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CONJURING IN TWO TONGUES: THE RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH PROSODIES OF NABOKOV'S "PALE FIRE"

> "*...I have not come across a single work that treated English iambics ... in a way even remotely acceptable to a student of prosody.*"
>
> Vladimir Nabokov, *Notes on Prosody*

> "*... a prosody designed to deal with [Pushkin] cannot be used for English poetry, which Nabokov does not quite understand, as he occasionally betrays, in his otherwise delightful English verse...*"
>
> Edmund Wilson, *NYRB*

"Pale Fire," Vladimir Nabokov's longest poem in English, forms the core of *Pale Fire*, his most inventive novel (Nabokov, 1962). Although the poem has received significant critical attention, I have not come across a single work that analyzes the prosody of its 999 lines of iambic pentameter in a way Nabokov himself would have found "even remotely acceptable." This is ironic given that, shortly before he composed "Pale Fire," Nabokov himself carefully wrote up the rules by which he engaged with both English and Russian iambic verse. These rules of engagement were based largely on methods and insights of mathematically minded Russian poets and critics — people like Andrei Bely and Boris Tomashevsky— whose approach was much more quantitative and taxonomic than that of their English-speaking counterparts. It should not surprise us that Nabokov —the unofficial curator of lepidoptera at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology— admired Russian critics who analyzed poems the way naturalists study butterflies, dissecting them to better understand their

internal structures and evolutionary origins. Reading Nabokov's detailed *Notes on Prosody* (1964) convinced me that, to comprehend the inner workings of his poetry, we must take the same quantitative and systematic approach: carefully counting syllables, classifying rhythms, and comparing examples. My aim in this essay is to deploy Russian-style, quantitative methods to study the prosodic architecture of "Pale Fire," and a few other English language poems by Nabokov that I suspect of containing "a Russian something" hidden in their architecture.[1]

The novel, *Pale Fire,* is a complex creature: a poem and a critical commentary that work together to tell stories and pose puzzles. The poem, "Pale Fire," is written, ostensibly, by the American poet and teacher John Shade and it describes events leading up to his daughter's suicide and his subsequent search for meaning and consolation in the promise of an afterlife. After Shade's untimely death at the hands of a mysterious assassin named Jakob Gradus (or perhaps the escaped mental patient Jack Gray), his poem falls into the hands of Charles Kinbote, a mentally unbalanced scholar and possibly the exiled king of a small Eastern European country. Kinbote publishes the poem but in doing so he takes it over like a parasitic wasp, injecting his own cracked and self-absorbed commentary into the forward, footnotes, and index. A fair amount of scholarship has been devoted to *Pale Fire* (e.g. Boyd, 2001) but Shade's poem has generally received less attention than Kinbote's commentary. Recently, however, the poem has begun to have a life of its own outside the confines of the novel. In 2012, Gingko Press published the poem without Kinbote's commentary, along with a 'facsimile' of the manuscript. Nabokov scholar Brian Boyd and poet R. S. Gwynn contributed critical essays to this edition, arguing for the autonomy of "Pale Fire" and suggesting that it ranks among the great American poems of the Twentieth Century. These essays, however, focus almost exclusively on semantic elements of the poem — themes, allusions, and influences — with only passing nods in the direction of Nabokov's prosody. Neither writer attempts a systematic analysis of the poem's language and rhythm.

This is really too bad because it is only when we strip the semantic flesh from the rhythmic and linguistic skeleton of "Pale Fire" that we begin to see what a strange, chimeric creature it really is: how it deploys both English and Russian prosodic devices to mark significant passages. Here are a few examples that emerged from the analysis described in later sections of this essay: (1) Nabokov uses his favorite tool for analyzing rhythm — one developed by Russian poet Andrei Bely — to construct a prosodic "Jacob's Ladder" within the poem. This

figure is linked to the assassin, Jakob Gradus, and it embeds his fatal presence in the very architecture of the verse. (2) All vowel elisions in "Pale Fire" follow one of two linguistic rules: one that creates poeticisms by removing syllables, and another that highlights significant words by leaving them intact. (3) The overall rhythm of the poem shifts measurably from the first half to the second —a transition from stability to instability that coincides with the death of Shade's daughter, Hazel. And among the unsettled rhythms of the second half of the poem — hidden in Canto 3 — we find an unmistakably Russian passage. By Nabokov's own criteria these lines violate norms of English prosody while conforming closely to those of Russian. The form and content of this passage, as well as those of similarly constructed passages in an earlier and much shorter poem, "An Evening of Russian Poetry," suggest that, like Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, Nabokov used 'foreign' rhythms to create a cryptic voice of alienation and exile (Friedberg, 2011). In Nabokov's case this voice is also strongly associated with moments of *potustoronnost* (потусторонность), that is: a sense of proximity to another world. Vladimir Alexandrov characterizes this under-appreciated aspect of Nabokov's art as a recurring "intuition about a transcendent realm of being" (Alexandrov, 1995a). In his American works *potustoronnost* often takes the form of "a Russian something," distant in space and time and yet somehow immediately adjacent to the here and now.

AN AMERICAN POEM WITH RUSSIAN ROOTS

To understand why Nabokov might mix Russian and English prosodies in "Pale Fire" it helps to recognize some of the linguistic confluences associated with the poem. By the time he wrote "Pale Fire" Vladimir Nabokov was an expatriate several times over. He was born in 1899 into wealth and privilege in the twilight of czarist Russia, and grew up on a family estate outside St. Petersburg. He was tutored at home and, at an early age, became fluent in three languages: Russian, English, and French. In the wake of the 1917 revolution, Nabokov's family fled Russia for the west, never to return. Nabokov lived out the rest of his life as an exile, first in England and Germany; then in the United States; and finally in Switzerland. He began studying and writing poetry around the age of fourteen in Russia. In England he studied literature at Cambridge University. In Germany he began writing Russian short stories and novels. Fleeing the war in Europe, he moved to the U.S. at the age of forty (Boyd, *VN: TRY*; Johnson, 1985).

There he became an American citizen and began writing his important later works, all in English. Although "Pale Fire" is set in America it was, in fact, written in Switzerland where Nabokov spent his final years, living as both an expatriate American as well as an expatriate Russian writer.

The themes of mortality, transcendence, and the hereafter that preoccupy John Shade in "Pale Fire" actually reflect a central concern that runs through Nabokov's work, right from its Russian beginnings. In the preface to a posthumously published collection of his Russian poetry, Nabokov's wife Vera identified the major theme of her late husband's work as *potustoronnost*, a Russian word for which there is no exact English equivalent but which means roughly: the presence or proximity of 'the other side':

> Now, sending this anthology to be published, I want turn the attention of the reader to the central theme of Nabokov. This [theme], it seems, has not been noticed by anyone, even though it saturates everything he wrote; like a sort of watermark, it symbolizes all his creative work. I am talking about "*potustoronnost*," as he himself called it in his last poem "Being in Love." ... [Nabokov] approached [a description of *potustoronnost*] most closely in the poem "Glory," where he defined it with complete candor as a mystery, which he carried in his soul and which he neither should nor could reveal. ... [This mystery] gave him his unshakable clarity and love of life even during the heaviest experiences and [it] rendered him invulnerable to the stupidest and vilest of attacks. (*Stikhi*, p. 3)[2]

Nabokov's sense of *potustoronnost* may have been part of a *sui generis* system of metaphysics but, as a literary device, *potustoronnost* has a life of its own in the Russian poetic tradition. This life dates back at least as far as Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873) and such potent images as that of waking life as an island surrounded by a mysterious ocean of the unconscious: "As the ocean encompasses the earthly sphere / [So] earthly life is compassed round by dreams" ["Как океан объемлет шар земной, / Земная жизнь кругом объята снами"]. Tyutchev may have mined such images from German romantic philosophy and, although they are aesthetically powerful, it is questionable whether they hold any particular metaphysical significance for him (Gregg, 1985). Tyutchev's poetry was rediscovered around the turn of the twentieth century by

the Symbolist poets, most notably Alexander Blok (Venclova, 1985), who became himself a master of *potustoronnost*. The Symbolists in turn were an important influence on the artistic development of the young Vladimir Nabokov (Alexandrov, 1995b; Bethea, 1995b) as he related in a letter to Edmund Wilson. Describing the vibrancy of the Russian literary scene of his youth Nabokov claimed that: "The 'decline' of Russian literature in 1905-1917 is a Soviet invention. Blok, Bely, Bunin and others wrote their best stuff in those days. And never was poetry so popular, not even in Pushkin's days. I am a product of that period, I was bred in that atmosphere" (*Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, p. 220).

Another poet with Symbolist roots, Vladislav Khodasevich, likely inspired the most memorable lines of "Pale Fire": the opening image of a bird fatally colliding with a picture window (ll. 1-4).

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff – and I
Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky.

These lines echo an image from Khodasevich's poem "Swallows" ["Ласточки"], in which two birds dart in front of a window. Like Nabokov's window, this one reflects the blue [синева] of the sky and hides a mysterious depth (ll. 1-8):[3]

Имей глаза — сквозь день увидишь ночь,	Having eyes — beyond day you will see night,
Не озаренную тем воспалённым диском.	Unlit by this feverish/burning disc.
Две ласточки напрасно рвутся прочь,	Two swallows speed away in vain,
Перед окном шныряя с тонким писком.	Darting by the window with a thin squeak.
Вон ту прозрачную, но прочную плеву	Behold this transparent, but solid membrane
Не прободать крылом остроугольным,	Impervious to the sharp wingtip,
Не выпорхнуть туда, за синеву,	Nothing flutters to that place, beyond the blue,
Ни птичьим крылышком, ни сердцем подневольным.	No bird wing; no captive heart.

There is an obvious connection between the waxwing and the swallows, but there is also an interesting difference. Khodasevich's swallows do not attempt to penetrate the mystery beyond the window and they escape disaster. Nabokov's waxwing is not so lucky but, while it cannot physically penetrate the window, its collision produces a sort of transcendence. The dead bird lives on somehow "in the reflected sky," that is: in the memory of John Shade as he looks out the window of his office; in the lines of Shade's last poem; and perhaps in some metaphysical sense. Like much of Nabokov's work, the dominant theme of Khodasevich's "Swallows" could be described as *potustoronnost*. The first two lines reveal the existence of a "night" lurking behind the "day." The next six lines —with the metaphor of birds flitting past a window— illustrate the simultaneous proximity and inaccessibility of the cryptic night. The final stanza (ll. 9-12) proposes an attitude of acceptance toward this mysterious darkness which is not so much dispelled as enhanced by the illumination of the "feverish disc" from the first stanza:

Пока вся кровь не выступит из пор,	Until all the blood drains from [your] pores,
Пока не выплачешь земные очи —	Until you have cried out [these] earthly eyes—
Не станешь духом. Жди, смотря в упор,	You will not become spirit. Wait, looking closely
Как брызжет свет, не застилая ночи.	As light pours forth, not concealing the night.

Without worrying too much about what Khodasevich means by "day" and "night," the relationship between the two worlds recalls the relationship between Tyutchev's "earthly sphere" and "dreams." Kevin Frazier (2010) has suggested that the opening stanzas of "Pale Fire" also echo another of Khodasevich's poems, "Ballad" ["Баллада"]. As in the beginning of "Pale Fire," the narrator of "Ballad" sits alone in a room contemplating a false sky that becomes the gateway into a sort of afterlife. Nabokov once described Khodasevich as the greatest poet in the Russian tradition (Bethea, 1995b) and claimed that "Ballad" — which he translated into English — represented "the limits of poetic skill."[4]

Nabokov and Khodasevich met as émigrés, after leaving Russia in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. Khodasevich, who was already a major Russian poet, supported and encouraged the young Nabokov during his early European years and the two became allies, fighting together in literary scuffles that played out across the pages of the émigré journals. In addition to the opening lines, Khodasevich may have inspired other elements of "Pale Fire." His

untimely death in a Paris hospital for the indigent, for example, may be echoed in the death of the exile in Canto 3 who, as he lies dying in an American motel room, "conjures in two tongues." We will return to this image in a later section.

If Nabokov was inspired by an image cribbed from a fellow Russian poet with a similar history and sensibility, what about the ostensible author of "Pale Fire" — the American poet John Shade? There is no reason to suspect that Shade would be familiar with a Russian émigré whose work was not widely available in English. Instead, Shade appears to have taken *his* inspiration for this passage from a short poem by fellow American, Robert Frost, published in *The Saturday Review of Literature* on April 12, 1958 (Socher, 2005). In this poem, "Of a Winter Evening," another bird — this time a "winter owl" — narrowly avoids collision with a seductive window. The poem is short and worth quoting in its entirety:

> The winter owl banked just in time to pass
> And save herself from breaking window glass.
> And her wide wings strained suddenly at spread
> Caught color from the last of evening red
> In a display of underdown and quill
> To glassed-in children at the window sill.

Abraham Socher (2005) makes a good case that Nabokov knew this poem and he notes its obvious connections to the opening lines of "Pale Fire." Namely, Frost's poem: "depicts the near collision of a bird with a sky-reflecting window, features a neat reversal of perspective, and is [written] in heroic couplets."[5] Frost himself makes a cameo appearance in "Pale Fire" (ll. 424-426) and many people have suggested him as a model for John Shade (e.g. Socher, 2005). If we accept both Khodasevich and Frost as influences on the opening lines of "Pale Fire," we see a truly remarkable layering of authorship and allusion. John Shade opens his poem with an image borrowed from an American contemporary; simultaneously Vladimir Nabokov opens the same poem by borrowing the same image from a fellow Russian émigré. The luckless cedar waxwing thus conceals an American owl and two Russian swallows. We scratch the American surface of "Pale Fire" and find a Russia hidden inside; and for a moment our attention slips from Shade the ventriloquist dummy and back to Nabokov, whose lips we just might see moving.

Among the deepest Russian shadows fall across "Pale Fire" is that of Alexander Pushkin's verse novel, *Eugene Onegin*, a work that Nabokov famously translated from Russian into English. "Pale Fire" was composed in 1960-1, not long after Nabokov finished work on *Onegin* (Boyd, *VN:TAY*, pp. 417-24) and the timing is probably not a coincidence. Nabokov struggled with *Onegin* and one suspects that the frustrations of this project actually itched *Pale Fire* into being. Nabokov had previously translated many Russian poets including his favorite, Vladislav Khodasevich, into carefully crafted English verse. Faced with the most famous work of the most important Russian poet, however, Nabokov balked. Perhaps it was the acuteness of his poetic sensibilities, both Russian and English, that made him despair of importing Pushkin's genius across linguistic borders. He expressed his ambivalence in a short poem, *On Translating "Eugene Onegin,"* where he calls the act of translating poetry, "A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter / and profanation of the dead." Ultimately, *Onegin* forced Nabokov to rethink his approach to translation and to adopt a literal, word-for-word method that sacrificed poetic effect for meaning.

Neither Nabokov's mode of translation nor his finished *Onegin* were universally beloved. Sometime friend, Edmund Wilson, characterized his literalist approach as a masochistic "hairshirt" and felt that "when [Nabokov] tries to translate *Onegin* 'literally,' what he writes is not always really English." (Wilson, 1965) Guy Davenport similarly observed that: "translation involves two languages; the translator is in constant danger of inventing a third that lies between, a treacherous nonexistent language suggested by the original and not recognized by the language into which the original is being transposed." (Davenport, 1981: p. 34) Davenport, Wilson and others felt that Nabokov's *Onegin* spent too much time wandering in the no-man's-land somewhere between Russian and English.

Nabokov appended copious notes to his translation of *Onegin*, including a ninety-two page discussion of English and Russian versification to explain, "a few things that the non-Russian student of Russian literature must know in regard to Russian prosody in general and to *Eugene Onegin* in particular" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 4). These *Notes on Prosody* were later published as a separate work. To my knowledge they represent the first application to English iambic verse of certain critical tools and quantitative approaches developed by Russian poets and critics in the early part of the 20th Century. More importantly for the present discussion, *Notes on Prosody* represents Nabokov's own understanding of Russian and English versification and it

should, therefore, be at least as helpful for understanding *Pale Fire* as for reading *Eugene Onegin*.

In addition to temporal proximity, Nabokov's *Onegin* and *Pale Fire* share important structural and narrative similarities. Both works are long narrative poems weighed down by even longer commentaries, and the highly eccentric nature of the commentary in *Pale Fire* clearly satirizes Nabokov's relationship with Pushkin and other poets he translated. Major characters from *Eugene Onegin* also have counterparts in *Pale Fire*. The worldly rake, Onegin; the earnest poet, Lensky; and the wry authorial voice of Pushkin are echoed, respectively, in the worldly and decadent Kinbote; the earnest poet, Shade; and the just perceptible voice of Nabokov himself. The connection between Lensky and Shade is particularly interesting. Both have a romantic streak; both are in love; both die from gunshot wounds; and both have a complicated relationship with their creators. In Lensky, Pushkin created a mediocre romantic poet but, nevertheless, displayed enormous affection for him. As Anna Akhmatova put it, "irony accompanies Lensky almost to the last hour of his life, but Pushkin mourns him with incredible strength and sorrow" (Amert, 1992; p. 120). Nabokov's relationship to Shade is more cryptic and remains the subject of considerable debate. One popular, and conventional, strain of criticism reads John Shade as a second-rate poet, whose earnestness contrasts with Nabokov's own love of mimicry and deception in art (e.g. Monroe, 1991). In this reading, "Pale Fire" functions mainly as an ironic character study of Shade and a playground for his cracked commentator, Kinbote. Regardless of Shade's poetic gifts, Nabokov's affection for him is obvious. Vladimir Alexandrov (1995a) notes that Nabokov endows Shade with the same sort of "seminal epiphanic experiences" that shaped his own development and that he described in his memoir *Speak Memory* and the essay "The Art of Literature and Commonsense." This is a gift given, according to Alexandrov, only to Nabokov's "favorite positive characters" (Alexandrov, 1995a).

METER AND PROSODY: THE RUSSIAN APPROACH AND THE TAXONOMY OF VERSE

> "*...a pure iambic rhythm in sustained form does not exist anywhere in the Russian language.*"
> Andrei Bely, *Lyric Poetry and Experiment*

> "*... English pentameter, meaning a swat at syllables 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 in each line, mitigated by 'irregularities' and 'inverted feet'.*"
> Ezra Pound, "Hell" in *The Spirit of Romance*

Before tackling "Pale Fire" it is necessary to discuss some basic aspects of poetry and prosody. In this section I will: (1) sketch ways in which poets use formal elements of language to carry meaning; (2) introduce some tools required to discuss Russian and English versification; and (3) illustrate some ways in which Nabokov manipulates poetic rhythm.

Form carries meaning

Literature is a convolution of content and form. Its power lies in the harmony between *what* an author says and *how* he or she says it. This is obviously true of prose and especially true of poetry, whose formal elements — rhythm, rhyme, strophic architecture — can create associations, impart tone, and carry meaning. In his book, *The Development of Russian Verse*, Michael Wachtel demonstrated how, "specific poetic meters and strophic forms carry... associations and expectations," by constructing a love poem in the form of a limerick (Wachtel, 1998; p. 3). There is nothing inherently funny about the architecture of a limerick — five lines of amphibrachic trimeter with the rhyme scheme *aabba* — but Anglo-American audiences have been so conditioned by their experience of the limerick as comic verse that the structure itself creates an expectation of comedy. A love lyric or an elegy in the form of a limerick cannot escape a taint of irony.[6] A more subtle example of this basic principle is found at the beginning of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, where he retells the story of Odysseus's communion with the dead from Book 10 of *The Odyssey*. Pound turns Homer's ancient Greek dactyls into English verse with a rhythm similar to long-dead, Anglo-Saxon meters used in *Beowulf* and *The Seafarer*. Like the ram's blood with which Odysseus calls forth the soul of Tireseus from the underworld, Pound's

Anglo Saxon meter calls Homer out of the Mediterranean; lures him into the British Isles; and press-gangs him into the English literary tradition.

Meter is not the only formal element of a poem that can carry meaning. More subtle rhythmic and linguistic variations can also create patterns and forge associations. Joseph Brodsky, for example, wrote many of his early Russian poems in the sort of iambic meters that have dominated English and Russian poetry for centuries. Within the confines of these 'standard' meters Brodsky crafted rhythms that — to his more astute listeners — carried a curiously English lilt, and he employed this 'foreign' rhythm most often when writing about themes of dislocation and exile. Nila Friedberg (2011) makes a compelling case that Brodsky crafted his 'English accent' by identifying key rhythmic differences between Russian and English iambic verse and then consciously applying the English prosodic rules to the composition of his Russian poems. In other words, Brodsky shifted between Russian and English voices, not by changing his meter but by changing how the natural rhythm of his words interacts with that meter. This trick enabled a dissident poet in the Soviet Union to hide subliminal Americas inside his Russian poems, an achievement arguably more subtle and subversive than what Pound accomplishes in the *Cantos*.

What exactly is meter? Many linguists (Halle and Keyser, 1971; Kiparsky, 1977; and Friedberg, 2011) take a 'generative' approach to this question, one that I find appealing in part because it separates the ideal of a poetic line from the myriad ways in which it is actually realized. That is, it helps explain the difference between *meter* and *prosody*. According to this approach, meter is an abstract pattern, or a template, composed of a certain number of 'weak' (W) and 'strong' (S) positions. Let us represent W and S positions with the symbols: '◡' and '_'. In iambic meters, the W and S positions alternate, with odd-numbered positions weak and even-numbered positions strong. The atom of this pattern, the iamb, is represented WS or '◡ _', and the template for an entire line of iambic pentameter is a string of five iambic 'feet': '◡ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ _'.[7] In the ideal case, W and S positions correspond to weak and strong phonological elements within words, such as the length, tone, or stress of a syllable. In both Russian and English poetry, phonological *strength* equates almost exclusively with *stress* and we mark where the stressed syllables fall on the iambic pattern with an accent (i.e. _́ or ◡́).

In recitation, stressed syllables are produced by more forceful contraction of the diaphragm and, to listeners, they sound louder and longer than unstressed syllables nearby

(Giegerich, 1992: p. 179). Both English and Russian are considered 'stress languages', meaning that every lexical word — noun, verb, adjective, or adverb — contains a stressed syllable.[8] A significant difference between Russian and English, however, is the notion of secondary stress. Russian words, even the longest ones, contain only one strongly stressed syllable. All the others, as Edmund Wilson put it, "go more or less slithering" (Wilson, 1965). It is, therefore, easy to determine which syllable should fall on an S position in the iambic rhythm. In long English words, however, listeners can often detect multiple, different levels of stress.[9] These multiple stresses would cause serious metrical headaches were it not for the fact that, in almost every English word, one syllable is stressed more strongly than all the others (Giegerich, 1992: p. 179). This *main* stress dominates the word and, according to most linguists and philologists, determines its proper positioning within a metrical pattern. So, even though English words contain more stressed syllables, they behave to a first approximation like their Russian counterparts with respect to the metrical template.[10]

Now, what is prosody? Prosody governs the actual arrangement of words in a poem and, in addition to the metrical template, it is subject to many other constraints including: grammar, distribution of word lengths, psychological experience, and tradition. These constraints mean that the stress pattern in a line of iambic pentameter does not always match the template. Consider two lines from "Pale Fire" (312-313):

My géntle gírl appéared as Móther Tíme,
A bént chárwoman with slóp páil and bróom,

Marking stresses and grouping syllables into pairs, we see that the first line conforms perfectly to the iambic template.

My gén- | tle gírl | ap-péared | as Móth- | er Tíme, ◡ ´_|◡ ´_|◡ ´_|◡ ´_|◡ ´_

The second line, however, contains every departure from the iambic pattern that it is possible to make.

