

PUBLISHING *TOOL*♣

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PUBLISHING NABOKOV

Yuri Leving: *Publication of the unfinished novel is surely a sensational event, but there is still plenty of unpublished correspondence, Russian poetry in need of translation, and uncollected critical essays among the archival legacy of Vladimir Nabokov. Could you illuminate some possible challenges of bringing out the newly discovered Nabokov from institutional and private archives?*

* This is an excerpt from a forthcoming collection of articles entitled *SHADES OF LAURA. Vladimir Nabokov's Last Novel The Original of Laura* (Ed. by Yuri Leving). Details about the volume will be announced at the website of the *Nabokov Online Journal* shortly.

The roundtable was conducted while Dmitri Nabokov was still alive; we decided against changing the references to him into the past tense. – *Ed.*

Olga Voronina: The biggest challenge, in my opinion, consists of fitting the unpublished Nabokov in with the poems, essays, and letters that have already appeared in print. Some of the editorial work done in the 1970-80s suffered from the editors' inability to access all of the archival materials necessary for preparing the footnotes and intros. Brian Boyd's monumental biography, which provides a solid chronological and factual foundation for any kind of manuscript-focused Nabokov scholarship, came out after many of VN's works had been published posthumously. A new volume of painstakingly prepared and more complete Nabokoviana will not necessarily cancel the earlier editions, which have already earned a reputation as canonical texts. The new translations will be quoted along with the old ones, possibly spreading panic among scholars who are used to most Nabokov translations being "definitive." The *Letters to Véra*, which I am currently translating with Brian Boyd and Dmitri Nabokov, are more or less unknown, save the few that came out in 1989 in *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters, 1940-1977*. But there are, as far as I know, quite a few unpublished lectures on literature, which will have to be assimilated with the already known essays edited by Fredson Bowers. Other books may also be in the works, with their editors confronting a healthy number of purely Nabokovian challenges.

Galya Diment: When it comes to unpublished materials other than *TOOL*, none of them (with the possible exception of some letters) have similar potential to be sensational or, even more importantly, to be sensationalised. I personally hope that most of the correspondence and critical essays get published. As to his Russian poetry, I would probably leave it untranslated, mostly in deference to Nabokov's own post-*Three Poets* views about translating poetry, and also because I largely share them.

Eric Naiman: When *The Original of Laura* appeared, it was beautiful and should have been a cause for celebration. How many novelists dead over thirty years get this lovely a casket? The roll-out of the book was like the exhumation and reburial of Rousseau. He has long been in the Pantheon, but this was fresh proof that Nabokov still matters: people still care about his legacy, and they care so much that they can grow irate or become misty-eyed about this latest book.

Part of the logic – if not the packaging – of the publication of *Laura* is that everything Nabokov wrote is precious – at least to scholars. I would hope that a similar logic applies to the publication of Nabokov’s correspondence, particularly with his wife and his mother. (What we have seen so far, in SNOB, is to my mind just as interesting as *Laura*; here we have Nabokov playing with narrative technique in his intimate correspondence.¹ Love letters as a laboratory for future works). I would suggest that the only rationale for suppressing parts of the correspondence is injury to the living. There is probably very little risk that the publication of Nabokov’s more intimate documents will do for him what the Soviet edition did for Chernyshevsky. What I would also like to see are documents that help provide a clearer picture of how Nabokov worked with his co-translators. A scholarly edition of the initial work by Michael Scammell and Dmitri Nabokov – along with Nabokov’s responses to them – might play a significant role in shaping our reading of the English texts and help us determine whether the original Russian versions might not be more – or, at least, differently – authentic.

For those editing Nabokov’s work, it is important to resist the temptation to retain knowledge unavailable to other scholars. Where editing is concerned, the less we have of authority and mystery, the more we will see of miracles.

