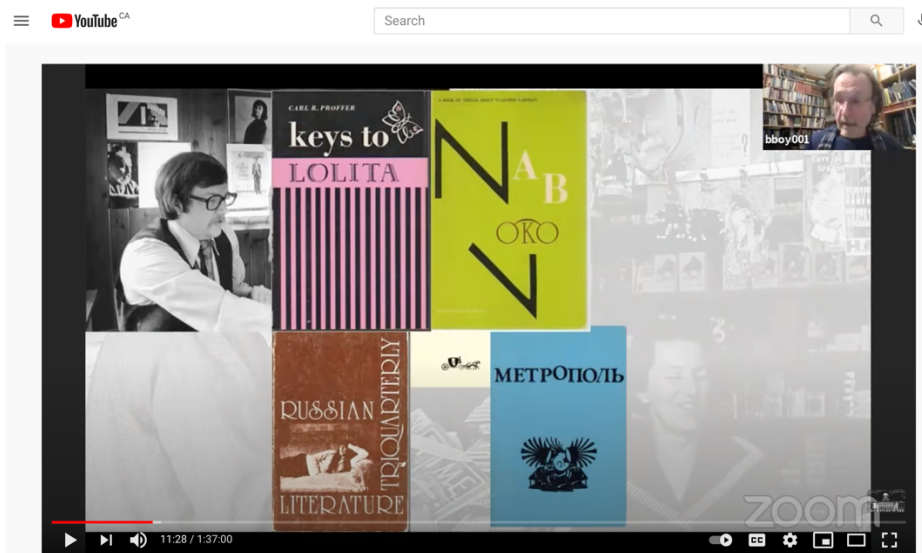


Tatiana Ponomareva

**THE NABOKOV READINGS
IN 2020**

The Nabokov Readings annual international conference was launched by Dr. Vadim Stark, the first director of the Nabokov Museum in St. Petersburg, twenty-five years ago. In 2002, my colleagues in the museum and myself took over the conference organization and since then the Nabokov Readings has always been bilingual, with Russian and English as working languages and it has welcomed participants from 36 countries since then. In 2019 the Nabokov Museum, a division of the St. Petersburg State University, was reformatted, and all the staff had to move to other research institutions. For the past two years the conference has been hosted by the Institute of Russian Literature (*Pushkinsky Dom*).



Brian Boyd's presentation on Zoom.

In 2020 we in the Pushkinsky Dom had to face an unprecedented challenge: the pandemic made travel impossible. Out of this challenge a new format was born: on June 30 – July 4 we ran not only an online conference but also, for the first time, an online

Nabokov festival. The festival included talks by the most famous Nabokov scholars of the world, presentations of new books on Nabokov, a round table discussion, a documentary film viewing and a reading of Nabokov's "Spring in Fialta" by well-known Russian public figures.

The main constraint in the planning was time zones: we started panels in the afternoon so that participants in North America could join us but that limited the length of the panels and, sadly, excluded many participants. As a result, this year the conference was in Russian only.

All the events of both the festival and the conference were recorded and can be viewed at any time on the Pushkinsky Dom channel¹.

FESTIVAL

The festival opened with the lecture by Alexander Dolinin "Nabokov Playing Nabokov: The Hidden Points in *Lolita*." The lecture focused on the hidden presence of the real bilingual author of *Lolita* in the novel written as a first-person narrative. Signals indicating that Nabokov appears in Humbert Humbert's "confession" (like Alfred Hitchcock appearing in his own films) are always related to the Russian language, Russian literature and Russian culture.

The other focal event was a lecture and an open interview by Brian Boyd in which he talked about his work on Nabokov and on his new book *Think, Write, Speak*. Brian Boyd also gave an interview to the esteemed online literary magazine *Polka* (<https://polka.academy/materials/708>).

Another event of the festival that received much public response was the presentation of new books on Nabokov and of the new website of the International Vladimir Nabokov society.

Yuri Leving talked about the Russian edition of his book *Lolita – The Story of a Cover Girl: Vladimir Nabokov's Novel in Art* (St. Petersburg: Kriga, 2019) and Stanislav Shvabrin on his recent work *Between Rhyme and Reason: Vladimir Nabokov, Translation, and Dialogue*. Alexander Kononov, Editor of Symposium, announced the

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoC3LED5csTl9qg91iKKJaQ>

forthcoming Russian edition of Brian Boyd's book *Stalking Nabokov* and Nikolay Rodosky (Ivan Limbakh Publishing House) told about recent publications on Nabokov.

The round-table discussion "Nabokov in the Time of Plague" in which several scholars took part was planned at the height of the pandemic and this explains the choice of its subject. A big part of Nabokov's writing career developed in very hard conditions and we talked about Nabokov's experience in overcoming life's challenges, about what helped him remain true to his mission as a writer and whether his experience can offer solutions to his readers now.