A bént | chár-wom- | an with | slóp páil | and bróom, ◡ ´_|´◡ _|◡ _|´◡ ´_|◡ ´_

The first and last feet in the line are iambic but, in the third foot, a weak monosyllable ("with") falls onto the S position, producing a pair of adjacent syllables without a strong word stress.[11] Nabokov refers to such a pair of syllables as a "scud" (confusingly, he also uses "scud" to describe an unstressed S-syallable by itself). In the fourth foot, a stressed monosyllable ("slop") lands in the W position, creating a foot with two strong stresses. Nabokov calls such an arrangement a "false spondee."[12] Finally, in the second foot, there is both a stressed syllable in W and an unstressed syllable S. Nabokov refers to this combination as a "tilted scud" or, sometimes, simply as a "tilt." Nabokov's terminology never caught on among philologists and it is much more common to refer to the first pattern as a *pyrrhic*, the second as a *spondee,* and the third as a *stress inversion*.[13] I use Nabokov's terms (Table 1) throughout this essay for two reasons: (1) they fit well with the 'generative' approach to metrics and (2) they illustrate Nabokov's own understanding of prosody. The word "scud," for example, implies speed. Nabokov's copy of Webster's dictionary[14] defines scud: "to move or run swiftly; esp., to move as if driven forward by something." As a noun, scud means: "a driving along; a rushing" or (especially at sea) "fragments of cloud driven swiftly by the wind."[15] Nabokov explicitly rejected the word 'acceleration' as misleading (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 13), but his use of 'scud' creates a similar sense that unstressed syllables are lighter and move *faster* — that recitation skims across them more quickly and easily than it does across syllables bearing stress.

Table 1. Nabokov's terminology
(*Notes on Prosody*, p8)

⏑ –	regular beat
⏑ –	scud (or false pyrrhic)
⏑ –	tilt (or tilted scud)
⏑ –	false spondee

The pair of lines from "Pale Fire," quoted above (312-313), also neatly illustrates how Nabokov manipulates rhythm for semantic and poetic effect. In these lines Shade is describing his daughter Hazel's childhood struggle for acceptance and, in particular, her participation in a school play. Before the performance Hazel used her artistic talents to paint the scenery. Now she appears on stage in the play itself but, because she is homely, she has been given the part of a grotesque: the withered and debased figure of old Mother Time. In the first of the two lines above, Hazel Shade walks out onto the stage to the perfect iambic beat of her father's hopes: "My géntle gírl appéared as Móther Tíme." As ever, with Nabokov, this moment of hope and

harmony merely sets us up for the fall coming in the next line, where we find that Mother Time is: "A bént chárwoman with slóp páil and bróom." The mangled rhythm of the line breaks the mood and is, indeed, the erratic gait of a kyphotic old woman, banging a broom and a pail.

An iambic line can tolerate 'irregularities' — e.g. scuds and tilts — but how irregular is *too* irregular? At what point does a line cease to be iambic verse? Nabokov does not address this question in *Notes on Prosody* but linguists, interested in the structure of poetry, have studied it in detail. It turns out that good poets do not stray from the iambic template higgledy-piggledy, but follow common patterns of departure. In English, the allowable departures are dictated by the boundaries of words and phrases and have been described by various 'prosodic rules'. These include the Monosyllable Rule (Hayes, 1988:222; Kiparsky, 1975) and the Stress Maximum Principle (Halle and Kaiser, 1971:69). These rules generally agree that scuds are harmless while misplaced stresses can render a line unmetrical. In other words, most of the time,[16] an unstressed syllable can fall on an S position without 'breaking' the meter but a stressed syllable cannot always fall safely onto a W position. Because they are more metrically innocuous, scuds appear more frequently than tilts or 'false spondees' in both English and Russian iambic poetry. "Pale Fire," for example, contains 1201 scuds scattered among 866 lines, compared to a sum of 743 tilts and 'false spondees' that occur in 536 lines (see Chapter 4 for more details).

Prosodic rules disagree about when a misplaced stress causes the most damage. For the present discussion I will rely on Kiparsky's formulation of the Monosyllable Rule (Hayes, 1988: p. 222; Kiparsky, 1975), which accounts for the prosody of much of the English canon, including that of Shakespeare and Milton. Classical Russian verse obeys a similar (but more restrictive) Monosyllable Rule and Nabokov's discussion of tilts and 'false spondees' is consistent with both rules.[17] The English version of the rule says that a stress can fall onto a W position in only two circumstances: (1) when it is a monosyllabic word or (2) when it coincides with a change in intonation (i.e. at the boundary of a line, sentence, or phrase, or simply anywhere a reader might pause in recitation). According to this rule Nabokov's line "A bent charwoman with slop pail and broom" is not just awkward, it verges on the unmetrical. The strongest stress in the polysyllabic "ch**á**rwoman" falls on the second W position of the line, with no clausal boundary to mitigate its effect. In other words, "bent" and "charwoman" are part of the same noun phrase (Kiparsky, 1976) with no syntactic boundary between them that could 'rescue' or 'account for' the misplaced stress. This looks fatal but the metricality of the line is saved by a sort of technicality:

a unique property of compound words in English prosody. Recall that stressed monosyllables can fall on W positions, but polysyllabic words must always place their strongest stress on S. Therefore, when polysyllabic words are fused with monosyllables to form compounds, the polysyllabic root is metrically dominant. If we consider "charwoman," as a compound word — composed of the monosyllable "char" and the disyllable "woman" — then the disyllabic component determines the placement of the word in the metrical pattern. The first syllable of "woman" must fall on S, even though it forces the stronger syllable "char-" onto W.[18] Thus, the word "charwoman" and its awkward placement jangle the rhythm of the line without formally breaking the meter. They also demonstrate the ruthless correctness of Nabokov's English prosody.

Prosody is a sort of dark energy, whose presence is felt in the reading or recitation of a poem but whose nature is often difficult to define. Nabokov learned early how to detect and manipulate this dark energy. In 1918, at the age of 19, he encountered Andrei Bely's essay "Lyric Poetry and Experiment" which had a profound effect on his understanding of poetic rhythms (Boyd, *VN: TRY*, p. 149). Twenty-five years later, he referred to the essay as "probably the greatest work on verse in any language." In *Notes on Prosody*, Nabokov introduced Bely's analytical tools to the English-speaking world and used them to help characterize the differences between English and Russian iambic rhythms.

Andrei Bely was the pen name of Russian poet, Boris Bugaev, son of a well-known mathematician who felt considerable paternal pressure to also pursue a career in mathematics. In "Lyric Poetry and Experiment," Bely undertook a quantitative analysis of Russian prosody. He recognized that, because they carry little metrical penalty, scuds are the most common rhythmic variation in Russian poetry; and he was, I believe, the first to note that the scuds, in a Russian iambic line are not randomly distributed, but follow a clear statistical pattern. He also discovered that individual poets vary the positions of scuds from line to line in different ways and he invented a simple graphical device to illustrate this point (**Figure 1**). Bely represented a line of poetry as a horizontal row of boxes, each box corresponding to one metrical foot. If a foot contained a scud, he placed a dot in the corresponding box. He then stacked the rows of boxes on top of each other to represent an entire poem by a grid of boxes, much like a spreadsheet. Connecting the dots and comparing the patterns in different poems neatly illustrated how poets modulate rhythm in different ways. Bely's diagrams, or 'scud maps,' for two particular poems,

Ioann Damaskin by Alexei Tolstoy and a fragment of *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin (Figure 1), illustrate what he considered, respectively, 'poor' and 'rich' rhythms. In the poor rhythm of Tolstoy the stress distribution varies little, producing mostly vertical lines, while Pushkin's rich rhythm generates more complex figures.

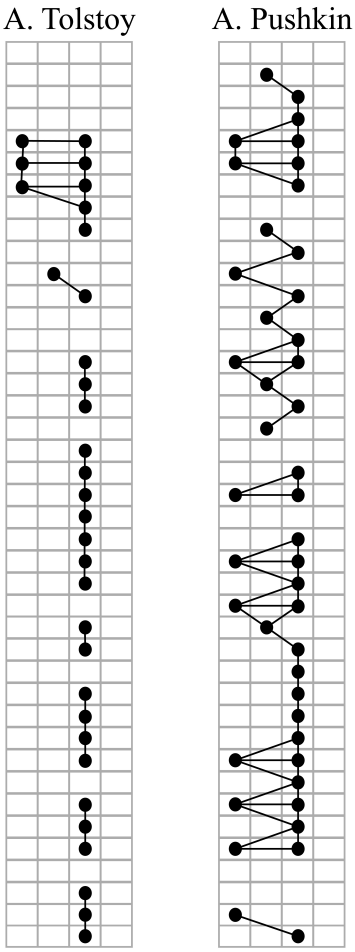

Figure 1. Rhythmic patterns of verses by Alexei Tolstoy and Alexander Pushkin (Bely, 1910).

In addition to differences between first- and second-rate poets, Bely's maps also illustrate general rhythmic tendencies in Russian iambic verse. Note, for example, that there are no dots in the last (rightmost) column of either poem diagrammed in Figure 1, while the second column from the right contains the most dots of all. This means that word stress is *never* lost from the last S position, but lost *most often* in the penultimate position. Remarkably, this tendency applies to work by almost all poets in the Russian tradition whether they are writing iambic tetrameter or pentameter. It holds true throughout the Nineteenth Century and well into the Twentieth (**Figure**

2). Critics and academics like Andrei Bely and Boris Unbegaun (Unbegaun, 1956) analyzed thousands of lines of poetry, written by many different poets, and they compiled remarkable sets of statistics. As a result, we know that, in Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century iambic pentameter, the stress on the final S position is essentially *never* lost. The stress on the penultimate S position is lost most frequently (46.2% of the time in the Nineteenth Century and 58.7% in the early Twentieth), and finally, stress in the middle S position is lost much less frequently than in the position that follows it (15.4% in the Nineteenth and 16.9% in the early Twentieth Century).[19]

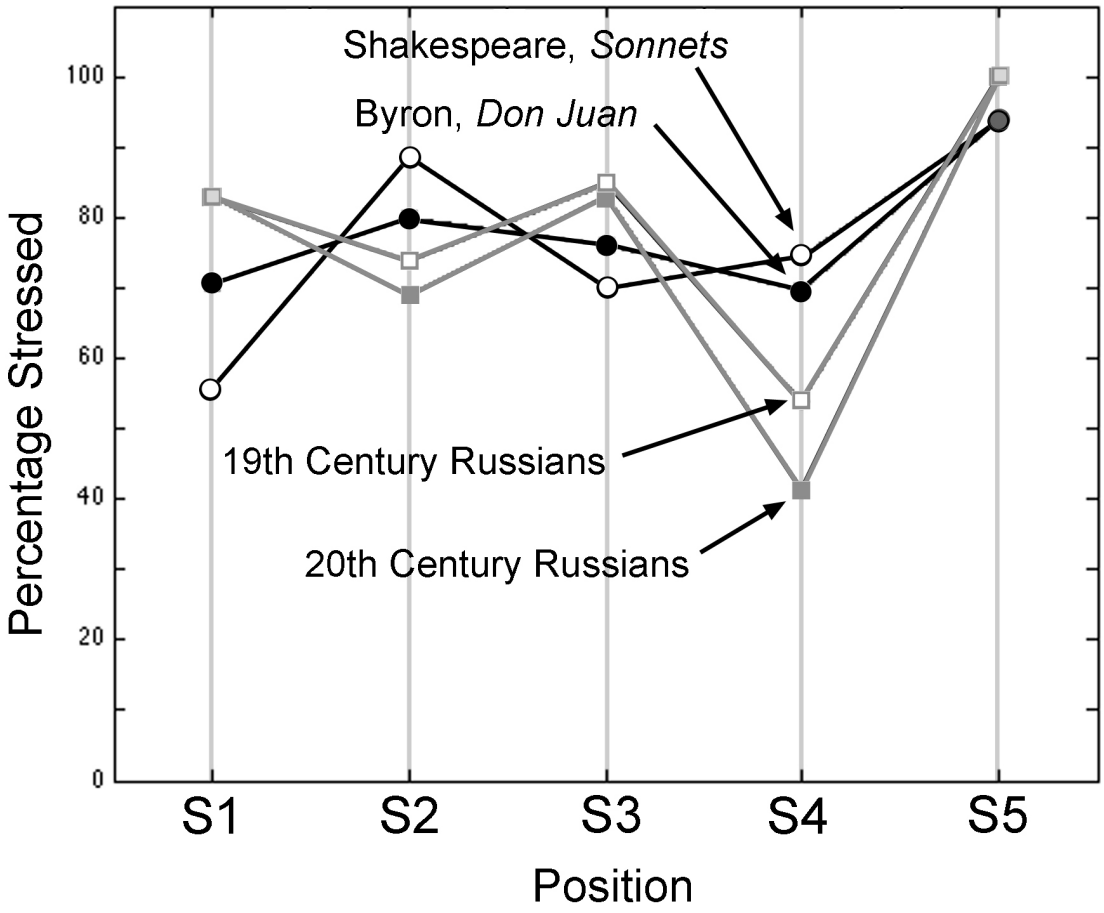

Figure 2. Regressive accentual dissimilation in Russian iambic pentameter. The frequency with which stress falls on each S positions is plotted for Russian and English iambic pentameter.

Taranovsky (1953) called the tendency of weak syllables to fall on the penultimate S position in Russian iambics the Law of Regressive Accentual Dissimilation. As with many formal aspects of Russian poetry, this rhythmical bias can be traced back to Pushkin; but it also

reflects a fundamental issue with the length of Russian words. Note that only three kinds of word can fit exactly into the iambic template: one-syllable words (_ or _́); two-syllable words (_ _́ or _́ _); and three-syllable words with stress on the middle syllable (_ _́ _). Every other type of word forces at least one weak syllable onto an S position. If we take the poetic vocabulary of Alexander Pushkin as an example, we see that only 53.7% of his words can fit into the iambic template. The other 46.3% all force weak syllables onto S positions, introducing scuds (Friedberg, 2011). With so many weak syllables per line, the iambic pattern must buckle somewhere, and Russian poets developed a strong inclination to buckle it on the penultimate S position. The English language contains an abundance of one- and two-syllable words, so poets writing in English do not feel the same prosodic constraint.[20] Nabokov himself ascribes the "predominance of polysyllables in Russian verse (as compared to the prodigious quantity of monosyllabic adjectives and verbs in English) ... to the [virtual] absence of monosyllabic adjectives in Russian." (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 47) His list of key differences between Russian and English iambic tetrameter (most of which also apply to iambic pentameter) in *Notes on Prosody* includes the fact that, in English, "scuds are frequently associated with weak monosyllables" while, in Russian "scuds are frequently associated with the unaccented syllables of long words."

English iambic pentameter does not suffer the strong dip on the fourth S position characteristic of the Russian rhythm (Figure 2). Friedberg, therefore, used regressive dissimilation as a major criterion by which to judge the 'Russianness' of rhythms in Joseph Brodsky's work. Nabokov also identified regressive dissimilation (although he did not call it that) as a key difference between Russian and English rhythms. He also noted a slight preference for loss of stress in the first S position in English poetry and characterized English iambic lines as 'weighted' with more stresses toward the end while Russian lines are more strongly weighted toward the beginning.

To 'hear' the effect of these prosodic differences in an English poem I knocked together (with apologies to Yvor Winters) two four-line stanzas of iambic pentameter: one with more English rhythms and the other with more Russian (**Figure 3**).

<u>English</u>

The lamp, with lucent, thin and wav'ring flame, ◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́

Shone on the highest shelf and lit the prize. _́ ◡|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́

"The Book of Sacred Secrets" was its name	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́
And long it lay, away from prying eyes.	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́

Russian

With flame so lucent, thin, and **acrobatic**	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ◡|◡ ‿́|◡
The failing lamp **illuminated** there	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ◡|◡ ‿́
Upon the shelf a volume **hieratic**,	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ◡|◡ ‿́|◡
Whose secret depths no **acolyte** would share.	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ◡|◡ ‿́

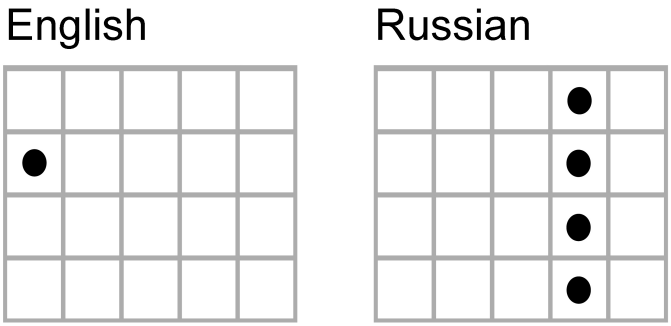

Figure 3. Bely-style 'scud maps' of the quatrains used to demonstrate the sound of English and Russian rhythms.

Both quatrains describe the same scene: the lamp-lit discovery of a holy book. The first is composed entirely of one- and two-syllable words, while every line of the second contains words of three, four, or five syllables (bold and underlined). None of the longer words in the second quatrain fits the iambic template, no matter where it is placed. To mimic the classical Russian bias, I neglected any secondary stresses a native English speaker might detect in these long words— "acrobatic" (◡ ◡ ‿́ ◡), "illuminated" (◡ ‿́ ◡ ◡ ◡), "hieratic" (◡ ◡ ‿́ ◡), and "acolyte (‿́ ◡ ◡) — and placed them all near the end of the line, where they drop unstressed syllables onto the fourth S position.[21] In the first quatrain —consistent with a canonical English rhythm— the only unstressed S position, or scud, occurs at the beginning of a line. This could be called a 'tilted scud' (*a lá* Nabokov) or an 'inversion' (*a lá* the rest of the English-speaking world).

The rhythmic difference between the two quatrains is subtle but certainly detectable. The 'English' lines miss only one iambic beat, due to the inversion at the beginning of the second line which makes it start 'faster' or 'lighter' than it ends. In contrast, every line in the 'Russian'

quatrain begins with a strong iambic rhythm but then misses a beat near the end. The ends of these Russian-themed lines skip along more lightly than their beginnings. The uncommon number of polysyllabic words employed to mimic the Russian rhythm also alters the feeling of the second quatrain, requiring, for example, a poetic inversion in the third line to place "hieratic" in the necessary position. Thus, when sustained over several lines, and especially when juxtaposed with more conventional English rhythms, the imported rhythm of regressive dissimilation can certainly be 'heard' in English iambic verse.

Nabokov mimicked regressive dissimilation for poetic effect in English, deploying it as early as his 1945 poem, "An Evening of Russian Poetry" (*Collected Poems*, pp. 177-183). This poem is written from the perspective of a visiting scholar — an émigré from Russia — delivering a lecture on Russian poetry at a women's college in the United States. In the first twenty-six lines, the lecturer introduces his topic and describes Russian orthography and phonetics. Only four of these opening twenty-six lines (~15%) contain scuds on the fourth S position. On line 27, however, a student in the audience asks a question about Russian prosody and, in response, the poem delivers a sudden "surge of scuds" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 49) on the penultimate S position (ll. 27-31).

***<u>An Evening of Russian Poetry</u>*, <u>lines 27-31:</u>**

Next question. / *'Is your prosody like ours?'*	◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _
Well, Emmy, our pentameter may seem	◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _
To foreign ears as if it could not rouse	◡ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _
The limp iambus from its pyrrhic dream.	◡ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _
But close your eyes and listen to the line.	◡ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _

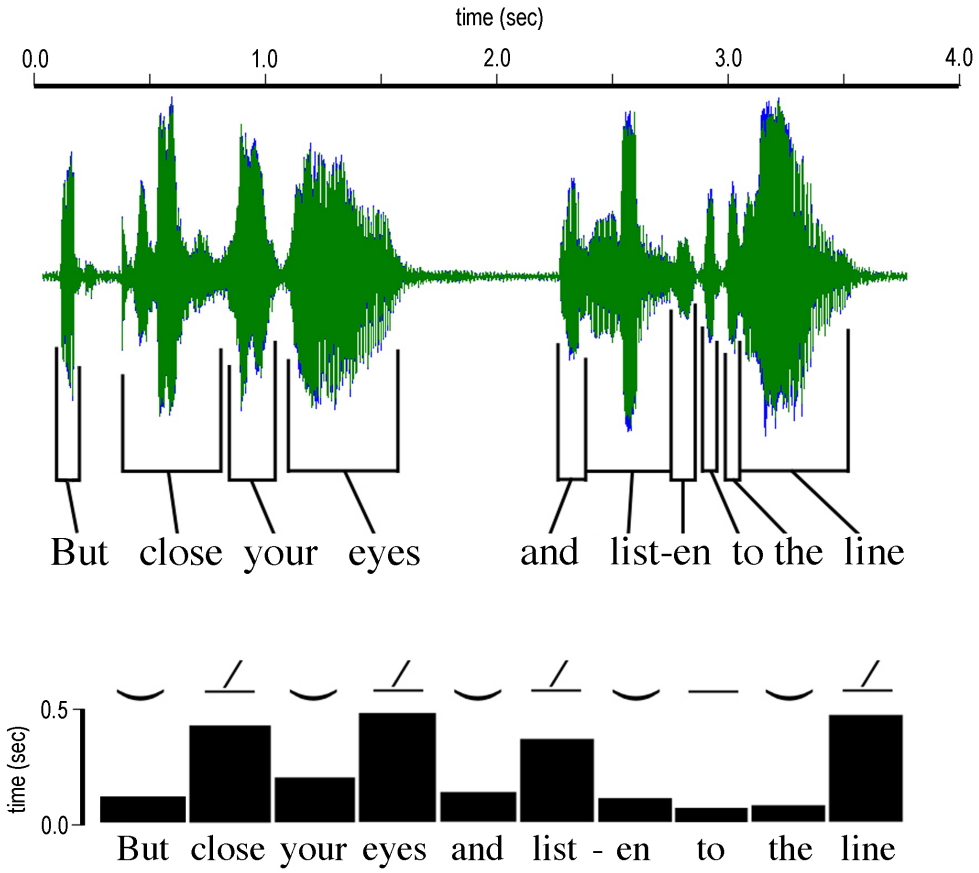

Figure 4. Vladimir Nabokov's vocal stresses when reading a line from "An Evening of Russian Poetry." Top: waveform of Vladimir Nabokov reciting "But close your eyes and listen to the line" in 1958. The duration of each syllable is marked and the iambic pattern can be seen in both the width and peak amplitude of the syllables. Bottom: bar graph of the duration (in seconds) of each syllable.

Four of the five lines above (80%) are scudded on S4, providing a literal example of the sound of "our [Russian] pentameter." Taking the final admonition literally, if we close our eyes and listen this line, we hear how it mimics the rhythm associated with regressive dissimilation in Russian iambics. This rhythmic variation is audible in Nabokov's own reading of the line in a 1958 recitation (**Figure 4**).[22] In the first four words ("But close your eyes") the iambic pattern is most obvious in the timing. The words "close" and "eyes" are stretched out much longer than "but" and "your." When he pronounces the last five words of the line ("and listen to the line") Nabokov marks the stressed syllables by increasing their both volume and duration (Figure 4, top). He hammers the first syllable of "listen" (*list-*) by loudly voicing the 'i' and also by dragging out the labial that precedes and the sibilant that follows. From there, he flits lightly and

quickly across the three syllables of, "-en to the," and ends by dragging out the word "line" (Figure 4, top).

Following this five-line reenactment of a Russian rhythm comes a five-line description of a "marvelously long" Russian word (ll. 32-36): "The melody unwinds; the middle word / is marvelously long and serpentine: / you hear one beat, but you have also heard / the shadow of another, then the third / touches the gong, and then the fourth one sighs." The "long and serpentine" word is clearly composed of four syllables, with phonological stress on the first ("you hear one beat"). Russian words have little or no secondary stress, so after "you hear one beat," you hear only a "shadow" of the second; a "touch" of the third; and a "sigh" of the fourth. In the very next line (37) Nabokov recreates in English the Russian rhythm he has just described:

It makes a very **fás-ci-na-ting** noise: ◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _|◡ _́

This slyly recursive line describes itself extremely well. The "fascinating noise" of the tetra-syllabic Russian word is mimicked by the four syllables of *fá**s**-ci-na-ting*: a word with stress on the first syllable and virtually no secondary stress. The herpetological hiss in the middle of 'fascinating' also recalls the "serpentine" nature of the unknown Russian word. In addition, "fascinating" places a scud on the fourth S position, giving the entire line a stereotypically Russian rhythm of regressive dissimilation.[23] In his memoir, *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov describes how he crafted such rhythms in his early Russian poetry, creating lines exactly like the one above (l. 37), in which "a long, wriggly adjective would occupy the first four or five syllables of the last three feet of the line" (*Speak, Memory*, p. 220). Near the end of "An Evening of Russian Poetry" Nabokov includes two lines of Russian verse, transliterated (idiosyncratically) into Roman letters as: "*Bess**o**nitza, tvoy vzor oon**y**l i str**a**shen*; / *lub**o**v' moy**a**, outs**oo**pnika prost**ee***" (Insomnia, your gaze is doleful and frightening; / My love, forgive this apostate). These lines illustrate the basic challenge of Russian iambic verse. Two four-syllable words, "*bessonitza*" [*бессонница*] and "*outsoopnika*" (more properly *otstoopnika*) [*отступника*], cannot be made to fit perfectly into the iambic rhythm and must produce scuds.