Yuri Leving: *What are the rules of thumb and potential pitfalls associated with preparation of the scholarly apparatus for Nabokov’s editions (introductions, commentary, and other readers’ aids)?*

Olga Voronina: Nabokov’s ability to attract the “mass reader” (a phantom of the imagination, but not of revenue, on the part of the publisher, who believes that “masses” do not need glosses), along with connoisseurs eager to suck his prose to the bare bones and savour every bit of it, can corner even an experienced editor. How much commentary is too much and how few readers’ aids are too little? Personally, I like the stark Vintage editions, but my students cannot get enough of *The Annotated Lolita*, which provides them with a safety net for exploring the novel’s dizzying heights. Not every Nabokov

¹ “Vladimir Nabokov: Letters to Vera,” *Snob* 11, no. 26 (November 2010). – *Ed. note.*

paperback should be “appelized,” but the appeal of *Pale Fire*, *Transparent Things*, and *LATH!* for the lay reader and maven alike would be greater if the novels contained a foreword suggesting the reading strategy as well as a commentary that directed the “wild goose chase.” The main pitfall, of course, is not to numb the thrill by revealing too much. *Ada Online* is one of the possible solutions to this dilemma. The publication contains everything one needs to decipher the riddles in the novel; readers can portion the aids and do a vigorous cross-search to weave their own web of subtextual and intertextual associations. As for editions of Nabokov’s non-fiction, they need everything: the introduction, the commentary, and the afterword. It is high time that *Strong Opinions* was reissued in a new, “scholasticised” format, including the index already put together by Dieter Zimmer. Perhaps it could become another Nabokov online project.

Eric Naiman: The wonderful thing about some of the annotated editions - particularly those by Appel and Barabtarlo - is that they capture many of the anxieties and thrills of reading Nabokov. These are examples of the kinds of good readers that Nabokov creates. If you teach the *Annotated Lolita*, Appel emerges not only as a figure of authority, but as a character in his own right, one situated at a level between the author and his readers. Olga describes his critical apparatus as a “safety net,” but it can also be seen as a product of over eagerness to control the meaning of the text. The Berg Collection contains part of Appel’s correspondence with Nabokov, and we can see the origin of those anti-annotations in interpretations suggested to and rejected by the annotator’s teacher. One can read them as Appel’s attempt to put these meanings into circulation anyway, a gesture akin to the critical citations of émigré scholars in Soviet days. His commentary and Barabtarlo’s are so wonderful because they capture the complex dynamics of readerly temptation, resistance, and submission. Like all good works of scholarship, they should be read not as ensuring the reader’s safety but as encouraging a mixture of scepticism and excited admiration. “Ok, now let me drive.”

Yuri Leving: *The cover or jacket of a book conveys a message about its contents, influencing both the retailer who stocks the book and the potential purchaser in the*

shop.² Can Nabokov's covers be 'read' to reveal the assumptions that publishers make about the markets they are targeting? How has Nabokov, as an established author, been repositioned over time?

Leland de la Durantaye: Unquestionably. *Lolita* offers the most striking instances, as both Duncan White and Dieter Zimmer have shown (Zimmer's archive of cover images is particularly revealing in this regard), with the roles played by soft lighting, full lips, long legs, bobby-socks, saddle-shoes and the rest. More generally, the air of impish mystery conveyed by the entire series of Vintage International covers not only reflects the assumptions of publishers but seems to have shaped – or, at least, reinforced – a certain image of Nabokov as an impishly mysterious author. The graphic designs of foreign editions of Nabokov's works - from Brazil to Turkey and beyond - offer fascinating glimpses of such assumptions - as well as showcasing remarkable talent.

Olga Voronina: Up until the mid-1990s, only a few Nabokov covers suffered from overstatement. The recent trend, however, has been towards visual embellishment, if not exaggeration. The latest hoopla about Vintage paperbacks is especially alarming.³ Not only have John Gall's "collector boxes" been an unacknowledged rip-off (the installation artist Barbara Bloom came up with this box format ten years ago, in a series of exhibits dedicated to Nabokov), they have also succumbed to one of the interpretative sins most loathed by VN: generalization. I can't imagine a Nabokovian novice or a pro who wouldn't be scared off by the cover of *Laughter in the Dark* with its crude cut-and-paste vampire; the new Vintage *LATH!* is just as garish and fallacious.

