable and ostensibly synonymous “out of mind.” In fact Housman’s phrase “[a] dead man out of mind” makes the dead man not “unconscious” but “forgotten.”⁵⁷ The situation of the speaker in “Far in a western brookland” is similar, as in the first published version of the line quoted above: “He hears: long since forgotten / In fields where I was known [...]”⁵⁸

Supporting evidence for the reference to “I hoed and trenched and weeded” is found in stanza four of Nabokov’s translation:

But one of them sat pensively apart,
not joining in the *light-lipped* gossiping,
and there alone, God knows what made her heart,
her young heart dream of such a hidden thing....

The compound “light-lipped” is modeled formally on “light-leaved,” in the last stanza of Housman’s poem (“When light-leaved spring comes on”). The elements of Nabokov’s coinage are derived from a second poem, “With rue my heart is laden” (*ASL* LIV). Notable in each context is the intensive and semantically significant repetition of /l/. The young men appear here in their characteristic posture:

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping

⁵⁶ Taranovsky, *Essays on Mandel’shtam*, 16, 18.

⁵⁷ Confirmation of this meaning can be found in Psalm 31.12, identified in Burnett (who credits Sparrow) as a subtext of Housman’s line: “I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind [...]” (*The Poems of A. E. Housman*, 369).

⁵⁸ Housman revised this line for the edition of *A Shropshire Lad* published in November 1922 (*The Poems of A. E. Housman*, 55). Nabokov may well have known the line in its original phrasing from his pre-1922 edition (*Speak, Memory*, 273).

The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade.

The fate of the lightfoot boys is the common fate of “young males” in *A Shropshire Lad* (the plight of the rose-lipt girls might have been considered a fate worse than death). The fate of the speaker in the last stanza of “I hoed and trenched and weeded” is a posthumous flowering. In that final poem Housman transforms the theme of young men and death, where the *lad* must inevitably be *laid* to rest. The “luckless lads” like the speaker are associated with “light-leaved spring.” The speaker concludes the book with two variants of the vision of his own death: the “dead man out of mind” at the end of stanza two, and, at the end of stanza four, the poet “dead and gone” whose flowers other “luckless lads” will “find” and “wear.” The second variant has a counterpart in “Far in a western brookland,” where, though the speaker may be forgotten, the sighing of his soul in the land that “bred [him] long ago” is heard by the “wanderer” there. While there is no direct quotation of “Far in a western brookland” in Nabokov’s “Triple Dream,” and indeed, Nabokov translates Lermontov’s “dusha” as “heart” and not “soul” in the 1941 version (cf. “soul” in 1958), the parallel between Housman’s poem and Lermontov’s, where the speaker at rest alone is represented by the “soul” in his distant homeland, is intriguing.

.....

APPENDIX I

The Triple Dream

I dreamt that with a bullet in my side
in a hot gorge of Daghestan I lay.
Deep was the wound and steaming, and the tide
of my life-blood ebbed drop by drop away.

Alone I lay amid a silent maze
of desert sand and bare cliffs rising steep,
their tawny summits burning in the blaze
that burned me too; but lifeless was my sleep.

And in a dream I saw the candle-flame
of a gay supper in the land I knew;
young women crowned with flowers.... And my name
on their light lips hither and thither flew.

But one of them sat pensively apart,
not joining in the light-lipped gossiping,
and there alone, God knows what made her heart,
her young heart dream of such a hidden thing....

For in her dream she saw a gorge, somewhere
in Daghestan, and knew the man who lay
there on the sand, the dead man, unaware
of steaming wound and blood ebbing away.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Nabokov, *Verses and Versions*, 297. The translation appears without the title in its first publication in 1941 ("The Lermontov Mirage," 33). The longer ellipses of the earlier publications are restored here.

The Triple Dream

In noon's heat, in a dale of Dagestan,
With lead inside my breast, stirless I lay;
The deep wound still smoked on; my blood
Kept trickling drop by drop away.

On the dale's sand alone I lay. The cliffs
Crowded around in ledges steep,
And the sun scorched their tawny tops
And scorched me – but I slept death's sleep.

And in a dream I saw an evening feast
That in my native land with bright lights shone;
Among young women crowned with flowers,
A merry talk concerning me went on.

But in the merry talk not joining,
One of them sat there lost in thought,
And in a melancholy dream
Her young soul was immersed – God knows by what.

And of a dale in Dagestan she dreamt;
In that dale lay the corpse of one she knew;
Within his breast a smoking wound showed black,
And blood ran in a stream that colder grew.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Nabokov, *Verses and Versions*, 298. The title is suggested though not attached to the 1958 translation in its first publication (Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*, v-vi).

СОН

В полдневный жар в долине Дагестана
С свинцом в груди лежал недвижим я,
Глубокая еще дымилась рана,
По капле кровь точилась моя.

Лежал один я на песке долины.
Уступы скал теснились кругом,
И солнце жгло их желтые вершины
И жгло меня — но спал я мертвым сном.

И снился мне сияющий огнями
Вечерний пир в родимой стороне.
Меж юных жен, увенчанных цветами,
Шел разговор веселый обо мне.

Но, в разговор веселый не вступая,
Сидела там задумчиво одна,
И в грустный сон душа ее младая
Бог знает чем была погружена;

И снилась ей долина Дагестана;
Знакомый труп лежал в долине той,
В его груди, дымясь, чернела рана,
И кровь лилась хладеющей струей.⁶¹

1841

⁶¹ Lermontov, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii v dvukh tomakh*, Vol. 2, 76.

APPENDIX 2

Far in a western brookland
That bred me long ago
The poplars stand and tremble
By pools I used to know.

There, in the windless night-time,
The wanderer, marvelling why,
Halts on the bridge to hearken
How soft the poplars sigh.

He hears: no more remembered
In fields where I was known,
Here I lie down in London
And turn to rest alone.

There, by the starlit fences,
The wanderer halts and hears
My soul that lingers sighing
About the glimmering weirs.⁶²

⁶² *The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman, 77.*

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