Бесс**ó**нница, твой вз**ó**р ун**ы́**л и стр**á**шен; ◡ _́|◡ _|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡

Любó**в**ь мо**я́**, отст**у́**пника прост**и́**. ◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _|◡ _́

The first places a weak syllable on the S2 position of the first line while the second places a weak syllable on S4 of the second line. As noted above, the second line represents the most common solution to this problem in Russian prosody and apart from the fact that "apostate" [*отступника*] is a noun rather than an adjective, this line also fits the clichéd Russian rhythm described in *Speak Memory*.

"An Evening of Russian Poetry" contains several more examples of how Nabokov mixes Russian prosody into English verse and I will mine more of its treasures in a later section.

NABOKOV'S USE OF BELY'S TOOLS

Upon discovering Bely's methods of analysis, Nabokov spent hours applying them to thousands of lines of classic Russian poetry. He also used them to construct his own poems with predefined rhythmic patterns. A classic example of this type of experimentation is the poem *Большая медведица* (*Great Bear*), written in September, 1918, one month after he first read Bely's "Lyric Poetry and Experiment" essay (Boyd, *VN: TRS*, p.150). The 'Great Bear' of the title refers to the seven brightest stars of the constellation *Ursa Major*.[24]

Большая медведица	**Ursa Major**
Был гро́зен во́лн полно́чный ре́в...	The midnight roar of waves was menacing...
Се́мь де́вушек на взмо́рье жда́ли	Seven girls waited on shore
невозврати́вшихся челно́в	for boats that had yet to return
и, ру́ки заломи́в, рыда́ли.	and, having wrung their hands, they sobbed.
Се́мь зве́здочек в суро́вой мгле́	Seven little stars in the coarse-grained mist
над рыбака́ми че́тко вста́ли	stood out above the fishermen
и указа́ли пу́ть к земле́...	and pointed the way to land...

The first thing we notice in this poem is the repeating sevens. Seven sobbing sisters sit on the shore while seven stars promise to guide the fishermen to land. The poem itself is composed of seven lines. Counting the stresses in the S positions, we also discover that the poem contains

seven scuds. And, if we map the seven scuds on Bely's diagram: behold! The constellation, *Ursa Major* itself appears (**Figure 5**). These early experiments illustrate both Nabokov's attention to rhythm and his love of subliminal pattern. Brian Boyd also sees a connection between these exercises and Nabokov's serious scientific studies of the *lepidoptera*, both of which betray a passion for classification and careful analysis (Boyd, 1990: pp. 149-151).

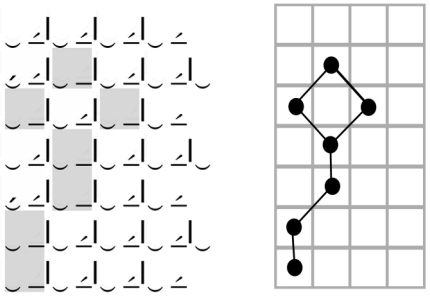

Figure 5. Pattern of stresses and scuds in Nabokov's short poem, *Большая медведица.*
Left: metrical template with words stresses marked and scuds highlighted by gray boxes.
Right: Belian scud map of the poem revealing the constellation Ursa Major.

Nabokov was later dismissive of some of these early prosodic experiments, but he did not stop embedding hidden patterns and secret messages in his work. In *The Vane Sisters*, a ghost story from 1951, Nabokov encoded a hidden message from the two deceased Vane Sisters in the first letters of the words of the final paragraph. These letters combine to inform the reader that the spectral sisters took a hand in writing the story.[25] This acrostic subverts the content of the paragraph itself, in which the (ostensible) author laments his failure to contact the sisters in the afterlife. This literary trick was clearly concocted to induce a feeling of *potustoronnost*, a sense that, somewhere close by, lies a thin membrane separating this world from the afterlife.

There is also at least one cryptic figure buried in the prosody of "Pale Fire," one that involves the assassin, Jakob Gradus. To see this pattern we must first understand the origin of Gradus's name. Brian Boyd discovered that Nabokov's edition of *Webster's*[26] defines the word "Gradus" as an abbreviation of *Gradus ad Parnassum*, a Latin phrase used as the title of "a dictionary of prosody, poetical phrases, etc., once used in English schools as an aid in Latin versification" (Boyd, 1997). The literal meaning of this phrase is "Steps up (Mount) Parnassus," where "steps" refers to the graded nature of the lessons in Latin prosody.[27] Interestingly, Kinbote's commentary also fuses Jakob Gradus with the prosody of "Pale Fire" when he claims that: "We shall accompany Gradus in constant thought, as he makes his way from distant dim

Zembla to green Appalachia, through the entire length of the poem, <...> steadily marching nearer in iambic motion <...> moving up with his valise on the escalator of the pentameter" [C. 17 and 29, 78]. The image of Gradus "moving up <...> on the escalator of the pentameter" alludes playfully to "steps up the mountain," but do these words have additional significance?

In his notes on the text, Kinbote plots the travels of "Gradus the Gunman" against the dates on which Shade composed various parts of "Pale Fire." The gunman's journey begins in a note to lines 120-121, where Kinbote claims that, "On the day <...> John Shade wrote this, Gradus the Gunman was getting ready to leave Zembla for his steady blunderings through two hemispheres." These lines (120-121) form part of a stanza near the end of Canto One in which the young John Shade, walking outside at night, pauses "halfway up the hill" to listen to the sound of crickets and to look up at the stars. Like his contemplation of the "false azure in the windowpane" of the first stanza, this moment of meditation leads Shade to thoughts of time, eternity, and eventually mortality.

<u>Lines 115-124</u>

And there's the wall of sound: the nightly wall	◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́
Raised by a trillion crickets in the fall.	◡́ ⎯|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯|◡ ⎯́
Impenetrable! Halfway up the hill	◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́
I'd pause in thrall of their delirious trill.	◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́
That's Dr. Sutton's light. That's the Great Bear.	◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯|◡́ ⎯́
A thousand years ago five minutes were	◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡́ ⎯́|◡ ⎯
Equal to forty ounces of fine sand.	◡́ ⎯|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯|◡́ ⎯́
Outstare the stars. Infinite foretime and	◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡́ ⎯|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯
Infinite aftertime: above your head	◡́ ⎯|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́
They close like giant wings, and you are dead.	◡ ⎯́|◡́ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́|◡ ⎯́

This sudden sense of proximity to the hereafter — the closing wings of eternity — creates a classic moment of Nabokovian *potustoronnost*. At the beginning of this moment, when Shade looks up, he does not see just any stars but specifically the constellation *Ursa Major*, the Great Bear: the figure that Nabokov hid among the scuds of an earlier poem. When we construct a Belian diagram of this stanza (**Figure 6**), however, we do not see *Ursa Major* but instead a

distinctive stair-step pattern, climbing from the first S position up to the last. Is this Gradus riding the escalator of the pentameter?

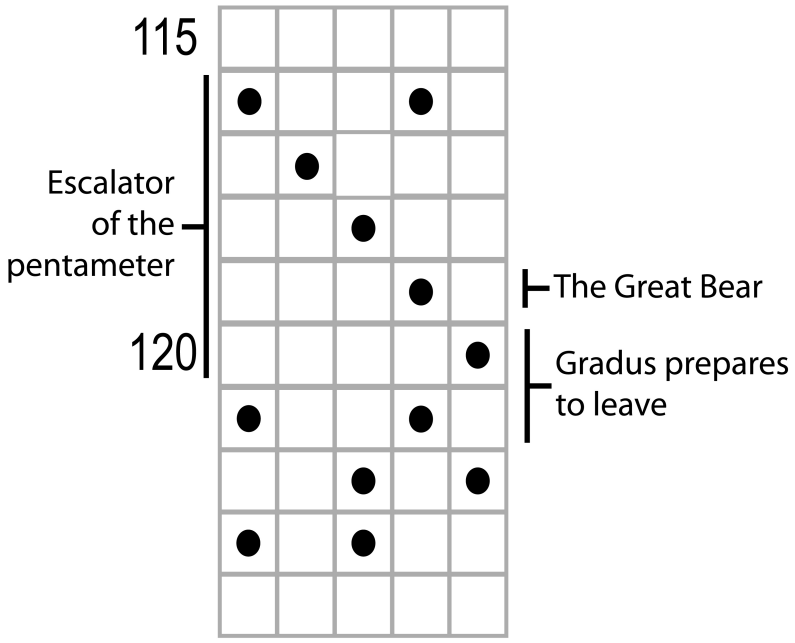

Figure 6. Belian scud map of lines 115-124 of "Pale Fire." The "Great Bear" appears on line 119. Kinbote notes that Gradus is preparing for his journey on lines 120-121. Shade contemplates his death on line 124.

Rather than answer this question directly, I will simply enumerate the hints that the pattern is intentional: (1) Given the overall statistics of Nabokov's prosody[28] a pattern like this has less than 3% probability of occurring by chance in 999 lines of iambic pentameter. (2) The stanza mentions The Great Bear, a figure Nabokov previously encrypted in the prosody of a poem. (3) Both halves of Gradus's name refer to stair steps. "Gradus" itself is a Latin form of "steps" and Jakob (Jacob) is the name of the biblical patriarch who dreamed of a ladder or stairway ascending from earth to heaven. (4) The name Gradus also points to a dictionary of prosody, *Gradus ad Parnassum*. (5) Kinbote warns us that we will see Gradus "moving up ... on the escalator of the pentameter." (6) Kinbote begins his account of Gradus's "real world" journey in a note tied to this stanza, specifically, a note on the last line of the stair-step pattern. (7) Shade ends the stanza contemplating his own mortality, as if reacting unconsciously to his killer's first stirrings. (8) Shade begins the next stanza by contrasting himself with his antithesis: "the regular vulgarian." This phrase fits Kinbote's characterization of Gradus as crude, unimaginative, and anti-aesthetic: in other words, the opposite of John Shade.

Lines 116-120 contain the clearest and most complete set of climbing scuds in "Pale Fire" but fragments of this pattern appear throughout the poem.[29] Some of these climbing scuds coincide with images of death or comments about Gradus[30] but others have no obvious connection. Does this motif appear at random? Does it reflect a general rightward drift in Nabokov's rhythmic modulation? Or does it serve as recurring 'theme music' for Shade's killer?

Looking for meaning in the dots of Bely's scud maps begins to feel like looking for human faces in a shifting cloud bank. I will, therefore, wrap up the present discussion by briefly mentioning one other possible figure encoded in the scuds "Pale Fire." This figure looks like an isosceles triangle or upward-pointing arrow and it occurs within an eight-line stanza (854-861) near the end of Canto 4. In "Lyric Poetry and Experiment," Bely describes a very similar structure, which he calls a "roof." This form is possibly related to the semantic content of the stanza, which describes one of John Shade's methods of composing poetry. "But method A is agony! The brain / Is soon enclosed in a steel cap of pain. / A muse in overalls directs the drill / Which grinds and which no effort of the will / Can interrupt…" (ll. 854-858). The image of the "steel cap of pain" appears in line 855, at the very apex of the triangular pattern. It is possible that Nabokov has transformed Bely's "roof" into a "cap of pain" associated with the difficulty of poetic composition and then embedded it the rhythm of his poem.

THE 'USUAL' AND THE 'ACTUAL': PATTERNS OF ELISION IN "PALE FIRE"

> *[The English elision] is the perfect example of the possibility of eating one's cake and having it.*
> *Vladimir Nabokov*

A powerful tool for manipulating rhythm in English verse is the deletion, or *elision,* of unstressed syllables. This is a venerable poetic device with deep roots in natural speech. Sometimes, for example, when I say the word "probably," especially in a formal context, I maintain all three syllables. Often, however, when speaking quickly and informally, I drop the middle syllable and the word becomes: "prób-ly." The frequency and pattern of such elisions can be a defining element of regional accents. In America (Vaux and Golder, 2003) people born east of the Ohio River are likely to pronounce all three syllables of the word 'caramel' (cár-a-mel), while people from west of the Ohio generally elide the middle vowel (cár-mel).

Poets writing in English have long used elision to adjust the registration of verbal stresses and align them with the underlying metrical pattern. Until the late 19th century, poets often marked these elisions with apostrophes, as in this passage from Alexander Pope's, *Imitations of Horace* (Pope, 1737):

> The silenc'd Preacher yields to potent strain,
> And feels that grace his pray'r besought in vain,
> The blessing thrills thro' all the lab'ring throng,
> And Heav'n is won by violence of Song.

The apostrophes in "pray'r," "lab'ring," and "Heav'n", mark the removal of unstressed vowels and the shortening of each word by one syllable. To see the usefulness of such elisions, consider the following line of iambic pentameter from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, *Constancy to an Ideal Object* (Coleridge, 1828): "The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze." When the word 'glistening' is pronounced according to *Webster's* dictionary, with all three syllables intact, the iambic pattern of the line breaks down at the end.

a: The víewless snów-mist wéaves a **glíst-en-ing** háze ◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _|_́

The final S position is *not* stressed but is followed by an eleventh syllable that *is* stressed. For poets writing English iambic verse, these departures from regularity are significant. As in Russian poetry, English iambic lines rarely fail to stress the final S position. Shakespeare, for example, stresses this syllable in 93% of the lines of his sonnets (Figure 2). And while poets do occasionally append additional, 'extrametrical' syllables at the ends of iambic lines (see Section 4), they are almost never stressed. Elision of the unstressed 'e' in glistening, however, resolves both issues and restores the line to a perfect iambic beat.

b: The víewless snów-mist wéaves a **glíst'ning** háze ◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́

The marking of elisions with apostrophes has always been somewhat haphazard in English poetry and, since the middle of the 19th century, poets rarely mark them at all. Elisions

are still present but they must be detected by their effect on rhythm. As Nabokov himself puts it, "Indiscriminate apostrophization disfigures elision by trying to reconcile the eye and ear and satisfying neither." Nabokov certainly made use of elision in "Pale Fire," as we can see in line 261, which also contains the word "glistening". The word occupies the same position as in Colreridge's line above and it induces the same perturbation of the iambic rhythm.

L-261 a: Your prófile has not chánged. The **glíst-e-ning** téeth ◡ ´|◡ _|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ _|´

Unlike Coleridge, Nabokov does not signal elision with an apostrophe but it is clear enough that he intends one.

L-261 b: Your prófile has not chánged. The **glíst-ning** téeth ◡ ´|◡ _|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ ´

Nabokov was sensitive to the power of elision and devoted an entire section of *Notes on Prosody* to the topic, where he observed that

> The beauty of the English elision lies [...] in the delicate sensation of something being physically preserved by the voice at the very instant that it is metaphysically denied by the meter. Thus, the pleasure produced by a contraction or a liaison is the simultaneous awareness of the loss of a syllable on one level and its retention on another and the state of balance achieved between meter and rhythm. It is the perfect example of the possibility of eating one's cake and having it. [Nabokov, *Notes on Prosody*, p. 32]

To collapse a syllable it is generally sufficient to remove a vowel (or dipthong). Given the number and distribution of vowels in a line of poetry we might imagine that unmarked elisions would be difficult to pinpoint without ambiguity. This turns out not to be the case, however, in part because vowels are not elided haphazardly, but in distinct patterns. The linguist Paul Kiparsky identified three prosodic rules (Kiparsky 1977: 240) that govern a large number of elisions in English poetry:

(1) An unstressed vowel can be elided or ignored if it follows another vowel or a dipthong. According to this rule, words like "diamond" (dí-a-mond) and "dial" (dí-al) can lose an unstressed 'a' to become, respectively, 'dí-mond' and 'dīl'.

(2) An unstressed vowel in the middle of a word can be deleted if it is followed by a sonorant (e.g. n, l, r) and another unstressed vowel. This rule describes the conversion of words like "glistening", "murmuring", "shivering", and "gardener" into "glist'ning", "murm'ring", "shiv'ring", and "gard'ner".

(3) Finally, an unstressed high vowel (e.g. /i/ or /ə/) that precedes another unstressed vowel can become so deflated that it remains detectable only as a 'glide' — a 'y' or 'w' sound — that sculpts the onset of the vowel that follows. This form of elision — also called *synaeresis* — turns words like "usual", "oblivion", and "medium" into "ús'yal", "oblív'yon", and "méd'yum."[31]

Nabokov did not have the benefit of Kiparsky's prosodic rules, published sixteen years after the composition of "Pale Fire," but they turn out to be excellent tools for understanding how elision works throughout the poem. Although none of the elisions in "Pale Fire" is marked by an apostrophe, the highly regular pentameter of the poem renders them unmistakable. Counting syllables using preferred pronunciations (*Webster's*, 1957), we see that 974 of the 999 lines in "Pale Fire" (97.4%) contain exactly ten syllables, while twenty-five lines (2.5%) contain eleven syllables. In addition to hypermetrical syllables, the longer lines also contain troublesome trochaic (◡́ _) stresses at the end. Perhaps not surprisingly, every one of the eleven-syllable lines in "Pale Fire" contains a polysyllabic word that can be shortened according to one of Kiparsky's prosodic rules to restore metrical regularity (Appendix 2). Below are two examples, with the affected words in bold (and their positions marked by shaded boxes in the metrical representation on the right). The first line of each pair (a) illustrates the effect of preferred pronunciation on the meter and the second (b) illustrates the effect of elision:

<u>Line 421</u>

a: Of its **pre-póst-e-rous** áge. Then cáme your cáll, ◡ _|◡ ◡́|◡ _|◡́ _|◡́ _|◡́

b: Of its **pre-póst-rous** áge. Then cáme your cáll, ◡ _|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ ´|

Line 425

a: Was méntioned twíce, as **ús-u-al** júst behínd ◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ _|◡ ´ _|◡ ´

b: Was méntioned twíce, as **ús-yal** júst behínd ◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ ´ _

Looking at the twenty-five elisions in "Pale Fire" (Table 2), do we see a pattern? *Notes on Prosody* provides example elisions that fall under each of Kiparsky's three rules, but Nabokov's own, somewhat sketchy, classification schemes reveal that he does not understand elision in the same way as Kiparsky. Nabokov, for example, accounts for elisions in "murm'ring," "gath'ring," and "gard'ning," by noting that when 'u' and 'e' fall in unstressed, second syllables of "trochaic" verbs they are often elided in the participle form. This may be true, but it describes only a subset of cases covered by Kiparsky's more general second rule. Thus, Nabokov might not have made a conscious connection between the elision in "glist'ning" and those in "iv'ry" and "prepost'rous." He would, however, almost certainly have made an unconscious connection. Like most writers and readers of English verse, Nabokov's ear for elision was a linguistic and aesthetic intuition, precipitated from clouds of particular examples encountered throughout his lifetime. Kiparsky simply formalizes these intuitions.

Table 2. Words subject to elision in "Pale Fire." In the first column, the words are parsed according to *Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition: Unabridged* (1957). In the second column, they are parsed consistent with the indicated elision.

Kiparsky Rule 1 Elisions

[none]

Kiparsky Rule 2 Elisions:

line	Webster's	Elided
261	glís-ten-ing	glíst-ning
421	pre-pós-ter-ous	pre-pós-trous
820	í-vo-ry	ív-ry

Kiparsky Rule 3 Elisions:

line	Webster's	Elided
53	fó-li-age	fól-**ya**ge
59	so-lár-i-um	so-lár-**yu**m
81	Ca-ná-di-an	ca-nád-**yu**n
118	de-lir-i-ous	de-lír-**yu**s
125	vul-gár-i-an	vul-gár-**yu**n
254	im-mé-di-ate-ly	im-méd-**ya**te-ly
257	tríl-li-um	tríll-**yu**m
369	schó-li-um	schól-**yu**m
386	fi-an-cé / fi-án-ce	f**ya**n-cé
409	ae-ó-li-an	ae-ól-**ya**n
416	vár-i-ous	vár-**yu**s
515	lar-vór-i-um	lar-vór-**yu**m
519	ob-lív-i-on	ob-lív-**yo**n
606	in-fé-ri-or	in-fér-**yo**r
639	mé-di-um	méd-**yu**m
687	pé-ri-od	pér-**yo**d
869	mys-té-ri-ous	mis-tér-**yu**s
918	im-mé-di-ate	im-méd-**ya**te
425	ú-su-al	ús-**ya**l
717	per-cép-tu-al-ly	per-cépt-**ya**l-ly
967	sén-su-al	séns-**yu**l
772	or-chí-de-ous	or-chíd-**yu**s

The majority of elisions in "Pale Fire" (22 of 26) conform to Prosodic Rule 3 (synaeresis), which turns an unstressed vowel into a glide. The remainder (4 of 26) are reduced following Rule 2, which removes a medial, unstressed vowel before a sonorant. Interestingly, nowhere in the poem could I find an elision described by Rule 1. That is, Nabokov never simply

removes an unstressed vowel immediately following a stressed one, despite the fact that "Pale Fire" contains many excellent candidates, including: "being," "giant," "prior," "dial," and "dual". Nabokov fleshes out both syllables of these words and all three syllables of "di-a-monds."[32]

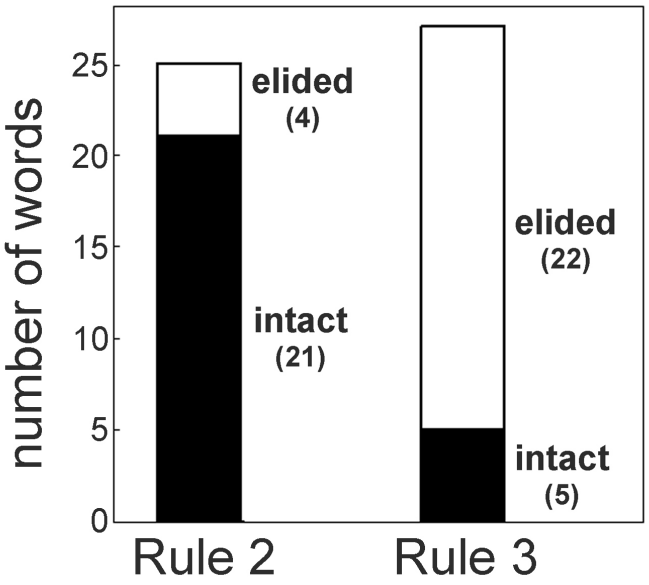

Figure 7. Elisions in "Pale Fire" that conform to Kiparsky's Prosodic Rules 2 and 3, compared to similar words left intact.

Elisions in "Pale Fire" display a strong bias (**Figure 7**). Rule 2 elisions occur in in only three candidate words ("glistening," "preposterous," and "ivory"), while more than twenty-one, equally good candidates remain intact.[33] In contrast, Nabokov makes nearly every elision allowable under Rule 3. He reduces eighteen unstressed 'i's that precede other unstressed vowels and spares only three ("happier," "insomnia," and "trivia"). He is less ruthless with the equivalent, unstressed 'u.' In three cases it is reduced ("usual," "perceptual," and "sensual") and on three occasions it retains full strength (once in "actual" and twice in "gradual"). In addition to 'u' and 'i' there is a single 'e' elided according to Rule 3, in the neologism, "orchideous."