Michael Juliar: I partially agree with Olga: The new Vintage *Laughter in the Dark* cover makes me grimace. (By the way, there is no new Vintage *LATH!* yet). But what's really

² Angus Phillips, "How Books Are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," in *Judging a Book By Its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers, and the Marketing*, Ed. by N. Matthews et al. (Hampshire: Ashgate 2007), 19.

³ <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=11597>

annoying and worse, misleading, is the new set of Penguin covers. I do like their various patterned backgrounds – very Nabokovian. But the light touches of the pen-and-ink and watercolour illustrations are more suggestive of something from Barbara Pym and don't give any hints of the directness and energy in Nabokov's works.

Galya Diment: Older dust jackets at least ran a gamut from ridiculous to sublime. In the ridiculous category were Fawcett's Mass Market Paperback editions of *Glory* (1973) and *King, Queen, Knave* (1969), both featuring a couple, one quite naked, the other quite clothed, locked in a passionate kiss. The covers looked indistinguishable from cheap Harlequin Romances. Among the sublime I count my favourites: Milton Glaser's rendition of *Pnin* which, as we know now from Mr Glaser's testimony, was heavily influenced by Nabokov's aid and instructions, and also the cover of the first Avon paperback edition of the same novel. Now the covers are, for the most part, neither truly outrageous nor wittily intelligent but mostly predictable and mediocre. At some point book illustrators must have held a conference and resolved that disembodied parts of the female face, especially lips, and female limbs, in particular knees, somehow do the trick. Thus *Lolita* and *Anna Karenina* have become linked through their synovial joints, but *Karenina*'s in the 2004 Penguin edition are definitely plumper.

Eric Naiman: Recently, Sandy Klein posted on Nabokv-L a link to a photo of Natalie Portman holding her *Lolita* "clutch" – a pocket book designed from the original Paris cover by the aptly named Olympia Le-Tan. That first cover is still one of the best, introducing nothing extraneous except the allure of what is inside and now the cultural memory of the book's first encounter with the world. It is hard to imagine Le-Tan having used a later design.⁴ One could put the Portman photo on a future cover, reasserting the power of text over fashion – or at least commingling their appeals. Then the conjurer's purse would once more be almost intact. (That was an anti-annotation – I don't think I could bring myself to buy or assign such a thing, but the picture could go up on the bulletin board next to my office door, surrounded by index cards detached from *Laura*).

⁴ See <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/jacketcopy/2010/12/natalie-portmans-lolita-clutch.html>

Yuri Leving: *What do you think of the design of TOOL by Knopf, Penguin, Rowohlt, and other publishing companies?*

Michael Juliar: I am ambivalent about the design of *TOOL*. On the one hand, the design feels like overkill. It is too much of a thing: It is stark, with poster-hard blacks, whites, and reds among a suffusion of gray pages; it is gimmicky, with a perforation theme including printed dashed lines where no perforating is possible; it is show-offish, with the odd red page that faces the table of contents, the playing card-like design at the end, and the index-card binding. On the other hand, I love this brimming over of Chip Kidd's imagination. If my brain were so fertile, I would have designed *TOOL* in much the same overwrought manner.

Leland de la Durantaye: The Knopf cover is very elegant and apt, fading to black as the reader's eyes move from right to left, grading into the darkness of death.

Galya Diment: I do think the Knopf and Penguin editions were artfully done, and I understand that university presses, given the harsh economic times right now, could have hardly afforded similar treatments. But in this particular case, no matter how beautiful and creative the book looked, I agree with Michael that it was overkill given what was contained between the covers.

Olga Voronina: Against the latest Vintage background, the solemn jacket and the underlying manuscriptic binding of *TOOL* by Knopf offers a solace to the eye. But I agree with Michael: there is too much of a good thing. Rowohlt's exquisitely ascetic edition is more appealing: it glorifies the text without sacrificing the texture.