The reading of "Spring in Fialta" by well-known public figures was something that only online format allowed us to do. The short story, one of the most popular in Nabokov, was read successively by writers Tatiana Tolstaya, Dmitry Bykov, Vadim Zhuk, Andrey Aryev and Yuri Saprykin, political scientist Ekaterina Shulman, singer Vladimir Miller, head of the Anna Akhmatova Museum Nina Popova, head of the Lev Gumilev Museum Marina Pisarenko.

The final event of the festival was the first showing of the full-length documentary film "My Nabokov" by Marina Trush and Vladimir Samorodov (Russia). The documentary was filmed for several years in various international locations and it includes interviews with Nabokov's relatives who knew him personally and Nabokov scholars, each of them sharing his/her own vision of Nabokov's art (hence the title). After the showing of the film Nabokov scholars and viewers discussed the film with the cinematographers.

CONFERENCE

The 2020 conference was dedicated to the memory of our renowned colleague Dieter Zimmer (1939-2020) who had passed away days before the beginning of the conference. The papers presented at the conference demonstrated a fascinating diversity of subjects. Traditionally, our conferences present new archival finds and this year saw two papers based on archival materials. Olga Voronina (USA) presented a paper "Cryptogram as an Open Text: Commentaries to Materials from Nabokov's Archive in NYPL." She focused on the origin of the word "nymphet" and a hidden allusion to Alfred Tennyson in the Cambridge chapter of *Conclusive Evidence / Speak, Memory*. Grigory

Utgof's (Estonia) paper was "From the Manuscript of *Podvig* to the Typescript of *Glory*" tracing the changes the novel underwent in its long bilingual history.

The conference opened with the paper by Michael Weisskopf (Israel) "*King, Queen, Knave* and the Periodic Table of the Russian Romanticism" that explores a new approach to the Romantic sources of Nabokov's art. Andrey Aryev, Editor of the leading St. Petersburg literary magazine *Zvezda*, presented a paper entitled "On a Phrase in Nabokov" in which he continued his research of the literary rivalry between Nabokov and G. Ivanov. Valery Timofeev (St. Petersburg) in his "Sirin's *Thule* as an Intertextual Pivot of Nabokov's Novels" offered a new look at Nabokov's Russian fiction of the transitional period.

Two of the papers: "The Poetics of Pseudotranslation: Nabokov and Alexander Grin" by Elena Tolstaya (Israel) and "The Waltz Hyperboloid: Nabokov and the Russian/Soviet Science Fiction of the 1910s-1920s" by Vera Polischouk (Russia) focused on the links between Nabokov and the major Soviet writers of his time.

Stephen Blackwell's (USA) paper "Notes on Trees in Nabokov's Russian Novels" offered a look into a yet unexplored part of Nabokov's world where art and nature meet. Olga Dmitrienko's (Russia) paper "The Genre Code of the Medieval Religious Literature in Nabokov's Novels and Short Stories of the 1920s-1930s" focused on the ideas of contemporary Russian émigré philosophers in Nabokov.

Alexandra Glebovskaya (Russia) presented her paper "A Jewish Theme That Was Missing From Nabokov's Work" on the Yiddish language and literature in Nabokov. Renata Goroshkova (Russia) in her paper "Charles Dickens and the Nabokovs" analyzed striking affinities between *Going into Society* by Charles Dickens and *The Potato Elf* by Vladimir Nabokov. Julia Trubikhina (USA) in "Reading *Ulysses* in Lockdown, reading *Lolita* in Quarantine" focused on Nabokov's use of Joyce's stylistic devices as well as the structural and philosophical motif of walking in both writers.

In line with the tradition of the museum years, the conference had a substantial biographical panel on Nabokov and his family. Michail Meylakh (St. Petersburg) shared his memories of meetings with Nabokov's sister Elena Sikorski. Evgeny Belodubrovsky (St. Petersburg) presented a paper entitled "V. D. Nabokov's Translation of Empress Alexandra's Letters: The Publication's History and Reception." Andrey Ustinov's (San Francisco, USA) paper was "Nabokov and Gleb Struve: New Materials." Daniel Sergeyev of the Rozhdestveno Museum gave a presentation "N. I. Tolstaya's Archive in the Collection of the Rozhdestveno Museum" (N. I. Tolstaya was one of the first Russian

Nabokov scholars and editors). Tatiana Ponomareva, adding to the research previously done by Dieter Zimmer, introduced two unpublished letters with details on the last years of Sergey Nabokov.

The experience of this difficult year demonstrated that online format should remain as a part of the Nabokov Readings in the future. The event reached a much broader audience than before and received positive feedback both in the media and in the Nabokov academic community. In the next year we hope to hold bilingual Nabokov Readings in the mixed online / offline format.