The pattern is clear: Nabokov abstains from Rule 1 elisions; occasionally employs Rule 2; and almost always indulges in Rule 3, especially when it reduces the letter 'i'. These biased elisions produce a distinctive poetic diction, one in which both "diamond" and "Canadian" are three-syllable words. Is this Nabokov's own diction or one he created for John Shade? There is some small reason to suspect that his Russian heritage might predispose Nabokov to fuse 'i' with

a vowel that followed. This would produce an effect similar to turning 'hard' Russian vowels (*а*, *у*, э, or *о*) into their softer versions (*я*, *ю*, *е*, or *ё*). For instance, in his notes to *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov claims to transliterate the Russian letter *я* as 'ya*'*, which he mostly does. One exception is the name of the heroine, *Тат**я**на*, which he renders as *Tat**ia**na*, with *я* transliterated as *ia*.[34] To see whether this reflects a general tendency, let us compare "Pale Fire" to some of Nabokov's other English verse. I identified 67 candidates for synaeresis of an unaccented 'i' (a Rule 3 elision) in Nabokov's *Onegin*; of these, 18 are spared and 49 (Appendix 2) are reduced.[35] This is a somewhat lower rate of synaeresis (73%) than that found in "Pale Fire" (83%). It is, however, closer to that found in the work of Yvor Winters (67%), one of the few significant American poets of Nabokov's generation who remained devoted to iambic meters.[36] The distribution of elisions in "Pale Fire" does not, therefore, appear to reflect an inherent bias in Nabokov's own diction.

Why, then, is "Pale Fire" so chock full of synaeresis? The null hypothesis, of course, is that this represents a statistical fluke. Another possibility is that Nabokov overuses synaeresis to give John Shade a sloppy or careless American diction. Abraham Socher notes that "of all his narrators, only John Shade has the memories, cadences and (more or less) the vocabulary of an American" (Socher, 2005). Shade's language should, therefore, represent that "second-rate brand of English" — those "clumsy tools of stone" — that Nabokov regretted exchanging for the "untrammeled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue" of his youth (*Lolita*, p. 317; and *Collected Poems*, pp. 211-212).

EIGHT INTERESTING WORDS

Rules create exceptions and exceptions stand out. Thus, the eight words that buck Nabokov's elisional tendencies stand out as prosodically marked and likely to be important. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss the three words reduced according to Rule 2 and the five words that escape elision under Rule 3.

Nabokov's use of Rule 2 elisions. As I read them, Nabokov's Rule 2 elisions do not give particular emphasis to one word, but rather mark occasional shifts to a higher register, a more self-consciously poetic tone. They are the type of elision intended to produce "the delicate sensation of something being physically preserved by the voice at the very instant that it is

metaphysically denied by the meter" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 32). They mark three passages whose subjects are, in order: romantic love, poetry, and The Gods (or perhaps The Fates).

The first word, "glistening," appears in a sentimental love poem that Shade addresses to his wive. It begins on line 245, when Shade's ruminations on mortality are interrupted by the sound of his wife's footsteps.

> And so I pare my nails, and muse, and hear
> Your steps upstairs, and all is right, my dear.

This triggers a recollection of their early courtship and the moment he fell in love.

> Sybil, throughout our high-school days I knew
> Your loveliness, but fell in love with you
> During an outing of the senior class
> To New Wye Falls. We luncheoned on damp grass.

With every line the tone becomes more lyrical; more self-consciously poetic; and further removed from the prosaic act of paring one's nails. In line 261, Shade describes his beloved, beginning with

> Your prófile has not chánged. The **glíst-ning** téeth ◡ _́|◡ _|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́
> Bíting the cáreful líp; [...]

The poetical elision of "glist'ning" helps elevate the tone, which rises even further in the next stanza.

> Come and be worshiped, come and be caressed,
> My dark Vanessa, crimson-barred, my blest
> My admirable butterfly! [...]

Given the rhyme with "blest," an earlier poet like Pope might have gone further and written "caressed" as "caress'd."

The word "preposterous" appears in a remarkable stanza near the end of Canto Two, one that jumps playfully between poetry and television. In juxtaposing the ancient art and the modern medium, Shade allows an ironically high poetic tone to spill over into the television. The stanza begins on line 408 with a weatherman describing the atmospheric conditions

> A male hand traced from Florida to Maine
> The curving arrows of Aeolian wars.

Poetry itself makes a television appearance on the next line, as Sybil Shade tells her husband about an upcoming program, on which, "Two writers and two critics, would debate / The Cause of Poetry on Channel 8." Before this, however, a woodland sprite and her sacred dance are pressed into service selling soap: "A nymph came pirouetting, under white / Rotating petals, in a vernal rite / To kneel before an altar in a wood / Where various articles of toilet stood." Shade then retreats from the television, upstairs to "read a galley proof," presumably of his own poetry. There, he hears "the wind roll marbles on the roof," and muses on a line from Alexander Pope's 18th century poem, *An Essay on Man*, before being called back down to hear his name mentioned in the televised discussion of poetry.

"See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing"	◡́ _|◡́ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́
Has unmistakably the vulgar ring	◡́ _|◡ _́|◡ _|◡ _́|◡ _́
Of its **pre-post-rous** age. Then came your call,	◡ _|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _́
My tender mockingbird, up from the hall.	◡ _́|◡ _́|◡ _|◡ _|◡ _́

The poetical nature of this elision in "preposterous" (l. 421) is bolstered by the fact that it occurs in the same sentence as the quote from Alexander Pope.

Finally, the word "ivory" appears near the end of Canto Four (l. 820), in a stanza describing John Shade's sense of the unseen forces that govern the universe. These forces are

engaged in a game whose "plexed artistry" and "correlated pattern" may be the only "web of sense" in this world of "topsy-turvical" coincidence" (ll. 809-815).

<u>Lines 816-820</u>

It did not matter who they were. No sound,	◡ –|◡ –́|◡ –|◡ –́|◡ –́
No furtive light came from their involute	◡ –́|◡ –́|◡ –|◡ –|◡ –́
Abode, but there they were, aloof and mute,	◡ –́|◡ –|◡ –́|◡ –́|◡ –́
Playing a game of worlds, promoting pawns	◡́ –|◡́ –|◡́ –|◡ –́|◡ –́
To **iv-ry** unicorns and ebon fauns;	◡ –́|◡ –́|◡ –|◡ –́|◡ –́

Line 820 is marked in several ways: the elision in "ivory," the use of "ebon" for "ebony," and the choice of poetical synonyms for 'white' and 'black.' These lines, like the other two passages marked by Rule 2 elision, apply a clearly elevated tone to a classically 'poetical' subject —the fates that govern human destiny. In English poetry before the 19th century Rule 2 elisions were the most likely to be explicitly marked with an apostrophe and, therefore, could be considered the most characteristically 'poetical.' The association of such elisions with moments of elevated subject and tone in "Pale Fire" appears to be quite straightforward.

THE ANTI-PATTERN IN NABOKOV'S RULE 3 ELISIONS

The words that escape the razor of Kiparsky's third Rule stand out clearly from the background of Shade's diction, but why does he (or Nabokov) draw attention to them? Let us start with the word "trivia," on line 92 in the First Canto — a word that turns out to be distinctly non-trivial. Kinbote bases an entire footnote on this word, something that should alert us to its significance. The word appears in the middle of a stanza (ll. 86-98) describing John Shade's "dear bizarre Aunt Maude" who raised him after the death of his parents. She is a poet and a painter with a three-fold taste, "For realistic objects interlaced/ With grotesque growths and images of doom." After her death, Aunt Maud is represented only by a collection of objects she has left behind.

Lines 91-93

[...] Her room	[...] ◡ ´ _
We've kept intact. Its **triv-i-a** create	◡ ´ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ | ◡ ´ _
A still life in her style: [...]	◡ ´ _ | ◡ ´ _ | ◡ _ ´ [...]

The "still life" is composed of five objects: a paperweight, an open book of verse, a guitar, a human skull, and a page from the local newspaper. Fleshing out the pronunciation of "trivia" against a background diction that would otherwise shorten it, gives the word emphasis. This might simply be used to hammer home the trivial nature of what Maude Shade has left behind. If we look more carefully, however, we find that "trivia" is the most important word in the entire stanza. It links the confluence of Aunt Maud's tastes in the first half of the stanza with the "still life" created by these tastes in the second half.

Going slightly further, it is tempting to speculate that Nabokov plays off the etymology of the word "trivia" — defined by *Webster's* as Latin for "crossroads."[37] More precisely, *trivia* are junctions where three roads meet. In this instance, the still life commemorating Aunt Maud's life was created by the three-way confluence of: realistic objects, grotesque growths, and images of doom. This reading is supported by the fact that the number three and three-way junctions (Table 3) appear throughout the poem —always associated with moments of creation/procreation or revelation.

The largest collection of *trivia* occur in a stanza associated with the conception of Hazel Shade (ll. 430-442). She is conceived in "[Nineteen] *thirty-three*," during a vacation visit to a tri-colored sea of "green, indigo, and tawny." Shade takes care to note that this trip occurred "Nine [3×3] months before her birth." The first three things Shade remembers from the trip are "a long ramble, relentless light, and flocks of sails." He notes three sail boats in particular – one blue and two red. Shade's final memory from the period is the three-pronged image of: "The man in the old blazer, crumbing bread, / The crowding gulls insufferably loud, / And one dark pigeon waddling in the crowd." Interestingly, Kinbote's footnote to the word "trivia" provides two images of sexual liaison and fecundity, both taken from Maud Shade's scrapbook: (1) a group of women admiring the zipper of a man's trousers and (2) Eve eyeing Adam's crotch. Nabokov (or possibly Kinbote) appears to be alerting the reader, however obliquely, to the association of the number three with procreation.

This association with procreation reinforces the central three-way confluence in the poem: the Shade family itself. In the evening, John, Sybil, and Hazel Shade, sit in their respective rooms, each reading, writing, or studying: "she'd be reading in her bedroom, next / To my fluorescent lair, and you would be / In your own study, twice removed from me." The three family members in their three rooms converse about, for example, Latin homework or T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets.* This domestic *trivium* becomes, in Shade's memory, "a three-act play" or an eternal "tryptich."

Lines 379-381:

[...] the point is that the three
Chambers, then bound by you and her and me,
Now form a tryptich or a three-act play
In which portrayed events forever stay.

Shade's writing is also marked by threes. His book of essays, *The Untamed Seahorse*, sells *three* hundred copies and, late in the poem, Shade describes a part of his creative process as the confluence of three thoughts that must be held in the mind, simultaneously.

Lines 863-866:

[...] one must use three hands at the same time,
Having to choose the necessary rhyme,
Hold the completed line before one's eyes,
And keep in mind all the preceding tries [...]

Shade appears to detach his creativity from the number three when he describes only two methods of composition.

Lines 840-846:

I'm puzzled by the difference between
Two methods of composing: A, the kind
Which goes on solely in the poet's mind,

A testing of performing words, while he
Is soaping a third time one leg, and B,
The other kind, much more decorous, when
He's in his study writing with a pen.

At this point Charles Kinbote, as if sensing a break in the pattern, steps in to provide the missing *third* element. In his note to these lines Kinbote claims that, rather than only two methods, there are "really three if we count the all-important method of relying on the flash and flute of the subliminal world." (*Pale Fire*, p. 263)

Shade locates his daughter's personality at a three-way junction of: "strange fears, strange fantasies, [and] strange force / Of character" (ll. 344-345). This *trivium* leads Hazel Shade to spend *three* nights, "Investigating certain sounds and lights / In an old barn" (ll. 346-347). At this point Kinbote comments on the number three, saying that: "there are always 'three nights' in fairy tales, and in this sad fairy tale there was a third one too." (*Pale Fire*, p. 190)

A *trivium* also marks a moment of revelation, when Shade finally meets an elderly woman whom he thought shared his vision of a life after death. He has, not surprisingly, driven *three* hundred miles to see her and, when he finally enters her house, a three-way confluence of images — "that blue hair, those freckled hands, that rapt / Orchideous air" (ll. 771-772) — creates the first foreboding that his quest for assurance of an afterlife will fail.

Table 3. *Trivia*, or three-way junctions, in "Pale Fire." A, B, and C reflect the order in which the elements are listed.

Line	**A**	**B**	**C**
	you (Sybil Shade)	Her (Hazel Shade)	Me (John Shade)
	realistic objects	grotesques growths	images of doom
	strange fears	strange fantasies	strange force of character
	green	indigo	tawny
	long ramble	relentless light	flocks of sails
	man in blazer	crowding gulls	one lone pigeon
	blue hair	freckled hands	orchideous air

necessary rhyme completed line preceding tries

The numerology of "Pale Fire" has been extensively discussed (Tammi, 1995) but, after cataloging the associations of the prosodically marked word "trivia" it seems to me that the significance of the number three has been underestimated.[38]

Next, let us consider the word "happier" which appears near the end of Canto One, in line 126. In the previous stanza, a youthful John Shade, walking outside at night, pauses "halfway up the hill" to listen to the sound of crickets and to look at the stars above. Much like his contemplation of the "false azure in the windowpane" of the first stanza, this moment of meditation leads him to think of time, eternity, and eventually his own mortality: "Infinite foretime and / Infinite aftertime: above your head / They close like giant wings, and you are dead." Shade then ascribes the appearance of such images of doom to his sensitive and artistic temperament by contrasting the effect of a similar experience on a "regular vulgarian".

<u>Lines 125-127</u>

The régular **vul-gár-yan**, I daresáy,	◡ ˊ_|◡ _|◡ ˊ_|◡ _|◡ ˊ_
Is **hápp-i-er**: he sées the Mílky Wáy	◡ ˊ_|◡ _|◡ ˊ_|◡ ˊ_|◡ ˊ_
Only when máking wáter. [...]	◡ _|◡ ˊ_|◡ ˊ_|◡ [...]

Interestingly, the 'i' in "vulgarian" has been reduced according to Kiparsky's third prosodic rule, while the equivalent 'i' in "happier" has not. As with "trivia," the fully fleshed, "happier," stands out. One explanation for this emphasis is that Shade/Nabokov is intentionally directing the semantic focus of the sentence onto the word, "happier." Consider for a moment the sentence: "The vulgarian is happier". This could be used to answer one of two questions, either: (1) "Who is happier?" or (2) "How does the vulgarian feel?" As a response to the first question, the focus is "vulgarian". As a response to the second question, the focus is "happier". Eliding a vowel in "vulgarian" while leaving "happier" intact, Nabokov tips the focus toward the second word (Rooth M., 1996). That is, the *new* or *important* information provided by the sentence is the mental state of the vulgarian, not his identity. The identity of the person Shade is contrasting himself against is taken for granted, thus emphasizing his sensitive, artistic nature.

The final ‘i’ spared the knife of Kiparsky’s third rule belongs to the word “insomnia”, which appears in line 234. In this section Shade describes his ambivalence toward canonical views of the afterlife: his struggle “... to translate / Into one’s private tongue a public fate.” He finds the result of this struggle unsatisfying:

Lines 233-234

Instead of poetry divinely terse, ◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯

Disjointed notes, **In-somn-i-a**'s mean verse! ◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯

Here, drawing out “insomnia” to four syllables neatly mimics and highlights the contrast between the “mean verse” and a poetry that is, “divinely terse”.

The fraction of ‘u’s that escape a Rule 3 fate (2/5 or 40%) is higher than the equivalent fraction of ‘i’s (3/25 or 12%), but the number of u-containing candidates is much smaller (5 versus 25). The only two words that retain unstressed ‘u’s are: “gradual” and “actual”. Consider two lines (17-18) from the second stanza of Canto One, which contain candidates for both Rule 3 and Rule 1 elision: “gradual” and “dual”.

Lines 17-18

And then the **grád-u-al** and **dú-al** blúe ◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯

As níght unítes the víewer and the víew, ◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯|◡ ¯

In the previous stanza Shade described how reflections in his office window superimpose the interior of the room onto the landscape outside. In the lines above, a gradually fading twilight progressively obscures the outer world, eventually leaving only the reflection of Shade in his office. “Dual” is the key word in these two lines. There is the duality of Shade and his reflection and the duality of the inner and the outer worlds superimposed in the window. These doublings are beautifully mimicked by lexical dualities within each of the two lines, beginning with the words “grádual” and “dúal.” The two words harmonize but, due to a difference in stress, they fail to rhyme. In the next line, however, the sound of “níght” is copied exactly in “unítes” but the meanings of the two words are unrelated. Finally, “víewer” aligns not only phonologically but also semantically with “víew.” Nabokov (and Shade) thus create a series of related word pairs

(gra**dual**/**dual**, **night**/u**nite**s, **view**er/**view),** whose progressive collapse toward identity echos the effect of the failing light on the scene in the window. This is one of the more carefully wrought poetic effects in "Pale Fire" and it would be seriously undermined by an elision in "gradual" that destroyed its resonance with "dual."

The second appearance of "gradual" occurs near the beginning of Canto Two (l. 209). Shade has just recounted Aunt Maud's slide into dementia and he is, again, meditating on the possibility of an afterlife.

<u>Lines 209-210</u>

Whát móment in the **grád-u-al** decáy ´ ´|˘ _|˘ ´|˘ _|˘ ´

Does resurréction chóose? Whát yéar? Whát dáy? ˘ _|˘ ´|˘ ´|´ ´|´ ´

There is a suggestion, here, of the resurrection of the flesh which must, somehow, occur in the context of infinite space and infinite time: "Space is a swarming in the eyes; and time / A singing in the ears. In this hive I'm / Locked up." There is no obvious moment for resurrection. Shade hammers this point by accenting the *gradual* nature of decay, which is not a singular event but a process with no clear end. In his note on this line Kinbote concurs, saying that, "Spacetime itself is decay" (*Pale Fire*, p. 163).

There is also an obvious link between the repeated preservation of "grad-u-al" and the cluster of allusions to the assassin, Jakob Gradus, that run through the poem and the commentary. In this passage, the word triggers Kinbote to warn us again of how Gradus lurks in the structure of the poem: "Gradus <…> has sped through this verse and is gone - presently to darken our pages again" (*Pale Fire*, pp. 163-164). The prosodic emphasis on "gradual" within the poem thus neatly echoes Kinbotes fixation on Gradus in the commentary.

The fifth, and final, escapee from Type 3 elision is the word "actual," which appears in the middle of the third canto, on line 726. John Shade has collapsed at the end of a speaking engagement at a Rotary Club meeting. His heart flutters and then stops momentarily, and he experiences the vision of a white fountain. Afterward, Shade tells the story to a doctor, who is skeptical.

Lines 723-726

He dóubted véry múch that in the státe	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿|◡ ‿́
He fóund me in “óne could hallúcinate	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿|◡ ‿|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿
Or dréam in any sénse. Láter, perháps,	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡́ ‿|◡ ‿́
But not dúring the **áct-u-al** collápse.	◡ ‿|◡́ ‿|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿|◡ ‿́

This appears to be the most straightforward use of ‘anti-elision’ for emphasis. Shade is quoting the doctor, who makes a careful distinction between an exact coincidence of two events and a later recollection of their coincidence. To emphasize the distinction, the doctor highlights the word “actual” in precisely the way one does in natural speech.

We can compare this full-bodied “actual” to an elision that occurs in the morphologically similar word “usual,” in line 425. Here, Shade is describing the night of his daughter’s death. His narrative jumps between Hazel Shade’s disastrous blind date and his own quiet night at home with his wife. Shade walks into a room where, on the television screen, “two writers and two critics <...> debate / The Cause of Poetry.”

Lines 423-426

[...] my náme	[...] |◡ ‿́
Was méntioned twíce, as **ús-yal** júst behínd	◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́
(óne óozy fóotstep) Frást.	◡́ ‿́|◡ ‿́|◡ ‿́

Shade addresses this part of the poem to his wife and his voice is casual and conversational. He is a well-known writer, so he finds nothing particularly noteworthy about being mentioned on TV or about losing top billing to Robert Frost. Lingering on the word “usual” would imply a bitterness that Shade apparently does not feel.

RHYTHMIC MODULATION AND VOICES FROM "THE OTHER SIDE"

> "*The presence or absence of scuds in a given passage may often be accidental but only a Philistine can assert that the accidental is 'undiscussable'.*"
>
> Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*

> *"...that sudden shudder,*
> *a Russian something that I could inhale*
> *but could not see.*"
>
> Vladimir Nabokov, "An Evening of Russian Poetry"

I began with the question of whether Vladimir Nabokov retained or affected a Russian rhythmic accent in his American poetry. To address this question we should understand not only which prosodic features *actually* differentiate Russian and English verse but, more importantly, which ones Nabokov *thought* differentiated them. As an insect taxonomist, Nabokov spent much of his time dissecting butterflies, looking for subtle anatomical features —'individuating details'— that discriminate one species from another (e.g. "Notes on Neotropical Plebejinae"). His dissection of English and Russian iambics in *Notes on Prosody* yielded two individuating details I have already discussed —elision and regressive dissimilation— together with four additional distinguishing features. All six are listed together below:[39]

English

(1) Scudless lines predominate over scudded ones [...]. [At most] their number is about equal to that of scudless lines.

(2) Sequences of scudded lines are never very long. Five or six in a row occur very seldom. As a rule, they merely dot the background of scudless series instead of forming sustained patterns...

(3) Scuds are frequently associated with weak monosyllables, duplex tilts, and scudded rhymes...

Russian

(1) Scudded lines greatly predominate over scudless ones.

(2) Scuds often form linked patterns from line to line, for half a dozen lines in a row and up to twenty or more. Scudless lines rarely occur in sequences above two or three lines in a row.

(3) Scuds are frequently associated with the unaccented syllables of long words. [...] there are no duplex tilts....

(4) Scud I and Scud II occur about as frequently as Scud III but often tend to predominate [...]. The line is weighted accentually toward its end.	**(4)** Scud III [i.e. scud on S3] greatly predominates over other scuds [i.e. the lines display *regressive dissimilation*]. The line is weighted accentually toward its beginning.
(5) Feminine rhymes are scarce, insipid, or burlesque.	**(5)** Feminine rhymes are as frequent as masculine ones and add extrametrical music to the verse.
(6) Elisions are more or less frequent.	**(6)** There are, strictly speaking, no elisions of any kind.

These six distinguishing features reflect both inherent linguistic differences (Scherr, 1983) and accidents of history (Wachtel, 1998). We will employ them to search Nabokov's American poetry for any Russian rhythms lurking beneath the protective coloration of the English language. Before plunging into the labyrinth of "Pale Fire," however, we will warm up by investigating the mixed Russian and English prosodies of three shorter poems: "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*," "An Evening of Russian Poetry," and "The Softest of Tongues." These are among the most linguistically liminal of Nabokov's shorter poems — each projecting "a Russian something" into English.

"On Translating *Eugene Onegin*," (*Collected Poems*, pp. 197-198) was written to acquaint Anglophone audiences with the structure of the 'Onegin stanza' — the basic unit of Pushkin long verse novel. The poem first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1955, while Nabokov wrestled with *Onegin*, and its subject is the author's ambivalence about the act of translation. The two stanzas of the poem reproduce three elements of Pushkin's prosody: (i) meter; (ii) strophic architecture; and (iii) rhyme scheme. Of these features, the most Russian — and according to Nabokov least English — is the rhyme scheme, which employs equal numbers of masculine and feminine rhymes. Masculine rhymes are created from words stressed on the final syllable — rhymes like *prose*/*rose* or *rake*/*mistake* — while feminine rhymes involve words with stress on the penultimate (or sometimes antepenultimate[40]) syllable — rhymes like *platter*/*chatter* or *earring*/*persevering*. *Notes on Prosody*, which takes most of its English examples from the Nineteenth Century, concludes that English poets rarely employed feminine rhymes and almost never to good effect (*Notes on Prosody*, pp. 82-95).