Yuri Leving: *Jason Epstein, Nabokov's publisher turned friend, writes: "With books no longer imprisoned for life within fixed bindings the opportunities are endless for the creation of new, useful, and profitable products by Internet publishers. For Walt Whitman and his ever-changing editions of Leaves of Grass the Web would have been*

*ideal. So would it have been for Theodore Dreiser and Vladimir Nabokov, plagued with squeamish and ignorant publishers, as it would also have been for samizdat writers in the former Soviet Union and will be for their counterparts under today's tyrannies."*⁵ *What do you think of internet prospects for Nabokov works (although it has been recently reported that no Nabokov digital editions are in the offing)?*

Michael Juliar: Obviously not just *Ada* (see Boyd's *Ada Online*) but all of Nabokov's works cry out for hypertext annotations. Of course, online versions of Nabokov's works (and, illegal though they are, there are many already) will lead to mash-ups, variations, take-offs, and possible samplings in the form of *Lolita*, *My Zombie Love* and *Pnin Pninned* and goodness knows what else. I'm sure that Nabokov would have been highly amused by this doodling in the margins of his works, as long as it didn't corrupt his texts. And I believe it wouldn't have and won't. I'll bet that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* have driven thousands of readers to peek into and to discover the riches of the originals. So why not a *Look at the Horrible Harlequins!?* Or *Lolita, My Demon Love?* Or *Slaughter in the Dark?* Or *The Bloody Eye?* Or ... someone please stop me!

Olga Voronina: Sooner or later, the internet will embrace Nabokov - or vice versa. The problem I see with VN's internet prospects concerns not as much the dissolution of "fixed bindings," which the master himself, serendipitously, has already dissolved (with *The Gift* and *Ada* being perhaps the most representative examples of Nabokov's aerial boundlessness), but the establishment of firm boundaries for those who would not mind inscribing themselves in the texts. I don't think Nabokov would've been "amused" by a plethora of virtual co-authors, especially in view of the fact that the online Nabokov "samizdat" these days is predominantly pornographic. One needs to make a heroic intellectual effort to counterbalance it. *Ada Online*, I have already mentioned, is an engaging example of how things could be done on the Internet.

⁵ Jason Epstein, *Book Business: Publishing past, present, and future* (New York: Norton 2001), 173.

Yuri Leving: *Discuss the issues of copyright and illustrative material in their application to potential publishing of Nabokov's writings.*

Olga Voronina: Nabokov not only doodled like Pushkin, his cards themselves can be seen as an art form. And yet, publishing another novel as a facsimile of VN's manuscripts would be a mistake. There are some fascinating images on the *Lolita* cards, but I doubt that they would heighten the reader's pleasure. Maps, however, might be a kind of "illustrative material" that would amplify our reading experience. Dmitri Nabokov writes in his introduction to *TOOL* about the tragic loss of his father's maps of the United States marked with references to Lolita's journey with Humbert Humbert. But what if other such "visuals" have been preserved? I would love to see, for example, maps of Demonica and Antiterra as drafted by Nabokov. After all, his *Lectures* have lavish cartographic illustrations - a hint that that's how Nabokov wanted us to read his works, too.

Galya Diment: I would like to see the butterflies from Nabokov's dedications flit freely between various editions.

REINVENTING NABOKOV
(POSTHUMOUS LEGACIES)

Yuri Leving: *Could you address the marketing strategy for Nabokov's writings in general and the recent publicity campaign for TOOL in particular? (For example, Dmitri Nabokov's interviews or Ron Rosenbaum's series of publications, the Playboy engagement, publicity pages on publishers' websites, short pieces devoted to the forthcoming novel in fragments running in glossy magazines such as American GQ or Russian entertainment weekly Plus TV, etc.).*

Leland de la Durantaye: In a word, savvy.