The Onegin stanza is composed of fourteen lines and can be heard as three quatrains plus one couplet. If we represent masculine line endings by lower case letters and feminine line endings by upper case, the rhyme scheme is: *AbAb-CCdd-EffE-gg*. Several critics have noted that the *AbAb* pattern that opens the Onegin stanza is also by far the most common rhyme scheme in Nabokov's Russian poetry (Scherr, 1995; Smith, 1995). The first quatrain in "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*," introduces the theme of the poem and illustrates the *AbAb* scheme:

What is translation? On a **plátter**	◡ ´ _| ◡ _| ´ | ◡ _| ◡ _| ´ | ◡
A poet's pale and glaring head,	◡ _| ◡ _| ´ | ◡ _| ´ | ◡ _ ´
A parrot's screech, a monkey's **chátter**,	◡ _| ◡ _| ´ | ◡ _| ´ | ◡ _| ´ | ◡
And profanation of the dead.	◡ _| ◡ _| ´ | ◡ _| ◡ _| ´ | ◡ _ ´

Apart from feminine rhymes, line length (tetrameter), and a lack of elision, the rhythm of "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*" is not especially Russian; it incorporates none of the subtler features described in *Notes on Prosody*. Many of the lines, for example, turn out to be 'scudded' but most often scuds are caused by non-stressed monosyllables rather than polysyllabic words. In addition, only a few of the lines are 'front-weighted' in the classic Russian manner: with stresses at the beginning and scuds near the end. This front-heavy rhythm has little impact when it appears in isolated lines[41] since even the most conservative English prosodies are fluid enough to produce lines like this by chance. It is when they fall together in clusters that such lines begin to mimic the statistical bias of regressive dissimilation (Taranovsky, 1953). The only cluster of lines with S3 scuds in "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*" appears near the beginning of the second stanza (17-19):

In the black mirror of a river	◡ _| ◡ ´ | ◡ _| ◡ _| ◡ _| ◡
Between the city and the mist.	◡ _| ◡ ´ | ◡ _| ◡ _| ◡ _ ´
Elusive Pushkin! Persevering,	◡ _| ◡ ´ | ◡ _| ◡ _| ◡ _| ◡

Unlike a Russian poem, most of the scudding here is caused by weak monosyllables, but a case could be made that this is an attempt to create a cryptic Russian rhythm. Such a case would be greatly strengthened by either: (i) a connection between the rhythm and the text or (ii)

a statistical test demonstrating that such a cluster is unlikely to arise by chance. I, however, see no strong textual support for a mimetic rhythm in these particular lines, and the overall scudding statistics of the poem predict a reasonably high probability (p=0.37) of finding three adjacent S3 scuds in twenty-eight lines purely by chance.[42] It seems, therefore, that Nabokov limited the prosodic mimesis in this poem to meter and rhyme scheme. Most lines from "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*" actually step to a comfortably English beat, occasionally beginning with English-style stress inversions (a.k.a. tilts). For example (ll. 10-11):

Then, in a language newly learned,	◡ ´ _| ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ _´
I grew another stalk and turned	◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ _´

Nabokov uses prosodic mimesis in much more subtle and interesting ways in "An Evening of Russian Poetry," (*Collected Poems*, pp. 177-183) a work that imports both rhymes and rhythms from the Russian tradition.[43] This poem takes the form of a lecture on poetry delivered by an émigré professor whose words, as he describes the nature and sound of Russian pentameter, actually reenact the rhythms of Russian verse in English. The poem tips off its readers to this process at the beginning, alerting us in the first five lines to the possibilities of linguistic mimicry and to the presence of cryptic and fragmentary Russian rhythms, hiding in plain sight (ll. 1-5):

The subject chosen for tonight's discussion	◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ ◡ | ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡
Is everywhere, though often incomplete:	◡ _´| ◡ ◡ | ◡ _´| ◡ ◡ | ◡ _´
when their basaltic banks become too steep,	◡ ◡ | ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ _´
most rivers use a kind of rapid Russian,	◡ ´ _| ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡
and so do children talking in their sleep.	◡ ◡ | ◡ _´| ◡ _´| ◡ ◡ | ◡ _´

The easiest foreign elements to spot winding through the poem are the feminine rhymes: line endings Nabokov reckoned common in Russian poetry but rare in English.[44] The poem, in fact, opens with a feminine rhyme — *discussion*/*Russian* — that frames the action of the entire poem. The overall rhyming pattern of "An Evening of Russian Poetry" turns out to be a complex mixture, not only of masculine and feminine rhymes, but also of double and triple rhymes

(Appendix 3) that often cross strophic boundaries. Many of the rhymes are, in one way or another, off: some are slant (e.g. *sighs*/*noise*/*rose* in 36/37/38); some are feminine rhymes that match only on the stressed syllable (e.g. *lantern*/*phantom*/*thank you* in 6/8/10); and some are heterosyllabic — rhyming masculine with feminine line endings, such as *scepter*/*steps* in lines 48/50.

Interestingly, Nabokov considered some rhyme types to be distinctly un-Russian, especially heterosyllabic rhymes — those combining masculine and feminine line endings. He referred to this kind of rhyme as *gynandrous*, a word that spills over from entomology where it is used to describe an insect — say a butterfly — with both male and female anatomical features.[45] According to Nabokov: "the nearest approach to the English gynandrous type of rhyme, 'flower-our,' would be *storozh-morzh* ('watchman-walrus'), but I do not think that this has ever been tried" (*Notes on Prosody*: p. 84). This strong claim indicates either a limited familiarity with prosodic innovations inside twentieth-century Russia[46] or a deeply conservative view of Russian prosody, or perhaps both. Regardless, this perspective makes the *gynandrous* (heterosyllabic) rhymes in "An Evening of Russian Poetry" particularly interesting, as they tend to oppose the mimetic effect of more Russian prosodic elements.[47]

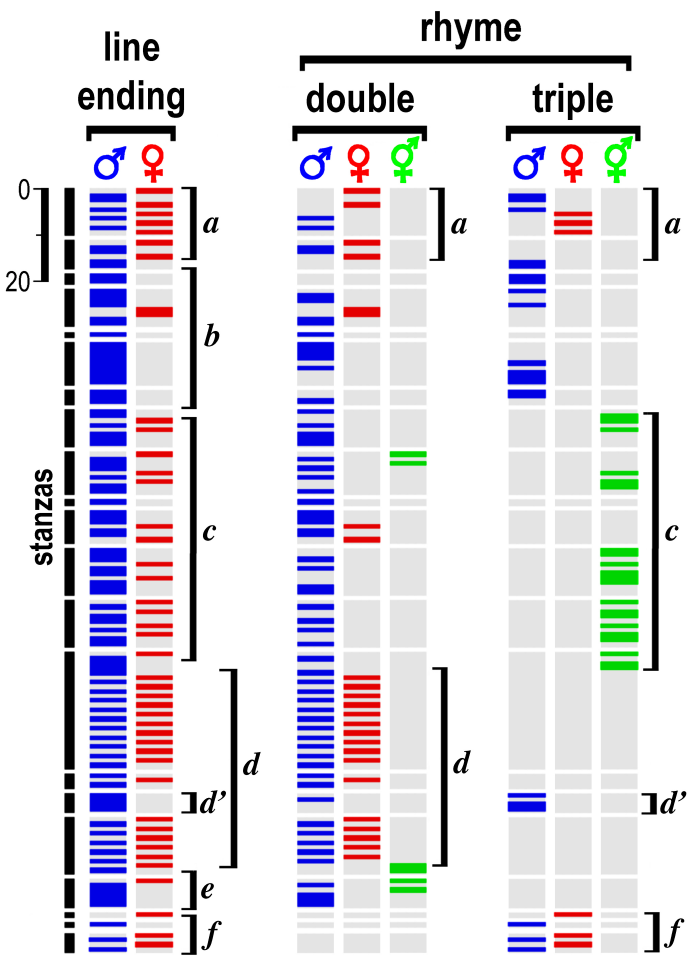

Figure 8. Rhyme scheme of "An Evening of Russian Poetry." Lines 1-140 are represented vertically, from top to bottom (scale bar at top left). Black bars on far left represent stanzas. *Left*: line endings are marked as masculine (blue) or feminine (red). *Right*: double (center) and triple (far right) rhymes are marked as masculine (blue), feminine (red), or hetero-syllabic (green). Black brackets mark the boundaries of the different rhyme patterns, labeled: *a-d*.

When we plot the line endings and rhymes of "An Evening of Russian Poetry" graphically (Figure 8), we see that feminine endings and triple rhymes appear in clusters that come and go, producing not *one* unified rhyme scheme, but *six* distinct patterns (*a-f* in Figure 8). I will briefly sketch them all, in order:

(*a*): In the first sixteen lines of the poem the émigré professor introduces the topic of his lecture and mythologizes the origins of the Russian alphabet. These lines are divided into two stanzas of ten and six lines respectively, containing masculine and feminine line endings and

interleaved double and triple rhymes (Figure 8, middle and right columns). The opening stanza can actually be read as a *sonnetina cinque*, a ten-line sonnet of two quintains, with the rhyme scheme: *AbbAb-CdCdC*. The six-line stanza that follows has the rhyme scheme *EffE-gg* —a form sometimes called a "Spanish" *sestet*. Together these two stanzas can be read as a corrupted Onegin Stanza, broken by the transposition of two lines and the interpolation of two other lines. In addition, the rhyme schemes *AbbAb* and *AbbAb-CdCdC-EffE* also form clear prosodic links to two short poems by Pushkin, containing themes of exile, alienation, and regret (see below).

(*b*): The second pattern begins on line 17, when a member of the audience interrupts the speaker to ask why he is rhapsodizing on the nature of Russian words. The question pulls the professor from an imaginary Russian landscape with its "simple skyline" (l. 14) and its "hives and conifers" (l. 15) back into the American lecture hall, where feminine line endings all but disappear for the next twenty-two lines (Figure 8, left column), and masculine double and triple rhymes take over (Figure 8, middle and right columns). During this time the speaker explains to his audience the connection between linguistic form and semantic content, and describes the sound of the Russian iambic line.

(*c*): The third pattern begins on line 40, when the speaker introduces the topic of rhyme itself ("The rhyme is the line's birthday, as you know"). From here to line 89 masculine double rhymes trade back and forth with a slippery and sophisticated set of heterosyllabic triple rhymes (Figure 8, right column). As he spins out these subtle rhymes, the speaker moves from the subject of rhyme to the poetic character of various animals, minerals, and vegetables (i.e. " 'Trees? Animals? Your favorite precious stone?' "). Near the end of this pattern, however, on line 75 the speaker slides from a description of animals in Russian poetry into a paranoid vision in which memories and images of Russia pursue him like Soviet agents (ll. 75-78): "My back is Argus-eyed. I live in danger. / False shadows turn to track me as I pass / and, wearing beards, disguised as secret agents, / creep in to blot the freshly written page." The subsequent stanza (beginning l. 85) returns to the subject of poetry but the speaker explicitly seeks to maintain his odd, paranoid-nostalgic frame of mind (ll. 85-87): "Let me allude, before the spell is broken, / to Pushkin, rocking in his coach on long / and lonely roads."

(*d*): The fourth rhyme pattern begins on line 90: the precise moment when the speaker begins to describe the scene outside the window of the coach that carries Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin through the Russian countryside. The rest of this twenty-five-line stanza, a meditation on Pushkin's internal exile,[48] maintains a perfect pattern of alternating feminine and masculine double rhymes (Figure 8, middle column). As noted earlier, this *AbAb* pattern marks the beginning of an Onegin stanza as well as most of Nabokov's Russian language verse. This classic Russian pattern continues all the way through line 128, but it is interrupted briefly at line 113 by the insertion of a four-line stanza with only masculine endings. Nabokov flags this stanza as an insertion by rhyming across it. Specifically, he rhymes the Russian word *neighuklúzhe* (неуклу́же) on line 111 with the English word *conclúsion* on the other side of the interpolated stanza, down on line 117. When the temporarily suspended *AbAb* rhyme scheme takes up again on line 117, the speaker talks about his own exile in America and the uncanny moments when he is overtaken by a mysterious "Russian something" that pursues him through space and time. When the door (literally) closes on this stanza ("and then the child slept on, the door was shut," line 128), the *AbAb* rhyme scheme comes to its final end.

(*d'*): Prosodically, the short stanza at line 113 appears to be inserted into the larger *AbAb* rhyme scheme. Semantically, the stanza is also an insertion: a parenthetical comment in response to an audience member's question. Removing this 'inserted' stanza (ll. 113-116) would be almost unnoticeable were it not for the fact that a *hat* inside the stanza (l. 114) rhymes with a *that*, outside (l. 118).

(*e*): On line 129, heterosyllabic double rhymes finally break up the *AbAb* pattern. These heterosyllabic rhymes then give way to a block of strictly masculine rhymes as the émigré professor, having finished his lecture, "collects his poor belongings," and accepts a check for his performance.

(*f*): The poem ends with an pair of interleaved triple rhymes —masculine and feminine— each of which, in a fitting final touch, brackets one Russian word between two English words (*Russian*/*strashen*/*ashen* in 135/137/139 and *be*/*prostee*/*apostasy*[49] in 136/138/140).

This filigreed rhyme scheme is one of the most beautifully wrought elements of "An Evening of Russian Poetry." Nabokov himself acknowledged the central role of rhyme in this poem in a 1958 audio recording, in which he prefaced his recitation of it by saying: "This is going to be an impersonation, in iambic pentameter, with *fancy rhymes*."[50] Much more could be written about how rhyme creates mood and shades meaning in this poem, but I will limit myself to briefly discussing three passages (marked *a*, *c*, and *d* in Figure 8): (*a*) the ruined Onegin Stanza in lines 1-16; (*c*) the heterosyllabic triple rhymes of lines 40-89; and (*d*) the Russian-style *AbAb* pattern of lines 89-128.

Nabokov begins his poem about Russian poetry with a rhyme scheme that looks — at a glance — not particularly Russian. The opening stanza is ten lines, but breaks — both semantically and prosodically — in the middle, yielding two quintains with rhyme schemes: *AbbAb* and *CdCdC*. This pattern conforms to that of the Italian *sonnetina cinque*, but such five-line strophes and triple rhymes are relatively rare in classical Russian poetry (Scherr, 1986: pp. 240-241). For example, Tomashevsky lists only two occurrences of the *AbbAb* pattern in all of Pushkin's work (Tomashevsky, 1958: pp. 157, 182): the first five stanzas of Napoleon Bonaparte's soliloquy in "Napoleon on Elba" (*Наполеон на Эльбе*, 1815) and the first five lines of "In an Album" (*В альбом*, 1832). However, as Michael Wachtel convincingly demonstrates in *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings* (1998), one poet often alludes to the work of another by 'quoting' meter and/or rhyme scheme. Not surprisingly, the most potent prosodic associations in the Russian tradition all trace back to Pushkin, and so I suggest that Nabokov opens his poem with *AbbAb* as an intentional reference to one or both of Pushkin's short poems.

The prosodic allusions of the *AbbAb* rhyme scheme help set the tone of "An Evening of Russian Poetry." Images of exile, alienation, and regret in Pushkin's poems resonate with similar images drawn by Nabokov's émigré professor during his lecture. In "Napoleon on Elba," the deposed French emperor, exiled to the island of Elba, surveys the desolation of his new home. His soliloquy begins with the *AbbAb* pattern:

«Вокруг меня все мертвым сном поч**и́**ло,	*A*	"Around me all in deathlike slumber rested,
Легла в туман пучина бурных в**о́**лн,	*b*	The abyss of stormy waves lies in fog,
Не выплывет ни утлый в море ч**ё́**лн,	*b*	[This] frail boat will not sail out in [that] sea,

Ни гладный зверь не взвоет над мог**и́**лой —	*A*	The starved beast will not howl over the grave
Я здесь один, мятежной думы п**о́**лн…	*b*	I am here alone, full of rebellious thought...

The theme of exile permeates "An Evening of Russian Poetry," and appears most explicitly later in the poem, in lines that link Pushkin's internal exile in Russia to the émigré professor's exile to America. In Pushkin's poem (written during the "Hundred Days" of 1815) Napoleon returns to France from exile. The visiting lecturer, however, knows that his own return to Russia would be as disastrous for him as Napoleon's Waterloo.

The prosodic link between "In an Album" (*В альбом*) and "An Evening of Russian Poetry" extends well beyond the first five lines. Pushkin's poem is only fourteen lines long, with a rhyme scheme (*AbbAbCdCdEffE**f***) that very nearly matches the first fourteen lines of Nabokov's poem (*AbbAbCdCd**C**EffE*). If we remove the tenth line from "An Evening of Russian Poetry" and the fourteenth from "In an Album" (the bold characters in the previous sentence) the two schemes align perfectly. Interestingly, the tenth line of Nabokov's poem almost "does not count" semantically. This line represents an interruption, an accidental break in the flow of the lecture when the speaker tells his assistant that she has inserted a slide upside down. The themes that resonate strongly between these two poems are writing and regret. Pushkin's short poem falls into a genre known as 'album verse,' which are lines written into the personal albums of friends, acquaintances and admirers. He begins by expressing regret for having laid aside this particular album for so long without writing anything in it:

Долго сих листов заве́тных	*A*	A long while these cherished leaves
Не касался я перо́м;	*b*	I have not touched with pen;
Виноват, в столе моём	*b*	The fault is mine [that], in my desk
Уж давно без строк приве́тных	*A*	Overdue and lacking lines of greeting
Залежался твой альбо́м.	*b*	Idly sits your album.

In the nine lines that follow, Pushkin makes up for his tardiness by writing his best wishes in the album on the occasion of its owner's name day. These lines coincide in Nabokov's poem with an interesting act of writing. The émigré professor does not sign his name in an

album, but he instructs his assistant to insert a slide "and let the colored beam / project my name or any such-like phantom / in Slavic characters upon the screen." And as for the theme of regret, it dogs the lecturer throughout the entire poem to its last lines, in which he accuses himself of "apostasy" and begs forgiveness from his great love, the Russian poetic tradition.

If we now consider the second stanza of "An Evening of Russian Poetry" — six-lines with the rhyme scheme, *EffEgg* — we cannot help noticing that this stanza perfectly reproduces the rhyme scheme at the end of Pushkin's Onegin stanza. This is the signature strophic form of the most iconic work of Russia's greatest poet, but here it lies in ruins. Going back and considering the opening sixteen lines of the poem together, we begin to see the outlines of a more complete, but corrupted, Onegin stanza. The first two quatrains have become quintains, but the first can be returned to the Onegin form by simply removing Line 3. The second quintain is more problematic. Removing Line 10 makes it a quatrain but the rhyme scheme (*CdCd*) does not match Pushkin's form (*CCdd*). To restore it completely we must also swap Lines 7 and 8. This minor surgery exactly reproduces the rhyme scheme of an Onegin Stanza, down to its alternating masculine and feminine line endings. With two more alterations, these fourteen lines can also be rendered semantically coherent.[51] By building a *sonnetina cinque* out of the ruins of an Onegin Stanza, Nabokov opens "An Evening of Russian Poetry" with a beautiful illustration of the principle described in its opening lines. "The subject chosen for tonight's discussion [Russian prosody] / Is everywhere, though often incomplete."

The complex triple rhyming in lines 40-89 (*c*, Figure 8) is heralded at the beginning, on line 40, when the émigré professor announces that "The rhyme is the line's birthday, as you know." And what follows could, in some way, be seen as a chaotic birthday party.[52] The triple rhymes in this section often begin with a pair of words whose rhyme is only approximate followed by a third word that rhymes more closely with one of the original pair (Appendix 3). These include: *few*/*rubies*/*subdued* (ll. 70/71/72) and *broken*/*awoke*/*cloak* (ll. 85/87/88). Sometimes the three words are more phonically equidistant, as in *verse*/*first*/*bursting* (ll. 65/66/68): here, the *t* in *bursting* forges a new link with *first*, but the extra syllable in *bursting* negates this advantage. Together, the *gynandrous* triple rhymes act to destabilize the connection that rhyme usually forges between lines. Affiliations shift and evolve with time. For example, the initial attachment between *broken* and *awoke* is later weakened by the stronger connection between *awoke* and *cloak*. The émigré professor associates these slippery triple rhymes with

magic: they create an illusion or a spell. Later, as he ends his lecture (ll. 129-131), the professor says: "The conjurer collects his poor belongings — / the colored handkerchief, the magic rope, / the double-bottomed rhymes, the cage, the song." This "double-bottomed rhymes" clearly refers to the triple rhymes which — like a magician's hat — have a false bottom that opens to reveal a second bottom hidden beneath. The professor — or at this point 'the conjurer' — weaves a spell with his false-bottomed rhymes that gives added valence to a line near the end of this section. When the conjurer says (ll. 85-85) "Let me allude, before the spell is broken, / to Pushkin, rocking in his coach..." the word "spell" now has a double meaning. Semantically, it appears to refer to the vision in the previous stanza, of "False shadows" that "turn to track me as I pass" (l. 76). Prosodically, however, it refers to the spell of the double-bottomed rhymes, a spell that ends just after the conjurer mentions Pushkin. I suggest that this association between conjuring and prosody is particularly significant to Nabokov and that it reappears in a key passage of "Pale Fire" (see below).

On line 90 the beguiling but 'anti-Russian' heterosyllabic triple rhymes[53] give way to the solidly Russian: *AbAb*. The effect of this prosodic transition is a shift from swirling instability to clockwork regularity. The chaos of the previous section actually heightens the sense of order in the rhyme scheme of this passage. Lines 90-128 (*d* and *d'*, Figure 8) begin with a Russian landscape rolling past the window of Pushkin's coach, probably during one of his intervals of internal exile. A "sob" and a reference to the poet Nicolai Nekrasov on line 94 signal Pushkin's very Russian-themed unhappiness[54] which begins to find poetic expression in "the panting syllables that climb and climb, / obsessively repetitive and rasping, / dearer to some than any other rhyme" (ll. 95-97). The rhyme that is "obsessively repetitive" echoes in the repetitive *AbAb* scheme of this section. The poetic images that follow (e.g. "lovers meeting in a tangled garden" in line 98) suggest that a "passion for expansion" (l. 102) in the Russian poetic tradition can be traced back to Pushkin, and that this passion inevitably leads Russian poets "into the silence of exile" (l. 109). At this point in the lecture, the speaker notes that he has no time to tell "the whole amazing story" (l. 111) and mutters about its sadness, under his breath in Russian. He then briefly interrupts the *AbAb* rhymes to (cryptically) explain this *sotto voce* comment.

When the conjurer returns to the *AbAb* scheme on line 117, he is no longer discussing Pushkin's internal exile, but his own exile outside of Russia. Something mysterious, however, has followed the professor from his native Russia. It is as if, in the earlier stanza, the misery of

Pushkin's exile conjured a spirit — "a Russian something" — that has haunted Russian poetry for generations and that now follows the speaker everywhere, occasionally coming so close that he can smell it (l. 126). The impression is both that of a stowaway ghost as well as a portal through space and time ("space is collapsible," l. 119), linking the speaker to the Soviet Union of his own time and to Pushkin's Russia. Nabokov's wife, Vera, referred to this sense of another, unseen world —this feeling of *potustoronnost*— as the "main theme" of her husband's work,[55] one that "saturates everything he wrote" (Alexandrov, 1995a).

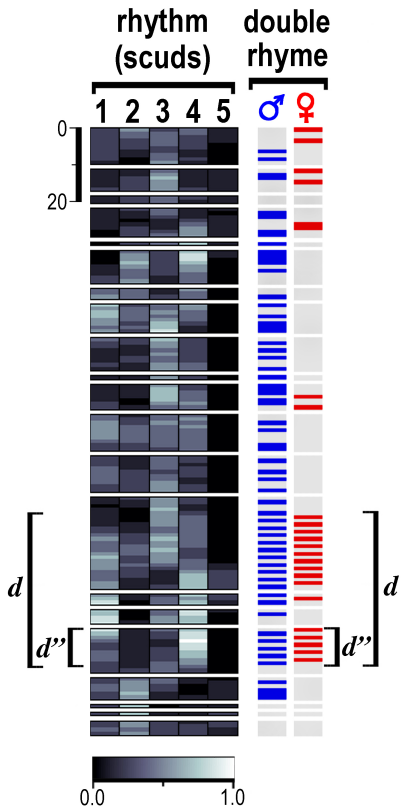

Figure 9. Rhythm and rhyme in "An Evening of Russian Poetry." The poem is represented vertically (scale bar: top left).

Left: Heat map of the density of scuds on S1-S5, based on a nine-line sliding average. Lighter colors represent higher rates of scudding (see scale).