Olga Voronina: Patrick Forsyth and Robin Birn claim that marketing is “no more than common sense.” According to these publishing mavericks, “not simply trying to sell what we happened to produce” should be a credo of any bookseller.⁶ Even if this is the rule of the game, Nabokov would have surely winced at Forsyth’s and Birn’s claim. Its underlying idea (writing is accidental, promotion rules) transfers agency from writer to publisher, for whom “common sense” often, indeed, becomes the main aesthetic criterion.

And yet there is an analogy that might help us understand why Vladimir Nabokov and, later Dmitri, would not shun marketing as a means of delivering as many books as possible into as many as possible readers’ hands. The paragraph dedicated to soccer in *Speak, Memory*, describes Nabokov’s alter ego as a detached participant in the game, the rules of which he did not invent. “I would ... think of myself as of a fabulous exotic being in an English footballer’s disguise, composing verse in a tongue nobody understood about a remote country nobody knew. Small wonder I was not very popular with my teammates.”⁷

The Nabokovian marketing strategy seems to me exactly this: it is a form of detached participation that ensures the positive outcome of the game while minimizing the emotional involvement of the player. Or, rather, the goalie. He might not be in total control of the match, but he certainly pounces on the ball at the critical moment, hopefully catching it just in time.

Michael Juliar: *TOOL* was a niche book in the American market. Knopf/Wylie/Dmitri Nabokov oversold it and positioned it incorrectly. It belonged on the literature/college reading shelves and not on bookstores’ hot-book-of-the-week front tables. I give them credit for getting *Playboy* to put down very good money for the first serial rights.

The publicity campaign, though, was remarkable. Radio talk shows, blogs, magazine and newspaper reviews, all jumped in and created a tremendous buzz. I was pleasantly amazed. The book didn’t have, unfortunately, carrying power; it couldn’t

⁶ Patrick Forsyth and Robin Birn, *Marketing for Publishing* (New York: Routledge 1997), 1.

⁷ Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (New York: Vintage International 1989), 268.

develop the word of mouth that a finished version of a completed, cohesive story would have generated. Consider: The outtakes of a just-discovered and unfinished Fellini film would have met the same fate.

Eric Naiman: *TOOL* was difficult to read in *Playboy*. The word *squinty* – in the font used by the magazine to print the work - would fit easily within Sasha Grey’s nipples in the photo spread that accompanied the abridged fragments. (And those nipples – Flora’s – were soon everywhere, in just about all the reviews that disparaged the writing and found it impossible to forgive, as though nobody had ever noticed the vacuous expression of breasts). *Playboy* surrounded the text with so many sidebars that the reader would have been hard pressed to read it in any sort of attentive fashion. In the old days, when Nabokov was still alive, the distractions were the cartoons on facing pages, or the photos - an odd number of girls, or even? - one had to overlook in the process of turning the pages to reach the continuation of the story. Here, however, the story was hemmed in, indeed hounded by curatorial tenderness that probably left some readers feeling claustrophobic rather than aroused.

In *Playboy* the text itself had many embellishments of the sort that Nabokov was paid by Heffner to add – “the super-Oriental doctor with long gentle fingers,” “her nightly dreams of erotic torture in so-called ‘labs,’ major and minor laboratories with red curtains,” the “lace-edged rag on the moss,” one of “the only signs of an earlier period of literature.”⁸ Nabokov played these games before, but then the reader had been encouraged to *read* them. A new novel by the author of *Lolita* shouldn’t have to rely on a photo spread in homage to that earlier book, although Nabokov surely would have enjoyed the pairing of a nude cross-over model with a completely anodyne text about Kubrick’s movie by Roger Ebert. Ebert might have been paid more for his name had he realised that anyone who actually did read the story could not help but equate him - his words lying on the page next to Grey - with Flora’s Philip Wild.

⁸ *Playboy* (December 2009): 44-48.

Galya Diment: As Nabokov's life was coming to an end, he probably thought that while - like Philip Wild - he could not control his rapidly deteriorating body, he could at least control the fate of his unfinished and thus vulnerable manuscript. So while, as a Nabokov specialist I am grateful to Véra and Dmitri Nabokov for not burning the cards because they will inform my scholarship, as someone who deeply cares about Nabokov's reputation I am also disheartened that instead of making them available in a much more academic fashion, Dmitri Nabokov chose to merchandise them. It did create a sensation, yet not one I believe his father would have welcomed. I would add to Eric's vivid description of the *Playboy* layout that they, alas, could not even spell the writer's name correctly in the title of the article ("*The Original of Laura* by Vladimir Nabakov").

Yuri Leving: *Posthumous fame and the economics of culture in the 20th century have acquired a new important dimension: literary estates, heirs, agents and rights holders play an increasingly dominating role in controlling and disseminating creative works in our society, governed as it is by legal frameworks. Dmitri Nabokov, there is no doubt, has played a major role in the preservation and active promotion of his father's literary legacy over the past four decades – from translating and publishing to editing and commenting on Vladimir Nabokov's writings. Whether he is unique in this role and how one could characterise this kind of activity, which has been dubbed by journalists as anything from selfless devotion to a greedy urge, Dmitri Nabokov aggressively answers: "My reaction, were it legal, would be a swift kick in the teeth."⁹ Discuss the possible positive and negative effects of the heirs' role in the decision-making process and in the publishing business, especially as it has transpired in the case of TOOL.*

Leland de la Durantaye: Criticism of Dmitri Nabokov's choice to publish the work and of the preface he wrote for it has been sharp and not unfounded. The reasons for the former are obvious, if debatable, and have been rehearsed too often to need repeating here. The harsh reactions of readers of the preface to *The Original of Laura* are also not difficult to understand - from the decorous disappointment heard in reviews like that of

⁹ Dmitri Nabokov, "Regarding *The Original of Laura*," *The Nabokovian* 63 (2009): 6.

Martin Amis, to more fierce expressions, such as John Banville's, who called Dmitri Nabokov's preface "lamentable" and "frequently repellent," to Alexander Theroux's still harsher judgment that it was "nonsensical, snobbish and cruel."¹⁰ That said – and this is something I think it is important to bear in mind – whatever one feels about the case of Laura, it should be recalled that up to the point of its publication Dmitri Nabokov has been a wonderful executor. He had indeed been protective of his father's legacy – as in the Pia Pera incident, to name just one – but that seems to me a natural vigilance. The power he has is easy to misuse and I think whatever shortcomings he has shown of late are counterbalanced by his earlier decisions and the work – in so many domains, beginning with translation – he has done. When compared with a notoriously thorny character like Stephen Joyce I think that Dmitri Nabokov's general benevolence shines through quite clearly – especially in relation to the second question – that of access to archival data and granting of legal permissions. For my part, I don't admire this particular decision, but I do admire the man.

Olga Voronina: Dmitri Nabokov is not the only heir who promotes his father's legacy, but he might be the only one who does so outside of politics and within the limits of the law. Two other cases immediately come to mind. There is the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI), a tenacious protector of Rand's copyright as well as a participant in protests against the legislature that ARI deems "anti-objectivist" (one of the institute's directors, Peter LePort, has co-founded Americans for Free Choice in Medicine, which opposes President Obama's health care reform). And there is Stephen James Joyce, James Joyce's grandson. He has been notorious for his campaigns against performers and scholars who wish to recite, quote, or interpret Joyce in ways he finds unacceptable. Stephen Joyce's lawsuits and mere threats, directed at Ireland's most distinguished institutions, such as the Irish Government and the National Library, have earned him the title of "the Unjust Collector."¹¹ Rumours circulate that he has destroyed some of the family correspondence,

¹⁰ See reviews in this volume.

¹¹ See D.T. Max's article by the same title in *The New Yorker* 19 June 2006.

including the documents that he had recalled from the National Library archives. Both S. J. Joyce and ARI cite “selfless devotion” as their chief motivation.