Right: Masculine and feminine double rhymes (*d*: lines 90-128. *d"*: lines 117-128). Black brackets mark the boundaries of the different rhyme patterns, labeled: *a-d*.

When the speaker describes two spooky moments of *potustoronnost* in lines 117-128 ("once in a dusty place of Mora county" and "and once in West Virginia..." ll. 121 and 123) not only does the rhyme scheme evoke Russia but so does the rhythm of the lines. In an earlier section of this essay, I discussed examples of Russian rhythmic mimicry that occur in this poem

around line 32 ("But close your eyes and listen to the line"). To more fully understand how rhythmic modulation works throughout "An Evening of Russian Poetry," I performed a nine-line sliding average of the scuds on each S position, from the beginning of the poem to the end (**Figure 9**, left side). This produces a figure similar to Bely's scud maps but, instead of displaying the rhythm of each individual line, this graphical device highlights regions of the poem where scuds cluster in the same position.[56] We will focus most of our attention on S4 (the fourth "strong" position in the line) because Nabokov reckoned consistent scudding on this position among the basic characteristics of Russian prosody (see above). In the first twenty-six lines of the poem scudding on S4 is very low but, as noted earlier, it spikes suddenly around line 32 (marked with an asterisk in Figure 9). After this brief spike, scuds on S4 remain relatively constant until line 117, at which point they rise again and remain high for an entire stanza (marked ***d"*** in Figure 9). The fraction of S4 scudding in this stanza (0.58 or 7/12) is the highest of any twelve-line passage and is more than double that of the rest of the poem (0.27 or 34/128):

And now I must remind you **<u>in</u>** conclusion,	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ_◡
that I am followed **<u>everywhere</u>** and that	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ
space is collapsible, although the bounty	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡
of memory is often **<u>incomplete</u>**:	◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ
once in a dusty place of Mora county	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡
(half town, half desert, dump mound **<u>and</u>** mescquite)	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ
and once in West **<u>Virginia</u>** (a muddy	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ_◡
red road between an orchard **<u>and</u>** a veil	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ
of rapid rain) it came, that sudden shudder,	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡
a Russian something that I **<u>could</u>** inhale	◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ _◡ ˊ
but could not see. Some rapid words were uttered –	◡ _◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ_◡
and then the child slept on, the door was shut.	◡ _◡ ˊ_◡ _◡ ˊ_◡ ˊ

And then, as if to mark a clear boundary, scuds on S4 disappear entirely in the next stanza (ll. 129-134). Considered by itself, the statistical significance of the rhythm in lines 117-128 is not impressive. Given the overall rate of S4 scudding in "An Evening of Russian Poetry" (0.29 or 41/140) the probability of finding a cluster like the one in lines 117-128 by chance within a

140-line poem is only slightly less than one in five ($p<0.2$). Finding such a scud cluster aligned with the *AbAb* rhyme scheme, however, is much more significant. The probability of this congruence occurring by chance is less than one in one hundred seventy-five ($p<0.006$).[57]

Finally, in addition to rhythm and rhyme, scansion demands, in line 123, that the word "Virginia" be pronounced with four syllables: Vir-gin-i-a. *Webster's* dictionary rules this pronunciation acceptable but it is certainly not common. One could interpret the expansive pronunciation as an adamant failure to elide, consistent with Nabokov's assertion that elision does not occur in Russian poetry. Also, it should not escape our attention that this particular example reflects the opposite of John Shade's strong tendency to synaeresis in "Pale Fire" (compare Shade's three-syllable "Canadian" with the émigré professor's four-syllable "Virginia").

Nabokov's conjurer marshals his greatest mass of Russian prosodic elements together in this one stanza — *AbAb* rhyme, rhythms of regressive dissimilation, scudding on polysyllabic words, and a conspicuous aversion to elision — to weave a distinctive "Russian something" into the very structure of the verse. In this stanza more than any other in the poem, "all hangs together – shape and sound [...] vessel and content" (ll. 19-20). The effect is spooky. As the conjurer's words describe his eerie sensation of the proximity of "a Russian something," his prosody makes the candle flames gutter and wafts a chill Russian breeze through the room. Nabokov must have understood that this effect could easily go undetected by Anglophone readers so he introduces the idea of linguistic mimesis at the beginning of the poem (ll. 1-5). He then carefully teaches his readers enough Russian prosody to detect its rhythmic signature (e.g. lines 27-31). He also creates a swirl of "fancy rhymes" that throw the simple, Russian *AbAb* pattern into greater relief. Despite all this guidance, however, Nabokov is ultimately skeptical of the reader's ability to appreciate his prosodic illusions. In lines 132-133, he says to his audience: "You tell him [the conjurer] of the passes you detect. / The mystery remains intact..."

Finally, before moving on to "Pale Fire," it is worth saying a few words about "The Softest of Tongues," (*Collected Poems*, p. 211-212) a short poem first published in 1941 in *The Atlantic Monthly*. In this poem Nabokov announces — and seeks to demonstrate — his arrival as an American writer by bidding poetic farewell to his mother tongue. Apart from the subject matter and a single Russian word ("*prash-chai*" [*прощай*] — "good-bye") there is not much Russian about this poem. Unlike "An Evening of Russian Poetry" there are no feminine rhymes

and no interesting clusters of scuds. The poem begins and ends with perfect iambic rhythms, the first three and last four lines containing no scuds at all. Finally, four of the poem's twenty-four lines contain tilts on the first foot, a typically English weighting of the line (e.g. line 22, "softest of tongues, my true one, all my own..."). Overall, the poem comes across as a demonstration piece, twenty-four lines of conservative —downright old-fashioned— English prosody submitted as proof that the author has indeed mastered these "clumsy tools of stone" (l. 24).

RHYTHMIC MODULATION IN "PALE FIRE"

And now, finally: into the labyrinth. Let us begin our analysis of "Pale Fire" by briefly checking for each of Nabokov's six prosodic 'individuating details' in the poem as a whole:

(1) *Frequency of scudded lines.* Nabokov claims that, in traditional English iambic verse, lines with "missing" stresses, or scuds, are the exception rather than the rule. Only in rare cases, according to Nabokov, does the fraction of scudded lines rise as high as one half. In "Pale Fire" scudded lines dominate over scudless lines (**Figure 10**), with 866 out of 999 lines containing scuds. This dominance of scudded lines would appear to be more characteristic of the Russian tradition.

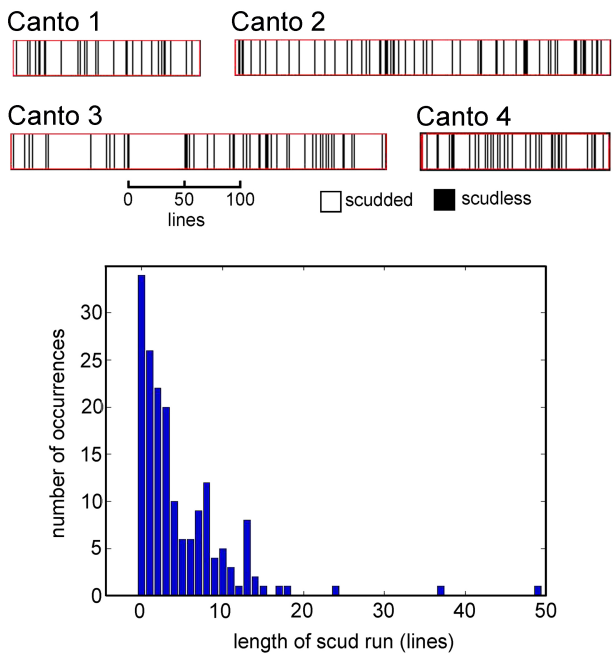

Figure 10. Scudded and scudless lines in "Pale Fire." Top: Diagram of the four cantos of "Pale Fire" with scudless lines marked black. Scudded lines are white and red arrowheads mark the position of the longest run of scudded lines in the entire poem (N.B. – these arrowheads mark the same position as the red arrowheads in Figure 13). Bottom: Histogram of the lengths of the contiguous runs of scudded lines. The red arrowhead marks the long run of scudded lines that is marked in the top part of the figure.

(2) *Sequences and patterns of scudded lines.* According to Nabokov's analysis, lines with "missing" stresses appear in English iambic poetry more or less in isolation while, in Russian poetry, they form chains or "linked patterns" that run from six to twenty lines. It is difficult to know precisely what Nabokov means by a "linked pattern" since any sequence of lines can be called a pattern, but he would certainly have counted as "linked patterns" the two examples discussed earlier: the "stair-steps" from lines 116-120 (Figure 6) and the "roof" that begins on line 855 (Figure 7). The high fraction of scudded lines (86.6%) in "Pale Fire" means that it contains many long clusters of lines with at least one unstressed S position. The average length of a run of scudded lines in the poem is slightly greater than six (6.11) and three of these runs exceed twenty lines. The longest scud run occurs near the beginning of Canto 3, in lines 606-654: a whopping forty-nine lines (Figure 10). As we will see later, this section of the poem also contains many other unique rhythmic features.

In contrast to the long runs of scudded lines, the majority of scuddless lines appear in isolation and their longest run is *four* lines. By this criterion, Nabokov would not have classed "Pale Fire" as a conventional, English-style iambic poem, lightly salted with scuds, but instead as a more Russian-style poem of scuds, peppered lightly with perfect iambic lines.

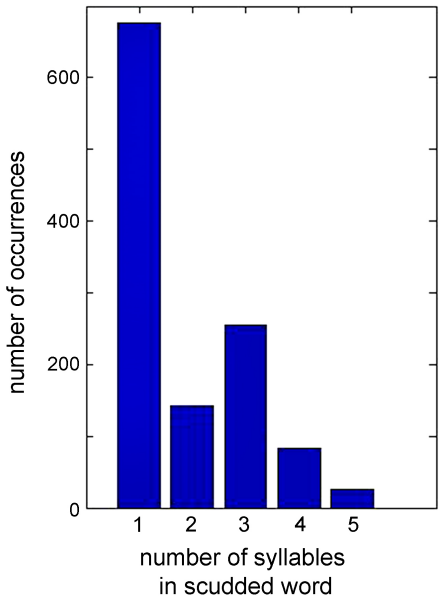

Figure 11. Histogram showing the lengths of all words that produce scuds in "Pale Fire."

(3) *Scuds on monosyllabic versus polysyllabic words.* Nabokov reckons that, in English iambics, scuds are frequently associated with one- and two-syllable words (monosyllables and "duplex tilts") while, in Russian, scuds are frequently associated with longer words. On which side of this line does "Pale Fire" fall? In all, the poem contains 7492 words and, by my count, 1181 of them fall across the metrical pattern in a way that drops weak syllables onto S positions and produces scuds. A fair number of these scudding words (362 or 31%) contain three or more syllables but the large majority (819 or 69%) are one- and two-syllable words, consistent with Nabokov's notion of English prosody. Furthermore, 142 (12%) of the scudding words are di-syllabic (**Figure 11**): words that Nabokov calls "duplex tilts" because, when their stress is displaced from an S position, it is obliged to fall on a W position. He asserts that such duplex tilts occur frequently in English iambics but almost never in Russian. On the whole, therefore, this third individuating detail places "Pale Fire" solidly in the English camp. Later, we will look at the distribution of duplex tilts and polysyllabic scuds to see how the rhythm changes through the course of the poem.

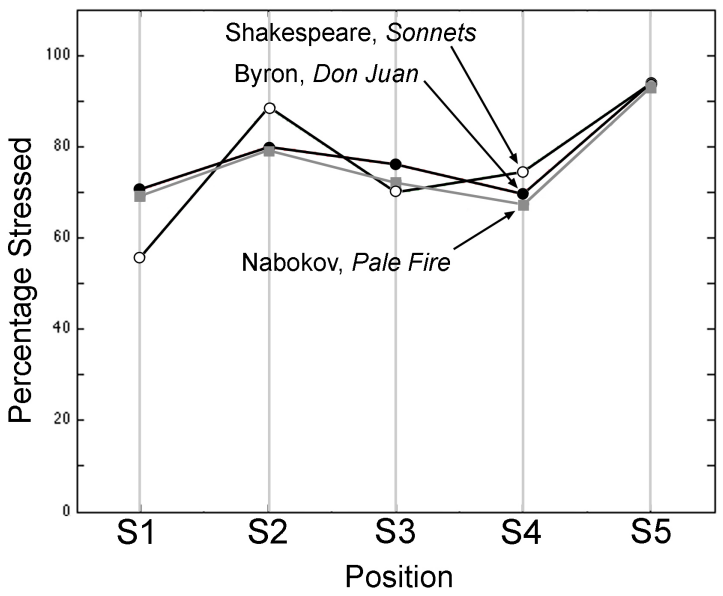

Figure 12. Frequency with which word stress falls upon strong (S) positions of the iambic pentameter line in "Pale Fire," compared to the work of Russian poets of the 19th and early 20th Centuries (top) and English poets, Shakespeare and Byron (bottom; data taken from Tarlinskaja, 1976).

(4) *Regressive dissimilation.* As described above, Russian poets display a consistent bias in the placement of word stresses in the iambic line. The final S position is always stressed while the penultimate S position is the most likely to be unstressed (Figures 5 and 10). More generally, in iambic pentameter, the odd S positions (1, 3, and 5) of the Russian line are more likely to be stressed than the even (2 and 4). This produces a characteristic dip in the stress pattern just before the end of the line (**Figure 12**, top). Poets writing in English show less bias in the placement of stresses and no strong dip near the end of the line (Figure 12, bottom). In "Pale Fire," we observe only a slight dip in the frequency of stresses on the fourth foot —nothing as dramatic as that found in the Russian tradition. In fact, the stress pattern of "Pale Fire" aligns with the English tradition, and is remarkably similar to that of Byron's long poem, *Don Juan* (Tarlinskaja, 1976). Interestingly, when Nabokov writes iambic pentameter in Russian, his lines exhibits a very strong pattern of regressive dissimilation.[58]

(5) *Frequency of feminine rhymes and extrametrical syllables.* As noted earlier, if we account for elisions, every line of "Pale Fire" contains exactly ten syllables. There is not a single extrametrical syllable in the entire poem. Furthermore, the rare scuds in the final S position

almost never occur in adjacent lines, meaning that Nabokov occasionally rhymes words with different stress patterns. He sometimes mitigates this mismatch by pairing the primary stress in one word with a strong secondary in another, as in lines 985-986 which rhyme "attains" and "windowpanes." The closest he comes to a *bona fide* feminine rhyme is when he pairs the word "possibilities" with the phrase "Sybil, it is" in lines 829-830. The feminine near-rhyme in these lines suits the moment in the narrative, when John Shade is frustrated in his attempt to explain to his wife the existential consolations of his art. In summary, the absence of feminine rhyme and extrametrical syllables place "Pale Fire" firmly on the side of the English tradition.

(6) *Elision.* I discussed elision in some depth earlier in this essay. The twenty-six elisions in "Pale Fire" (one for every 38 lines) make this aspect of the poem much more English than Russian. For comparison, the 20th Century Russian poets most notorious for elision, Boris Slutsky and Joseph Brodsky, are credited with 19 and 29 elisions, respectively, in their entire iambic oeuvres (Friedberg, 2011, pp. 50, 58).

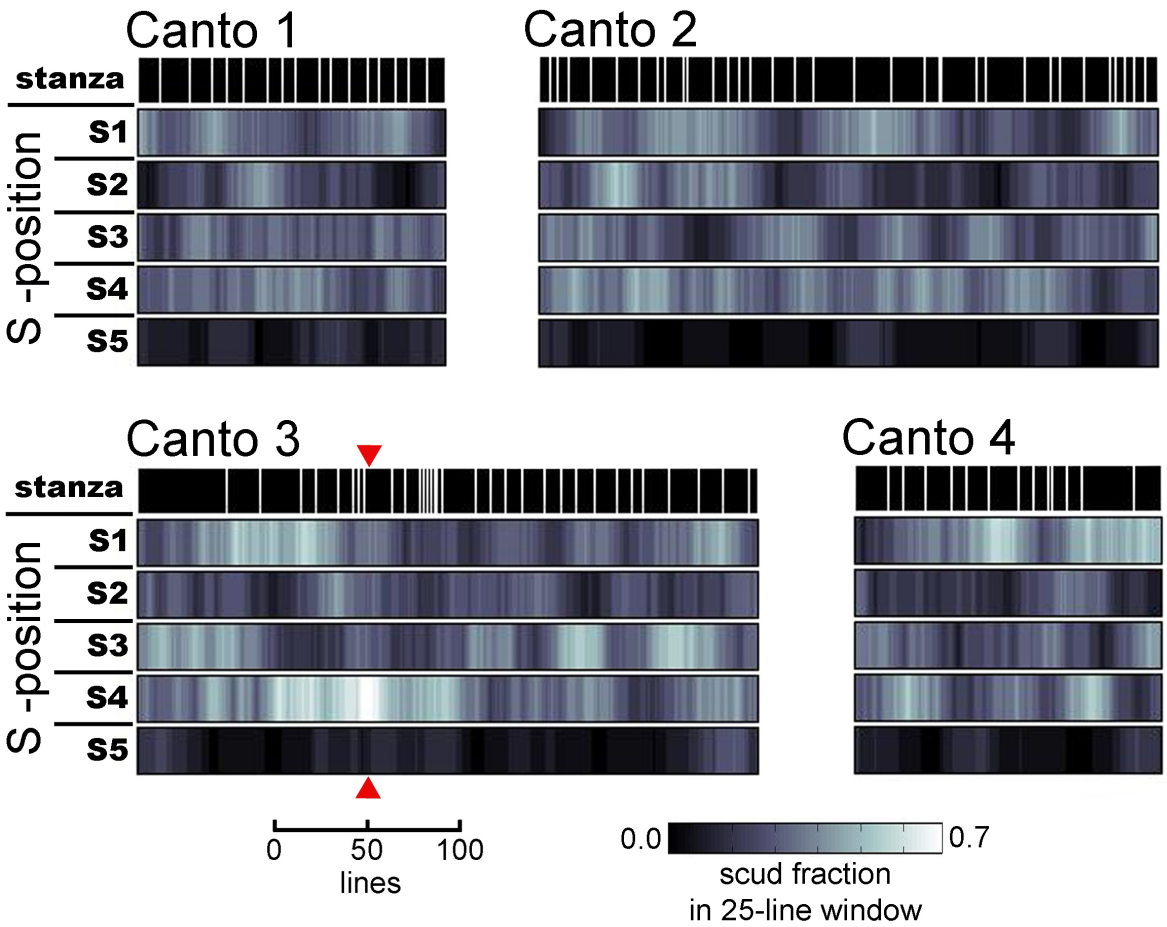

Figure 13. 'Heat map' of scud frequencies at all five S positions, averaged over a 25-line sliding window. Stanza boundaries are marked by white lines in the top row. The other rows correspond to phonologically strong (S) positions of the iambic line (S1 - S5). Shading denotes the frequency of scuds within the sliding window, from 0.0 (black) to 0.7 (white). Red arrowheads mark the position in Canto 3 where scudding on S4 is maximum and mimicks the rhythm of Russian regressive dissimilation (N.B. - these arrowheads mark the same position as the red arrowheads in Figure 10).

On the whole, "Pale Fire" exhibits a couple of prosodic tendencies Nabokov might have considered 'Russian', namely the frequency and pattern of scudded lines (points 1 and 2). By all his other criteria (points 3 – 6), however, the global rhythm of the poem is comfortably English. Calculating statistics for the entire 999 lines, however, masks rhythmic modulations and prosodic shifts that occur throughout the poem. To see these shifting rhythms, I calculated the fraction of stresses that fall on each of the five S positions of the pentameter line within a 'window' of 25 lines.[59] I then "slid" this window across the entire poem, from the first line to the last, to generate

a map of the local scud frequencies everywhere in the poem.[60] To better visualize the shifting rhythmic textures of the poem I shaded the map, marking higher scud frequencies with light tones and lower frequencies with dark (**Figure 13**). The uniform darkness of the bottom band in Figure 13 reflects the low probability of finding a scud in the S5 position anywhere in the poem. The other positions vary more from stanza to stanza and canto to canto. One obvious large-scale trend is that variability in the local scud frequencies increases in the second half of the poem. For example, the bright bands in Cantos 3 and 4 of Figure 13 mark regions of sustained scudding, especially in the S1, S3, and S4 positions. We can quantify this rhythmic variability by calculating a standard deviation for scud frequency at each position in the line (**Figure 14**). Comparing the standard deviations from the first and second halves of the poem reveals that the second half has a less stable rhythm than the first. Significantly, the largest rhythmic variations in the second half of "Pale Fire" occur in the S4 position, the position associated with the "Russian" rhythm of regressive dissimilation.

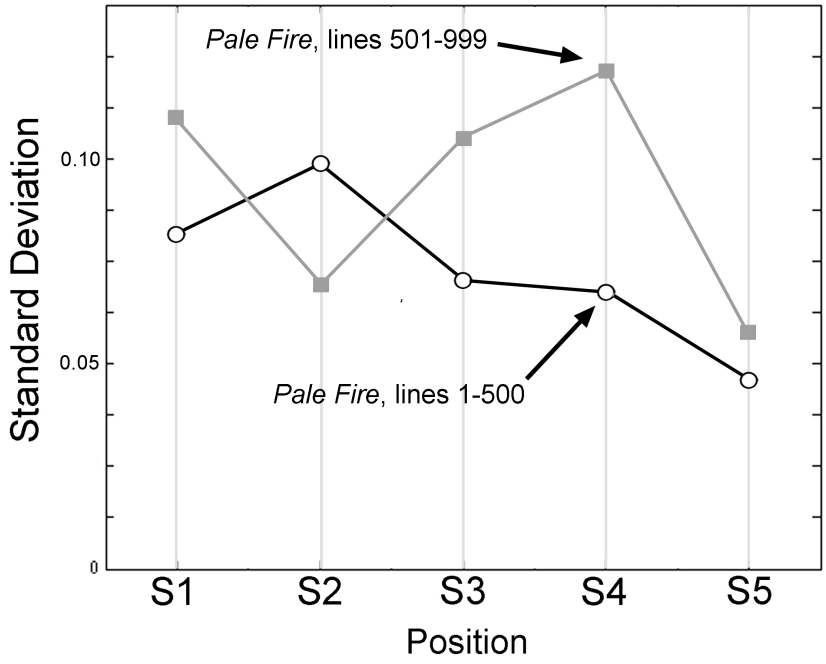

Figure 14. Standard deviations of 25-line averaged scud frequencies (see Figure 14) in the first (circles) and second (squares) halves of "Pale Fire." Note that the biggest change in variation occurs in S4, the position associated with Regressive Dissimilation.

This shift in rhythmic stability between the first and second halves of "Pale Fire" coincides with a distinct semantic shift in the poem. The first half focuses on Shade's family life and ends with the suicide of his daughter. The second half of the poem follows Shade through his

search for meaning and consolation in the hope of an afterlife. The meandering rhythms of this second half reflect the wandering nature of John Shade's spiritual and intellectual quest.

Let us explore this rhythmic variation in more detail, especially the modulations that occur on the S4 position of the line. In the first half of the poem the probability (within a 25-line window) of finding a scud in S4 hovers around 0.31, with a maximum of 0.5. In the second half of the poem the overall average scud probability in S4 jumps to 0.35, but the local maximum skyrockets to 0.68 —in a passage located between lines 621 and 650. This is the highest frequency of scudding in any S position anywhere in the entire poem, and it occurs in the center of a broader increase in S4 scud frequency (>0.55) that runs between lines 609 and 656 (Figure 14). This increase is specific to S4 and does not coincide with increased scudding on the adjacent positions, meaning that the stress pattern here exhibits strong 'regressive dissimilation,' characteristic of Russian verse. Given the rhythm of the first 500 lines of the poem, I compute the probability of such a strong spike in S4 scuds appearing in the last 499 lines purely by chance at approximately 2% (p=0.019).[61] These statistics argue that the sharp, local rise in S4 scudding in Canto 3 is not a fluke, but a deliberate perturbation of the rhythm.

To understand how this Russian rhythm relates to the semantic content of the poem, let us look at the onset of the regressive dissimilation pattern — lines 609-616 — where the S4 scuds first begin to rise. These lines fall in the middle of a meditation on facing the moment of death. After lamenting the lack of guidance for a condemned prisoner — and which thoughts he "should roll-call" when "marching to the wall" (ll. 597-598) — Shade introduces the character of an elderly émigré, dying alone in a motel room.

<u>Lines 609-619</u>

Nor can one help the exile, the old man	◡ _|◡ ´|◡ ´|◡ _|◡ ´ ´ _
Dying in a motel, with the loud fan	◡ ´ _|◡ _|◡ _|◡ ´|◡ ´ ´ _
Revolving in the torrid prairie night	◡ _ ´|◡ _|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´ _
And, from the outside, bits of colored light	◡ _|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´ _
Reaching his bed like dark hands from the past	◡ ´ _|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´|◡ ´ _|◡ _ ´ _
<u>Offering</u> gems; and death is coming fast.	◡ ´ _|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´|◡ _ ´ _
He **<u>suffocates</u>** and conjures in two tongues	◡ _ ´|◡ _|◡ _ ´|◡ _|◡ ´ ´ _
The **<u>nebulae</u>** **dilating** in his lungs.	◡ _ ´|◡ _|◡ _ ´|◡ _|◡ ´ _

Nabokov knew many people who died in exile, including his friend and fellow poet, Vladislav Khodasevich, whose imagery contributed to opening lines of "Pale Fire." Even if he is not precisely the exile described in this stanza, Khodasevich (who died alone and peniless in a Paris hospital) must be somewhere among the inspirations for this character. Khodasevich's sometime companion, Nina Berberova, characterized his last years by saying: "Exile is always a tragedy, the fate of the émigré always a misfortune. To the poet, emigration can mean extinction, and Khodasevich realized only too well what was in store for him" (Berberova, 1952).

The situation of the "exile […] / Dying in a motel room," also resonates strongly with a poet from another Nabokov poem, "The Room," which begins: "The room a dying poet took / at nightfall in a dead hotel / had both directories — the Book / of Heaven and the Book of Bell." Although they inhabit different poems, this poet and the exile of "Pale Fire" are connected. For example, they see similar swirling patterns on the ceilings of their respective rooms. The exile sees "the loud fan / Revolving in the torrid prairie night," while the poet in "The Room" finds that "Whenever some automobile / subliminally slit[s] the night, / the walls and ceiling would reveal / a wheeling skeleton of light."

We are never told whether the exile in "Pale Fire" is himself a poet, but the fact that he "conjures in two tongues" reminds us of the bilingual professor/conjurer from "An Evening of Russian Poetry," with all his prosodic illusions. Nabokov often used conjuring as a metaphor for literary technique, perhaps most famously in the afterword to *Lolita* (p. 317), where he laments abandoning his native language with its, "apparatuses — the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions — which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way." Similar to the opening lines of "An Evening of Russian Poetry," the notion of conjuring in "two tongues" also alerts us to the possibilities of linguistic crosstalk.

Kinbote's note on "conjures in two tongues" phrase consists entirely of sixteen pairs of languages,[62] along with "American and European." All of the language pairs include "English" but none of them repeats except "English and Russian," which appears four times. This repetition clearly marks English and Russian as the two most significant tongues in the list.

A Russian rhythm begins to emerge in these lines. Throughout this short passage scuds fall frequently on the typical Russian position, S4, but they also pile up at the same rate on the

more English position, S1. Also, unlike Russian verse, most scuds here —including all those on S4 — come from weak monosyllables. In total, these eight lines contain five tri-syllabic words (marked in bold), but only three of these long words (underlined) produce scuds.

The three-line stanza that follows the story of the dying exile (ll. 617-619) provides an afterword to his story, expressing doubts about the survival of consciousness after death ("A wrench, a rift--that's all one can foresee"). The next, three-line stanza (ll. 620-622) brings us to the Institute of Preparation for the Hereafter (IPH), an ecumenical organization devoted to investigating the possibility of an afterlife. John Shade previously lectured at The Institute, and he and his wife spent some time participating in its intellectual life. Ultimately, the experience left them cold (ll. 620-622): "As you remarked the last time we went by / The Institute: 'I really could not tell / The difference between this place and Hell.'" These lines set up the fifteen-line stanza that follows, in which Shade pokes fun at the chaotic and contradictory teachings and approaches of the IPH.

Lines 623-637

We heard **cremationists** guffaw and snort	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´
At **Grabermann's denouncing** the Retort	◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´
As **detrimental** to the birth of wraiths.	◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´
We all **avoided criticizing** faiths.	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´
The great **Starover** Blue reviewed the role	◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´
Planets had played as landfalls of the soul.	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´
The fate of beasts was pondered. A Chinese	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´
Discanted on the **etiquette** at teas	◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´
With **ancestors**, and how far up to go.	◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´
I tore apart the **fantasies** of Poe,	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´
And dealt with childhood **memories** of strange	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´
Nacreous gleams beyond the adults' range.	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´
Among our **auditors** were a young priest	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´ ´
And an old **Communist**. Iph could at least	◡ _◡ ´ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´
Compete with churches and the party line.	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´

I propose that these lines are the most prosodically significant of the entire poem: a Russian nugget buried at the heart of an English mountain. Five of Nabokov's six characteristic Russian features are obvious here: (1) every line is scudded; (2) there is a consistent pattern to the scudding; (3) twelve of twenty-four total scuds are created by polysyllabic words (bold and underlined); (4) scuds fall on S4 with almost twice the frequency of any other position in the line; (5) the Russianness is not quite complete as there are no feminine rhymes in this stanza; but (6) there are no elisions either. The total fraction of S4 scudding in these lines is 66%, and the rhythmic dominance of this pattern is seen in the almost unbroken column of gray boxes in the S4 position of the metrical diagram above. The stanza is also packed with poly-syllabic words, fifteen in its fifteen lines, and some of these words appear almost gratuitous (e.g. Graberman's, Starover, discanted, nacreous). Lexically, this stanza also contains the only *bona fide* Russian word in the entire poem, the surname "Starover." As Kinbote helpfully explains in his note to line 627, this name comes directly from the Russian word for "Old Believer" (*старовéр*).[63] The stanza also contains the only occurrence of the word "Communist" in the poem and, therefore, succeeds in bringing the Old Believers — a radically conservative religious movement of pre-revolutionary Russia — into proximity with the atheist-materialist rulers of Russia in the 1960s.

While Shade pours out the chaotic babble of voices and ideas from IPH, the prosody of this stanza works its spooky magic. A cryptic "Russian something" appears in the rhythm and vocabulary, creating again that sense of *potustoronnost*. Is this the spectral presence of the dying (possibly Russian) exile, conjuring in two tongues? If so, his appearance at this point undercuts both Shade's skepticism about life after death and IPH's haphazard approach to studying the afterlife. Such a haunted stanza would operate in a similar way to the final paragraph of Nabokov's story, "The Vane Sisters." The dead Vane sisters use acrostics to announce their intervention in the telling of their story, while the dying exile manipulates the prosody of John Shade's poem to reveal the possibility of a life after death.

The next stanza (ll. 638-652) describes the further descent of IPH into hoodoo and spiritualism, and is populated by some of Nabokov's personal *bêtes noires*: Freudians and characters from Dostoyevsky. Shade also describes how the "tasteless venture" of IPH actually helped him understand the negative space defined by both orthodox and unconventional systems of belief (i.e. "I learnt what to ignore in my survey / Of death's abyss…").

Lines 638-652

In later years it started to decline:	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_
Buddhism took root. A *medium* smuggled in	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ _ *elis*
Pale jellies and a floating **mandolin**.	◡ ´ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_
Fra **Karamazov**, mumbling his inept	◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_
All is allowed, into some classes crept;	◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´_
And to fulfill the fish wish of the womb,	◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_
A school of *Freudians* headed for the tomb.	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_ *elis*
That tasteless venture helped me in a way.	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_
I learnt what to ignore in my survey	◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ _
Of death's abyss. And when we lost our child	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´_
I knew there would be nothing: no self-styled	◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´_
Spirit would touch a keyboard of dry wood	◡ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´_
To rap out her pet name; no phantom would	◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ _◡ _
Rise **gracefully** to welcome you and me	◡ ´ ´_◡ _◡ _◡ ´_◡ _◡ ´_
In the dark garden, near the shagbark tree.	◡ _◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_◡ ´_

The last six lines of the above stanza (ll. 647-652) acquire a beautiful and subtle irony from the prosodic effects of the previous stanza (ll. 623-637). Shade accepts that his daughter will never make contact with him from the other side; that "no self-styled / Spirit would touch a keyboard of dry wood to rap out her pet name." He does not appear to realize, however, that a spirit has already rapped out such a message in the previous lines of this very poem. The word "rap" is particularly significant in this context because the rhythmic modulations of Russian and English poetry depend on the distribution of phonological stresses. The Russian word for such a stress, *ударение*, derives from *удар*, meaning "a physical blow," or "a stroke," or sometimes even "a rap."

The Russian prosodic elements are falling away in these lines. The entire stanza still maintains a high rate of scudding on S4, but most of the long words (bold) are gone. The lack of long words is exacerbated by two distinctly un-Russian elisions (in "medium" and "Freudians") that reduce three-syllable words to di-syllables. As a result, only three of twenty-four scuds in

this stanza are produced by unaccented syllables of long words. And finally, this passage is completely bereft of Russian words or references to the history and politics of Russia.

Nowhere else in "Pale Fire", outside of lines 609-652, does the prosody take such a strong and sustained Russian turn — a fact that marks these lines as special. As I mentioned at the beginning of the essay, Nabokov appears to associate Russian prosody with themes of exile and dislocation and he deploys Russian prosodic elements to create subtle moments of *potustoronnost*. The émigré professor of "An Evening of Russian Poetry" lapses into Russian rhythms when confronted by a spectral, "Russian something" that follows him everywhere. In similar fashion, the most concentrated Russian essence in "Pale Fire" (ll. 623-637) is bracketed on one side by a dying man who "conjures in two tongues" and on the other side by a spirit who raps out messages from the afterlife. We hear the ghostly whisper of *potustoronnost* only when we analyze Nabokov's poetry in the way I believe he hoped we would: using tools that he patiently explained to the English-speaking world in *Notes on Prosody* and "An Evening of Russian Poetry."

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NOTES

[1] This project was born in the winter of 2012, during a brief sabbatical at Princeton University, where I audited one of Michael Wachtel's classes in Russian poetry. This experience led me to Professor Wachtel's remarkable book, *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings*, and inspired me to tackle Boris Unbegaun's *Russian Versification*, a classic textbook on Russian prosody. My reading ultimately led me to Nila Friedberg's multi-modal analysis of Brodsky's prosody, *English Rhythms in Russian Verse: On the Experiment of Joseph Brodsky*. Friedberg makes a compelling case that the 'English accent' of some of Brodsky's early Russian poems was a conscious appropriation of prosodic principles from English verse, and that Brodsky used English rhythms to mark themes of dislocation and exile in his poetry. I began to wonder about the prosody of Vladimir Nabokov, another poet whose work straddled the English and Russian languages. Nabokov thought deeply about the differences between English and Russian verse —more deeply even than Brodsky— and he analyzed poetry with the intense, forensic attention of an insect taxonomist.

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are my own.

[3] The translation is intended to be a more-or-less literal crib. A few notes: (1) In the first line, "сквозь день" literally means "through day." I opted for "beyond day" to make it clear that the sense was not 'throughout the day'. (2) In line 4 the swallows do not dart "by the window" but "in front" of it ("Перед окном").

[4] Quoted by Bethea (1983, p. 237), who cites V. Sirin [Nabokov], "Vladislav Khodasevich" [a review of *The Collected Verse*], *Rul'* [The Rudder], no. 2142 (14 December 1927). The translation of the passage that follows is my own.

[5] From Socher (2005): "Vladimir Nabokov's first, fumbling biographer, Andrew Field, almost found it, when he asked the author about the connection between John Shade, the fictional poet of "Pale Fire," and Robert Frost. Nabokov teasingly replied, as he had before, that he really knew only one short poem by Frost. […] This, [the poem 'Of a Winter Evening'] I submit, is the 'one short poem of Frost's' that Nabokov truly 'knew,' in the intimate sense of having appropriated it for his art."

[6] Paul Fussell also uses the limerick as an example in his book, *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form* (1965): "Because of its associations with certain kinds of statements and feelings, a given meter tends to maintain a portion of its meaning, whether symbolic sounds are attached to it or not. In the limerick, for example, the very pattern of short anapestic lines is so firmly associated with light impudence or indecency that a poet can hardly write anything resembling this measure without evoking smiles. To 'translate' a limerick into, say iambic pentameter, is to drain off the comedy: we must conclude that a great deal of the comedy inheres by now in the meter alone."

[7] Linguists and philologists disagree about the importance of dividing iambic lines into two-syllable feet (Kiparsky, 1975). Interestingly, Nabokov also appears somewhat ambivalent about the significance of metrical feet. While all of his prosodic neologisms refer to phenomena that occur on pairs of syllables (scuds, tilts, etc.) he does not limit those pairs to the odd-even (◡ _). He employs terms like 'reverse tilt' and 'reverse duplex tilt' to describe prosodic effects that occur on even-odd pairs (_ ◡). Throughout this essay I will mark the divisions between iambic feet, at least partly as a typographical device to make the prosodic architecture of the lines easier to visualize.

[8] Cf.: "In phonetic terms, stressed syllables in English are produced with a stronger burst in initiatory energy —a more powerful contraction of the chest muscles— than unstressed syllables [...] On the acoustic side, this increased energy input results in greater loudness, increased duration and often — mainly in the case of primary stress— a change of pitch. It is not possible to quantify any of the physical correlates of stress in absolute terms. A syllable's property of being stressed is primarily a relative one..." (Giegerich, 1992: p. 179).

[9] Cf.: "When syllables are uttered in sequence, in polysyllabic words, for example, they are perceived as having different degrees of prominence, or stress. [...] In many words, the prominence of syllables is further differentiated [...some] syllables [...] bear secondary stress: stress that is weaker than the main (or 'primary') stress but stronger than that of an unstressed syllable. In longer words, further differentiation of stresses can be found: ...English is said to be a stress language: every (lexical) word — noun, verb, adjective, or adverb — has a stressed syllable, and where more than one syllable bears stress <...>, one of these stresses will be the main stress, and the others subordinated" (Giegerich, 1992: p. 179).

[10] Linguist Paul Kiparsky, for example, uses a four-step scale (from 1=highest stress to 4=completely unstressed) to analyze English poetry (Kiparsky, 1975).

[10] Two prosodic differences between Russian and English can be traced back to secondary stress. One is the positioning of compound English words in the metrical template, which is discussed later in this section. The other is related to the notion of *metrical tension*. Paul Kiparsky defines metrical tension as the sum of the differences between the actual word stresses in a line and the underlying metrical template. Russian syllables count as either 1 (stressed) or 4 (unstressed), so the difference at each position in a line is either 0 or 3. In an English line, intermediate stress values (2-3) can either increase or decrease the metrical tension, depending on whether they fall on S or W. Secondary stresses, therefore, do not affect the metricality of a line but they can increase or decrease its metrical tension.

[11] In counting stresses I have tried to maintain two basic principles: (i) consistency and (ii) adherence to Nabokov's understanding of English prosody. The basic set of rules I followed comes from Tarlinskaja (1976):

(1) Nouns, verbs, adjectives, numerals, and most adverbs are **always stressed**.

(2) Unstressed syllables of polysyllabic words, monosyllabic prepositions, conjunctions (including 'that' and 'if'), and particles (including 'to' of infinitives) are **always unstressed**.

(3) Monosyllable question words are **stressed** in the context of actual questions, but **not stressed** when they serve as conjunctions.

(4) Personal pronouns (including the word 'one' used as a pronoun) are stressed only in the S position, and then only when they occur at the end of a phrase. Otherwise they are unstressed.

(5) Possessive and demonstrative pronouns are stressed in the S position only when they occur in a focus construction. Otherwise they are unstressed.

These rules are not perfect but they improve the consistency of comparisons between "Pale Fire" and other English poems, analyzed in the same way (e.g. Figures 2 and 13). I departed from Tarlinskaja's rules only when they appeared to conflict with Nabokov's scansion (e.g. "The scudding of such particles as 'all,' 'no,' 'not,' 'was,' etc., is a question of context and individual taste." *Notes on Prosody*: p.11) or when a focus construction clearly indicated the presence of stress on a normally unstressed syllable (Rooth, 1996).

[12] In Nabokov's view: "strictly speaking, the spondee —i.e., two adjacent semeia bearing exactly the same stress accent (´ _ ´ _) and following each other without any break or pause (as might suggest to the ear an inner caesura or missed beat)— is an impossibility in metrical verse... But a kind of false spondee (´ ◡ ´ _ or ´ _ ´ ◡) is not infrequent." [*Notes on Prosody*: p. 27] In this particular case Nabokov would argue that: "the force of the meter sorts out ... [stressed] monosyllables in a certain, iambic, way..." [*Notes on Prosody*: p. 29].

[13] Paul Fussell began his 1966 review of *Notes on Prosody* by saying that "the traditional non-book is large and full of pictures; this one is small and full of tables, numerals, and funny words." Fussell praises some of Nabokov's insights but lambasts his formalism, particularly his terminology, saying: "what a

mere graduate student, in his simplicity, would call a pyrrhic foot Nabokov calls a 'scudded foot,' or a 'scud'; what an ordinary person would call a trochaic foot, or in a predominantly iambic poem an inversion of stress, Nabokov calls a 'tilt.' Whatever their necessity, these terms have at least the merit of comedy, and Nabokov, wit that he is, clearly revels in manipulating this mock-pedagogic language and thus playing out the role of farcical pedagogue... Here [...] we are told of 'semiscuds' and 'split tilts'; we are vouchsafed terms like 'scuddable' and fruity phrases like 'a surge of scuds'" (Fussell, 1966).

Nabokov was certainly asking for a fight with someone like Fussell, author of books on English prosody (e.g. Fussell, 1965), when he claimed that he had not "come across a single work that treated English iambics ... in a way even remotely acceptable to a student of prosody" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 3). Nabokov responded in a letter to the editor of *Encounter* that "I suspected that my view would irritate the conservative professional in his fondly tilled field, but I was hardly prepared for the sparkling flow of academic kitsch with which Mr. Fussell now regales me" (*Strong Opinions*, p. 274).

Much more substantial criticisms of Nabokov's approach have appeared in recent years, especially from Russian specialists. G.S. Smith, for example, notes that Nabokov ignored (or was unaware of) the most important work on Russian metrics produced in the years between Bely's 1910 essay and the publication of Notes on Prosody, including the work of Boris Tomashevsky, Kirill Taranovsky, Andrey Kolmogorov, and Mikhael Gasparov. These authors pushed the study of metrics away from Bely's focus on local patterns to a more global statistical analysis. According to Smith: "Nabokov evidently saw his primary task as explaining to an ignorant Anglophone public the principles of Bely's method of rhythmical analysis. Accordingly, in *Notes on Prosody* Nabokov developed an English vocabulary to express the concepts that were used by Bely in his work on verse rhythm. This vocabulary, for all its expressiveness and resourcefulness, with its 'scuds,' 'tilts,' and so on, has never attracted specialists in Russian versification. It occasionally makes an appearance in non-specialist discussions of verse rhythm, but it remains essentially a solipsism" (Smith, 1995).

[14] Nabokov's main English dictionary appears to have been the 1957 edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary: Second Edition, Unabridged* (Boyd, 1997). Edmund Wilson, in the *New York Review of Books*, complained about the large number of "dictionary words" in Nabokov's *Onegin*, including the mysterious word "stuss."

"This is not an English word, and if he means the Hebrew word for nonsense which has been absorbed into German, it ought to be italicized and capitalized. But even on this assumption, it hardly makes sense" (Wilson, 1965).

Nabokov replied, in a letter to the *NYRB*, that: "'Stuss' is the English name of a card game which I discuss at length in my notes on Pushkin's addiction to gambling. Mr. Wilson should have consulted my notes (and Webster's dictionary) more carefully." To which Wilson sniffily responded: "I am glad to be enlightened about stuss, a word which is not included in the O.E.D. (I never use Webster)..." (Wilson, 1965). One is tempted to speculate that Nabokov's reliance on the quintessential American dictionary reflected a conscious decision to be an *American* writer.

[15] It is in the last sense that the word scud has had its most important moments in American literature. Walt Whitman deploys it at the end of *Song of Myself*, as he imagines sublimating into a white cloud and floating away on the evening breeze:

> The last scud of day holds back for me,
> It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
> It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.
>
> I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
> I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

[16] The only exception to this general rule occurs in The Stress Maximum Principle (Halle and Kaiser, 1971; p. 69), which says that a stressed syllable cannot fall on a W position if it is surrounded by

unstressed syllables. That is, when a stress falls onto a W position, a scud on either of the adjacent S positions would render the line unmetrical.

[17] Nabokov's discussion of stress falling on W positions is greatly obscured by his idiosyncratic terminology, but it more-or-less agrees with the Monosyllable Rule. A stress-unstress pattern (◡̀ _), which Nabokov calls a "tilt," can be either: split, short, duplex, or long. There are also 'reverse tilts,' 'split reverse tilts,' and 'duplex reverse tilts.' Nabokov notes that the only tilt involving words of three or more syllables, the 'long tilt,' is "rare" and, generally, he concedes that most tilts are caused by a monosyllable falling on a W position. Of the four "typical tilts" he identifies in English iambics (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 18), two involve monosyllables, including the one he identifies as most common ('split tilt'). The only polysyllabic tilt Nabokov describes as "fairly frequent" is the disyllabic 'duplex tilt.' Consistent with the second half of the Monosyllable Rule, Nabokov observes that this pattern appears "especially in the beginning of the iambic lines" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 20). When such a word is not at the beginning of a line it can produce the dreaded 'reverse duplex tilt,' which "inevitably produces a harsh and uncouth effect, since the accent does not submit to the stress as flexibly as it does in the ordinary duplex tilt." Interestingly, Nabokov notes that "split and short tilts are as natural a modulation in Russian as they are in English but occur less frequently" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 21), which jibes with the more conservative nature of the Russian Monosyllable Rule.

Nabokov calls adjacent stresses (◡̀ _ ́) 'false' spondees, because he does not admit the possibility that —against an iambic background— adjacent stresses can have equal value. Instead, a pair of stresses "will generally lean toward the iambic, for the simple reason that, while its first syllable can take care of itself, the second syllable or monosyllable must be especially strongly stress-accented in order to keep up with its predecessor and show what it can do in its turn" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 29). In his view truly equal stresses must be separated by lexical break. Lines with such stresses are "unscannable metrically unless we spade the spondee in two" (*Notes on Prosody*, p. 29). Again, this claim is more-or-less consistent with the second clause of the Monosyllable Rule.

A final piece of evidence that Nabokov's prosody is consistent with the Monosyllable Rule is that not one of the 999 lines of "Pale Fire" violates it. Some lines do come close, however, such as line 766 ("And almost vulgar in its robust truth!"), which can be rescued only by exchanging the more common "ro-**búst**" for the rarer (but recognized by *Webster's*) "**ró**-bust."

[18] Kiparsky's analysis (Kiparsky, 1977: pp. 191-192) makes clear that compound words have special properties: "Polysyllabic (including disyllabic) words must have their strongest stress in S position ... This holds also for each constituent of a compound word. Hence *be*^{4}*fo*^{1}*reha*^{3}*nd* [*beforehand* and] *lo*^{1}*ve-la*^{3}*cki*^{4}*ng* [*love-lacking*] can only occur in WSW position." The superscripts denote the strength of the word stress on Kiparsky's four-step scale: from 1 (strongest) to 4 (weakest). The point here is that when a compound word is created by fusing a monosyllable to a disyllable (e.g. "beforehand" and "love-lacking") the major stress on the disyllabic root must fall on the S position, even when the monosyllable root is much more strongly stressed. If we accept "charwoman" as a compound word, then the first syllable *must* fall on W and the strongest stress on "w**o**man" *must* fall on S. This treatment of compound words is one of the only differences between English and Russian prosody that can be attributed to the strong secondary stresses in the English language.