Michael Juliar: Dmitri Nabokov rightfully did all he could to place *TOOL* in front of the reading public. From what I have seen, he did a sharp and aggressive job. His father couldn’t have asked for more in the promotion of his legacy.

Galya Diment: I have to take a bit of an issue with Olga. To begin with, there are obviously plenty of other heirs who promote their parents’ writings outside of politics. And second, Dmitri did not precisely hide his strong political opinions when he chose to keep a well-publicized blog several years ago. In general, it is inevitable that heirs are in charge of many literary estates. Some, like Dmitri Nabokov (who does not even have other siblings to reckon with) exercise sole power; others allow special committees to share in the decision-making. It is clear that Nabokov himself wanted no one but his wife and son making the calls after his death. It was his right – as it was theirs – not to share the authority with anyone about what to do with the writer’s unpublished materials (while seeking occasional advice from some Nabokov scholars, among them Stephen Parker and Brian Boyd). Véra and Dmitri Nabokov mostly appeared to me to have made wise decisions, as when they allowed the publication of Nabokov’s *Lectures on Literature*, *Russian Literature* and *Don Quixote*. Nabokov probably would have objected to those publications since he wanted only polished perfection to appear to his public under his name but, unlike his novels, these were not his main trade.

Olga Voronina: Let’s also note here that Dmitri Nabokov’s role in the perpetuation of the Nabokov heritage is enormous but, as the publication of *TOOL* has demonstrated, he facilitates access to unpublished Nabokoviana, rather than limits it. In this particular case no one else would have been able to make the decision about preserving the manuscript and making it available to the public. The notions of “positive” or “negative” effect do not seem to be applicable to this kind of decision-making. Dmitri has allowed Nabokov’s readers and critics to judge his father, which is the bravest thing any heir could do.

Now, whether we judge Nabokov's work or Dmitri's involvement in its publication is an entirely different question. What transpires in the post-publication media campaign is the critics' desire to participate in deciding the fate of the manuscript. "Is it, as the blurb claims, Nabokov's 'final great book'? No. Does it contain brilliant, funny, astonishing sentences only Nabokov could have written? Yes. Should it have been preserved and published? Definitely."¹² This is David Lodge writing in the *Literary Review*. "It would be ridiculous, of course, to blame the deceased for the estate sale," quips Aleksandar Hemon in *Slate*, blaming Dmitri instead for exposing his father "to a gloating, greedy world of academics, publishers, and the other card-shuffling mediocrities titillated by the sight of a helpless genius."¹³ Greedy, mediocre, and card-shuffling, I am with Lodge.

Eric Naiman: Dmitri Nabokov has created an interesting dilemma for the reviewer and scholar, in part because the publication of *TOOL* emphasizes the ways in which those roles may diverge. Is *TOOL* an aesthetic miscarriage or does it make sense to read the book as Nabokov's final metafictional word? Most of us trained to read closely look first for structural coherence, even if we eventually delight in that coherence's fragility. We all probably doubt that Nabokov would have published this novel in index cards, but here they are, the fragments of a novel, and Nabokov's carefully constructed writing has given me so much pleasure in the past that in opening this book I felt a duty to try to read it as if it were *Pnin*, or at least part of what *Pnin* would have been had the nutcracker fallen just a fraction of an inch to the left. In this respect, the scholar is more fortunate than the reviewer, paradoxically in the position of being able to adopt a more playful attitude towards this text. Many reviewers seem to have had their moral buttons pushed by this edition, as if they had a duty to protect the reader – or Nabokov – from fraudulent merchandise.

¹² http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/lodge_12_09.html

¹³ <http://www.slate.com/id/2235023/>

Yuri Leving: *Do the matters of facilitating access to archival data, legal permissions, and endorsements have any implications for scholarly research in general and Nabokov studies in particular?*

Olga Voronina: Facilitating access to archives would always, in the case of any writer, benefit scholarly research. But the problem often lies not with the heirs or estates, but with the archives themselves. While the NYPL has invested significant effort into cataloguing and preserving the Nabokov archive, thus making it a pleasure to work with, the Library of Congress has merely – and rather carelessly – kept its riches. A catalogue of all Nabokov archival holdings would be a blessing to have.