[19] This type of statistical analysis does not figure into contemporary works on English prosody (e.g. Fussell's *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form*, 1965). This is likely the reason Nabokov claimed that he had not "come across a single work that treated English iambics ... in a way even remotely acceptable to a student of prosody" (*Notes on Prosody*, 1964: p. 3).

[20] Quoting from Friedberg (2011: p. 12): "...in English literary language approximately 78.2 percent of all words are monosyllables, whereas in Russian literary language, the incidence of monosyllabic lexical words ranges between 6.3 percent for prose and 10.8 percent for iambic tetrameter (Scherr, 1980: 359-361; Gasparov, 1968: 67). Thus, neither Russian nor English language data can fit the iambic template perfectly: English has too many stresses to accommodate, while Russian has too few."

[21] Nabokov acknowledges secondary stresses in *Notes on Prosody*: "When we turn to polysyllabics, the first thing we notice is an important accentual difference between Russian and English, and this has a definite repercussion on the frequency of occurrence of pure scuds. In Russian, a polysyllabic word, no matter how long […], can bear but one accent […]. In English polysyllabic words, on the other hand, there may occur a secondary accent, especially in American speech…" (pp. 11-12). Nabokov's comment suggests that he thinks of word stress in English as having three discrete values: (i) full stress; (ii) secondary stress; or (iii) no stress.

Although native English speakers certainly hear when secondary stresses reinforce or antagonize the flow of iambs, Nabokov ignores them when counting scuds: "I shall disregard secondary accents when not intended by an English author…" (*NoP*, p. 12). He does, however, appear to recognize something rhythmically special about compound words: "…the fact remains that a number of ordinary compounds, constantly recurring in poetry, do bear the ghost of an additional accent, with a resulting semiscud, such as 'overmúch' or 'semidiámeters'…" (*NoP*, p. 12). In some ways, Nabokov's disregard of secondary stress resembles that of other writers on English prosody. One of Kiparsky's Prosodic Rules, for example, holds that secondary stress plays no role in determining word placement in the iambic pattern (Kiparsky, 1977). The critical difference, however, is that Kiparsky focuses on the relationship of stresses to the S-position (-) while Nabokov focuses on their relationship to the W-position (˘).

The important question for Nabokov's analysis of English prosody is whether a secondary stress produces a bona fide 'scud.' This question does not occur to most English-language philologists, in part because the more sophisticated writers (or at least the more linguistically-minded) grade word stresses on a scale of (at least) 1-4, and so a scud would not be a "yes/no" proposition but a matter of degree. This strikes me as the critical flaw in Nabokov's attempt to deploy Bely's tools to understand any English-language poetry other than his own.

[22] The recitation was recorded in 1958 at a WNYC (New York) Books and Authors Luncheon. It is preserved in the New York City Municipal Archives WNYC Sound Collection and available online at: http://www.wnyc.org/story/215696-vladimir-nabokov-1958/.

[23] Because the scud on the penultimate foot comes from a polysyllabic word, this line is even more characteristic of Russian prosody than the previous: "But close your eyes and listen to the line." Together, the two lines make an excellent English crib for the classical Russian rhythm:

But close your eyes and listen to the line
It makes a fascinating sound.

[24] The translation is mine.

[25] "Icicles by Cynthia. Meter by me, Sybil."

[26] According to Brian Boyd (Boyd, 1997), Nabokov relied on *Webster's New International Dictionary: Second Edition*, published in 1957.

[27] In fact, Paul Fussell begins the preface of his 1965 book on English prosody, *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form*, by saying that: "The title of this book may suggest that it is designed as a latter-day *Gradus ad Parnassum* to teach aspiring writers to produce passable verses. It is not" (Fussell, 1965: p. xi).

[28] We will first calculate the probability of obtaining a perfect stair-step pattern assuming that scuds occur at random. Say that the probability of finding a scud at each S position is P_1, P_2, P_3, P_4, and P_5. Then the probability of finding *only* one scud in a line, at S1 (P_{S1}), is

$$P_{S1} = P_1(1 - P_2)(1 - P_3)(1 - P_4)(1 - P_5)$$

and similar equations yield the probability of finding only one scud at each of the other positions (i.e. P_{S2}-P_{S5}). The probability of finding five different single-scud lines together in a cluster is

$$P_{5LC} = P_{S1}P_{S2}P_{S3}P_{S4}P_{S5}$$

This is true regardless of the order in which the lines appear. In other words, there are 5! (=120) possible clusters of single-scud lines, each with the same probability of occurrence (P_{5LC}). To estimate the probability of finding at least one 5-line, stair-step pattern within 999 lines of poetry we can take the worst-case scenario and consider that the poem represents 999 independent trials. In this case the probability of finding a perfect five-line stair-step is

$$P_{pss} = 1 - (1 - P_{5LC})^{999}$$

Given the overall scudding statistics for "Pale Fire" ($P_1 = 0.307$, $P_2 = 0.211$, P_3, $= 0.281$, $P_4 = 0.329$, and $P_5 = 0.073$), the five-line cluster probability (P_{5LC}) is 1.56×10^{-6} and the probability of finding a perfect stair-step in 999 lines (P_{pss}) is approximately 0.0016. This is actually an overestimate because there are not 999 independent trials in a 999 line poem. If we now allow the pattern to deviate from perfection by containing one additional scud at any other allowable position, the probability increases by approximately a factor of 20 to 0.032. Again, this is an overestimate and so we are safe in saying that the probability of randomly creating the particular stair-step pattern found in lines 116-120 anywhere within a total of 999 lines is less than 0.03.

[29] E.g. beginning on lines 27, 168, 247, 374, 413, 465, 497, and 663; see Appendix 1.

[30] E.g. the partial pattern beginning on line 465 which is linked to a note (regarding line 469) about Gradus using "broken English."

[31] For clarity's sake I have chosen intuitive (but consistent) phonetic spellings rather than attempting more formal phonetic transcriptions using, for example, the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Interestingly, Kiparsky's first and third rules are vowel-linked, that is: defined by the effect of one vowel on another. The first rule describes a *progressive* relationship: a strong vowel eclipses a weak one that follows it. The third rule, in contrast, describes a *regressive* relationship, in which one vowel partly absorbs the vowel preceding it. We could, therefore, refer to Rule 2 as regressive consonant-linked elision.

[32] It is clear that Nabokov understood the sort of elisions covered by Rule 1. *Notes on Prosody* provides three examples — "being", "violet", and "higher" — and, in translating *Eugene Onegin*, the three-syllables of fiery (fí-e-ry) are routinely reduced to two (fí-ry):

<u>Eugene Onegin</u>

EO: and though he was a **fiery** scapegrace, ◡ –|◡ –́|◡ –́|◡ –́|◡

EO: No, never midst the **fiery** days ◡ –́|◡ –|◡ –́|◡ –́ –

EO: or even himself, in **fiery** vexation ◡ –|◡ –|◡ –́|◡ –|◡ –́|◡

(numbers represent *chapter*:*stanza*:*line*)

[33] "Pale Fire" contains more than twenty-one strong candidates for Rule 2 elision that remain intact, including: "murmuring," "shivering," "papering," "covering," "fingering," "awakening," "gardener," "momentary," "vulnerable," "peripheral," "favorite," "wonderfully," "insufferably," "mystically," "physically," "fantastically," "floweret," "difference," "interest," "toward," and "Hesperus."

I am purposely ignoring three words: "family," "every," and "several." Nabokov always removes the medial vowel from these words (rendering them: "fam'ly," "ev'ry," and "sev'ral") as well as their compounds ("ev'rything" and "ev'rybody"), but these vowels are removed so commonly in American diction that the elided forms are more-or-less standard pronunciation.

[34] Edmund Wilson (Wilson, 1965) gets sniffy about this point in *The New York Review of Books*: "'The ache of loss chases Tatiana' (as he chooses to spell her)."

[35] Although the rhythm of his *Onegin* is not as regular as that of "Pale Fire," it is still strongly iambic and one can identify elisions with a fair degree of certainty. The difference in diction between the two poems is not just statistical; it is readily perceptible. In "Pale Fire," for example, the word "med-i-um" is cut down to "med-yum" while, in *Onegin*, the almost identical word "ted-i-um" retains all three syllables. In

addition, three words in *Onegin* —"obedient," "amiable," and "guardian"— appear in both intact and elided forms. Nothing like this happens in "Pale Fire."

[36] I estimated the frequency of Rule 3 elisions in Yvor Winters iambic verse from nine poems (Sonnet to the Moon, The Marriage, At the San Francisco Airport, An October Nocturne, The Moralists, John Sutter, Sir Gawaine And The Green Knight, On a View of Pasadena from the Hills, and The Journey) comprising 294 iambic lines in pentameter and tetrameter. This more-or-less-random sample contained eight good candidates for synaeresis, six of which would involve reduction of an 'i' (celest**i**al, patr**i**arch, reptil**i**an, oblivious, heav**i**er, and fur**i**ous). Four of these six words contained elisions (67%) while two remained intact.

[37] Nabokov's dictionary, *Webster's New International: Second Edition* (1957), provides three definitions of *trivia* in the following order:

"1. *Rom. Antiq.* Crossroads.

2. *Rom. Relig.* Diana as the three-faced goddess, Hecate.

3. Trifles; unimportant matters."

Webster's, of course, also defines *trivium* as: "The three 'liberal' arts, grammar, logic, and rhetoric, classified in medieval schools as the lower group of the liberal arts. "

[38] From Tammi (1995): "Another series of recurrences is based on numerical motifs. There is much ado about the 999 lines of Shade's poem. And there is a series of emblematic 'eights': The boy was picked up at a quarter past / Eight' (ll. 389-90); 'A quartet of bores / …would debate / The Cause of Poetry on Channel 8' (ll. 410-12); 'The miracle of a lemniscate left / Upon wet sand by nonchalantly deft / Bicycle tires …' (ll. 137-39); '[The] slener rubber band / which always forms, when dropped, an ampersand' (ll. 533-34). This receives a Zemblan motivation when Kinbote tells of the actress "Iris Acht" (122) who died in 1888, had a secret liaison with the king's grandfather 'in the mid-Eighties" (314), and arranged the meetings in a tunnel that measured, exactly, "1,888 yards' (127)."

[39] These individuating details apply equally to iambic *tetrameter* and *pentameter*.

[40] Some authors describe rhymes in which stress falls on the antepenultimate syllable as 'dactylic' or 'long' rhymes. I use the word 'feminine' to describe any line that ends with an unstressed, extrametrical syllable. In pentameter this would be an eleventh syllable and in tetrameter it would be a ninth. I do not count words that simply scud on S4 or S5 as feminine.

[41] Except, of course, when it is closely linked to some semantic feature of the poem, as at the beginning of "An Evening of Russian Poetry" where the semantic content of the lines, "But close your eyes and listen to the line" (31) and "It makes a very fascinating noise," (37) refers directly to their rhythm. That said, the first of these lines (31) also falls within a cluster of lines with the same rhythm (5 of 7 lines 27-31).

[42] I computed the statistics numerically using Matlab. Briefly, I first tabulated the fraction of scudding on each of the four S positions in "On Translating *Eugene Onegin.*" These turn out to be S1-0.214, S2-0.286, S3-0.286, and S4-0.071. I then simulated 1,000,000 twenty-eight-line patterns with the same scudding statistics and counted the fraction of patterns that contained a cluster of three scuds on S3.

[43] Critic Barry Scherr characterizes it simply as "a marvelous imitation of a lecture, complete with questions from the audience, [which] contains some fine lines about the sound of the Russian pentameter and about the nature of rhyme in Russian" (Scherr, 1995).

[44] Although Naokov's Russian poetry makes heavy use of feminine rhymes (Scherr, 1995; Smith, 1995) only five English pieces in his *Collected Poems* incorporate them in any significant way: two Russian-themed poems ("On Translating *Eugene Onegin*" and "An Evening of Russian Poetry"), two Euro-nostalgic poems ("Lines Written in Oregon," and "Dream"), and a *sui generis* meditation on the modern feminine ideal ("Ode to a Model"). In the first four cases feminine rhymes are associated with Russia and in the last they are linked to the feminine nature of his subject.

The subject of "Lines Written in Oregon" is a genus of orchid, called *Esmerelda*, unexpectedly encountered in the mountains of Oregon. The author speaks to the orchid as a fellow European refugee, one who has also established a new life in America. There is a hint of nostalgia and resignation in lines like the parenthetical: "(Europe, nonetheless, is over.)" The poem's alternating masculine and feminine

triple rhymes represent, as Barry Scherr, notes a "form not typical of English verse" (Scherr, 1995) and illustrates the author's sentimental attachment to European culture and literary forms (French as well as Russian). The feminine rhymes also create as a prosodic nod to the feminine qualities of the orchid.

An argument can be made that the feminine rhymes in "Ode to a Model" also refer to the femininity of its subject. In this poem the author stalks the image of a fashion model —an exaggerated ideal of femininity— through the pages of various magazines. In addition to prosodically encoding the notion of femininity, the line endings in this poem create a chaotic array of rhymes and half-rhymes that mimic a jumble of advertising images in the back numbers of a magazine. Shakespeare does something similar in Sonnet 20, which begins "A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted." This sonnet represents one of Shakespeare's two significant experiments with feminine rhyme (the other being Sonnet 87). Sonnet 20 argues that a beloved young man, the Master/Mistress, was originally created as a woman but Nature fell in love and, to satisfy her own pleasures, turned the nascent woman into man. Helen Vendler identified the key word in this sonnet as "woman" and notes that "the feminine rhymes enact the originally intended feminine sex in Nature's creation of the young man" (Vendler, 1997).

[45] Here, as ever, Nabokov creates his own idiosyncratic language. English-speaking philologists generally call this type of rhyme *heterosyllabic* (Scherr, 1995).

[46] When he says "I do not think that this [type of rhyme] has ever been tried [in Russian poetry]," Nabokov overlooks and/or dismisses the work of a raft of twentieth-century avant-garde poets. These include futurists such as: Severyanin, Shershenevich, Khrisanf, Kruchenykh, Petnikov, and most famously, Mayakovsky (Markov, 1968; pp. 93, 105, 108, 205, and 252). Here are only a few examples from Mayakovsky's ample supply: *мо́рде*/*го́роде* ("Последняя Петербугская Сказка" ["Last Petersburg Story"]); *ате**и**стов*/***и**стово* and *гло́данных*/*голо́дных* ("150000000").

[47] Although Nabokov does not mention it, triple rhymes are relatively rare in Russian poetry. This might be due to the relative ease of rhyming words in Russian. In his critical study of Pushkin's verse, for example, Briggs notes that: "Pushkin at his lowest ebb could never have brought himself, for any reason, to rhyme six successive lines with the same sound. The very idea would have been offensive to him, a tawdry display of the first and easiest of the poet's skills. In the whole span of approximately nine thousand lines of Pushkin's narrative poems only on a few isolated occasions, and only for a good reason will the company extend membership even to a *triple* rhyme" (Briggs, 1983, p. 95).

Along with other elements of his prosody, Joseph Brodsky appears to have imported his Russian triple rhymes from English. According to biographer Lev Loseff (2011): "the triple rhyme (*aaa*), which is rare in Russian but common enough in English (in Auden, for one), was used by Brodsky to great effect in 'The Fifth Anniversary' and 'Fin de siecle,' in his prologue to a translation of Euripides' *Medea*, and in 'The Theatrical'."

[48] Pushkin suffered several periods of internal exile, the first to the wilds of southern Russia (1820-1824).

[49] The triplet, *be*/*prostee*/*apostasy* (ll. 136/138/140), is not a heterosyllabic rhyme. All three lines are exactly ten syllables long and *apostasy* scuds on S5. Such lines do not create classical feminine rhymes and I refer these cases as "scudded masculine rhymes." There are several other examples of scudded masculine rhymes, both double and triple, including: *conifers/birds/words* (ll. 15-17), *content/bent* (ll. 20-21), *line/serpentine* (ll. 31/33), *bumblebee/sea* (ll. 25-26), and *infantile/exile* (ll. 107/109).

[50] The emphasis is obviously mine. The recitation was recorded in 1958 at a WNYC (New York) Books and Authors Luncheon. It is preserved in the New York City Municipal Archives WNYC Sound Collection and available online at: http://www.wnyc.org/story/215696-vladimir-nabokov-1958/.

[51] In Line 10 the lecturer interrupts himself to tell the projectionist she has inserted the slide upside down. This line also provides the weakest element of a triple rhyme (*lantern*/*phantom*/*thank you*) and is, therefore, both a prosodic and a semantic interruption. Line 3 is a non-essential, adverbial clause and losing it has little semantic effect. Swapping lines 7 and 8, however, causes a semantic problem but this can be fixed with one punctuation mark and one word change. The final result is not a true Onegin Stanza because its meter is iambic pentameter rather than tetrameter. Converting the stanza to tetramer in the minimum number of moves is left as an exercise for the reader.

“Reconstructed” Onegin Stanza	**original line #**
The subject chosen for tonight's discussion	1
Is everywhere, though often incomplete:	2
most rivers use a kind of rapid Russian,	4
and so do children talking in their sleep.	5
My little helper at the magic lantern,	6
project my name or any such-like phantom[.]	**8↓**
[I]nsert that slide and let the colored beam	**7↑**
[Trace] Slavic characters upon the screen.	9
On mellow hills the Greek, as you remember,	11
fashioned his alphabet from cranes in flight;	12
his arrows crossed the sunset, then the night.	13
Our simple skyline and a taste for timber,	14
The influence of hives and conifers,	15
reshaped the arrows and the borrowed birds.	16

[52] The exact rhyme scheme of the five-and-a-quarter stanzas in this section can be represented: a***bB***c***B***cdd, Abab***C***d***Cc***d, aabb***CccC***, ***aa***b***A***b***cCC***dd, ***A***b***Aa***b***C***d***Cc***d, ***A***b***aa***b-. Triple rhymes (as well as the shadow rhyme, ***CccC***) are bold italic.

[53] The closest approach to this sort of free-wheeling, heterosyllabic triple rhyme in Russian poetry is found in the work of Futurists like Velimir Khlebnikov. Markov (1960) notes that, in “The Poet,” Khlebnikov “uses triple rhyme or even what may be called ‘two-and-a-half’ rhyming, i.e., using different types of ‘inexact’ rhyme in a conventional rhyme pattern.” Nabokov certainly knew Khlebnikov’s work (Boyd, *VN:TRY*, p. 92) but appeared to dislike it intensely. When critic Roman Jakobson (Boyd, *VN:TAY*, p. 215) once recited some verses of Khlebnikov in front of him, Nabokov muttered: “это ужасно” (“that’s terrible”). It seems unlikely, therefore, that Nabokov is alluding to Khlebnikov in this passage (or Mayakovsky, see below).

In Figure 8 there appears to be a small gap in the run of hetero-syllabic triple rhymes in section *c*, a gap that corresponds, more or less, to the stanza beginning on line 58 (“The birch tree, Cynthia, the fir tree, Joan.”). The quatrain formed by lines 61-64, however, has a nominal rhyme scheme AbbA (formed by the words: *slender*/*wind*/*ends*/*cinders*), which, given the structure of the triple rhymes surrounding it, could almost be read as a hetero-syllabic *quadruple* rhyme.

This matching of the vowel sounds, or assonance, across rhyming pairs (also called ‘shadow’ rhyme; Scherr, 1983: p. 208) was common among modernists but rare in classical Russian poetry. Critic and philologist Mikhail Gasparov said of shadow rhymes:

В классической поэзии почти нет таких подобо-свучных рифмических цепей, как “красотой-душою-чужой-виною” (Пушкин), или “летучий-туч-недгучий-луч” (Фет) [...], именно потому, что они размывают границу между чередующимся созвучиями. В ривмовке абаб чем меньше похоже а на б, тем больше похоже а на а и б на б, и от этого тем крепче организующие рифмические связи. (Gasparov, 1985)

In classical poetry there are almost no similar-sounding [assonant] rhyme chains such as [“krasot**ó**i-dush**ó**yu-chuzh**ó**i-vin**ó**yu"] (Pushkin), or ["let**ú**chii-t**ú**ch-nedg**ú**chii-l**ú**ch"] (Fet) [...], precisely because they blur the line between alternating harmonies. In the rhyme scheme *abab* the less similar *a* is to *b*, [then] the more similar *a* is to *a* and *b* is to *b*, and from this the more strongly organized are the rhyming connections.

The one nineteenth century exception with which Nabokov would have been familiar was Tyutchev whose assonant rhymes make up more than 22% of his rhymed verse (Ginsburg, 2003). Futurists like Mayakovsky, of course, did not shy away from creating assonance between rhyming pairs, as in *Бруклинсксий Мост* [“Brooklyn Bridge”], where he interleaved *зуду*/*посуду* with *зуд*/*ползут*. Nabokov, however, would certainly not have looked to Mayakovsky as an exemplar of the Russian poetic

tradition and I am inclined to regard the assonant and heterosyllabic triple rhymes of this section as an 'anti-Russian' prosodic turn.

[54] Nikolay Alexeyevich Nekrasov (1821-1878) was a well known Russian poet. In his most famous poem ("Who is Happy in Russia?") seven peasants ask a cross section of the inhabitants of rural Russia whether they are happy. The answer is never cheerful.

[55] The word *потусторонность* is a noun derived from the adjective *потусторонный*, whose literal meaning is something like 'on the other side'. The phrase *потусторонный мир* (literally 'world on the other side') is generally used to refer to the afterlife.

[56] This type of analysis falls somewhere between Bely's hyper-local focus on line-to-line variation and the more global analytical methods of people like Gasparov and Taranovsky (1953).

[57] The numbers here are based on the probability of finding seven S4 scuds within any nine consecutive lines of a 140-line poem with an overall S4 scud frequency of 0.29.

[58] To judge regressive dissimilation in Nabokov's Russian iambic pentameter I chose 35 lines from his verse play *Mister Morn*. These lines represent two speeches from Act I, Scene 2: one by the 'Foreigner' (*Иностранец*) and the other by the 'Second Guest' (*Второй гость*). I chose these particular passages because, unlike much of the dialog in the play, they are relatively long and uninterrupted. The probability of scudding on each of the five S positions is: S1-0.20, S2-0.49, S3-0.17, S4-0.77, and S5-0.00. The absence of scuds on S5; the moderate rate of scudding on S2; and the very high frequency of scudding on S4 fit a pattern of Regressive Accentual Dissimilation very similar to the overall average for 20th Century Russian poets (Figure 12).

[59] I chose 25 lines because it is short enough to provide reasonable resolution but long enough to minimize 'noise' in the pattern.

[60] To calculate statistics for the final 24 lines, I (like Kinbote) treated the poem as if it is circular and started counting again from the beginning.

[61] I computed the statistics using the same method as described in Footnote #42. Briefly, I tabulated the overall frequency of scudding on the fourth S position through the first five hundred lines in "Pale Fire." This number turns out to 0.35, similar to the values computed for "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*" (0.286) and "An Evening of Russian Poetry" (0.314). I then simulated 1,000,000 twenty-eight-line patterns with the same scudding statistics and counted the fraction of patterns that contained a cluster of three scuds on S3.]

[62] One possible reading of this note is that it alludes to sixteen specific exiles, possibly poets, who left their native tongues behind to die in the English-speaking world. In this reading "English and Zemblan" would likely refer to Kinbote.

[63] In his note to line 627 Kinbote also provides a guide to pronouncing Starov**é**r, noting that the stress falls on the final syllable (as in *старов**é**р*). This pronunciation, however, does violence to the prosody and produces an unsightly "reverse tilted scud." Stressing the word like an English compound word (Star**ó**ver, similar to the treatment of 'charwoman') completely solves this metrical issue. It is possible that John Shade misunderstood (and mispronounced) the Russian name, shifting the word stress by a syllable. This is an issue with which Nab**ó**kov himself might have contended every time an American addressed him as "Mr. N**á**bokov."