SELLING NABOKOV

(ECONOMICS OF CULTURE AND THE MARKET OF LITERARY RARITIES)

Yuri Leving: *TOOL was reported Number One in sales in Russia with over 50,000 copies sold in November-December 2009. In the USA and UK (where on the day of its release the book had to compete with Sarah Palin's debut memoir, Going Rogue), sales appeared to be much more modest - despite a loud publicity campaign. How would you explain the phenomenon?*

Michael Juliar: On my bookshelves are more than twenty-one running feet of Nabokov volumes published in Russian in the Soviet Union as it was dissolving and now published in Russia. Among those hundreds of books from dozens of publishers (when copyright law was flouted) are reprints, reprints of reprints, unauthorized editions, cheap, pulpy affairs, elegant leather-bound volumes, and series of books radiating uniform covers and attempting to encompass the full range of the author's works. And so many of those books were printed in quantities that put our bestseller lists to shame: Runs of a hundred thousand and more at a time were not unusual. Russians love their native author and buy

and read him. So *TOOL*, a new Nabokov, even if fragmented, incomplete, and in translation, is a literary event in Russia. But in America, who cares? Who reads?

Galya Diment: In Russia the reception was, indeed, markedly different – but so was at least one edition. Together with a Russian replica of American and English editions, they also published a much smaller and very inexpensive *Laura i ee original* (Azbooka-klassika, 2010). It contains just 188 4 x 6.5 (as opposed to 6 x 9.5) pages, and that includes more than 50 pages of translator Gennady Barabtarlo’s essay in the back. It is defined there as “Fragments of a Novel,” and not “A Novel in Fragments,” while the “Dying Is Fun” subtitle is altogether missing. The cards (in English) are partially reproduced on four pages, two in the very beginning of the book, and two at the very end; while the narrative is run as a straightforward text. The size of the book and its price (anywhere from 160 to 230 rubles which is roughly \$6-8) therefore do not artificially inflate its importance, the way English and American editions did. As to Palin, being able to see Russia from her porch in Alaska did not, as far as I know, translate into her being a bestselling author there.

Olga Voronina: The idea of Nabokov competing with Sarah Palin is deliciously grotesque. Their readers line up in different queues, with the Nabokov line continuing on the other side of the Atlantic. That said, the 150,000 figure of Russian sales characterises not as much the Russian people’s disregard for political ego trips as their heightened sense of cultural continuity and national identity as shaped by culture. Very few Russian readers situate Nabokov in the 1920-70s, the years when he was banned from publication and therefore could not be read openly. For the majority, he belongs to the post-Soviet era of opened literary floodgates, with its spiritual exhilaration and the promise of socio-political renewal. Although that ardour has been dampened, *TOOL* might be attractive as a reminder of the 1990s. There is also a never-ending sentiment of Nabokov’s “return” to Russia, something I would hear – and speak of – during my years at the Nabokov Museum in St Petersburg. Finally (although I should have probably started here), *TOOL* attracts Russian audiences because it is a work of literature, a book beyond and above the glorified ghettos of crime, horror, and romance fiction, into which Russian publishers

herd their readers these days. For a nation that continues to be taught great books throughout middle and high schools as well as in college, the lack of literary talent on the market is more than obvious.

Yuri Leving: *Nabokov never won the Nobel Prize for literature, and yet he remains one of the bestselling, most studied and admired authors. How would you place Nabokov in the cycle of literary prizes and production values (in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the politics of culture and the symbolic capital of linguistic utterances)?*

Galya Diment: I personally do not believe Nabokov's legacy is in need of any extraordinary measures (but now it is definitely in need of no more inflicted harm). That Nabokov never won a Nobel Prize puts him in better company (Tolstoy, Joyce, Proust) than had he won one. Nobel Prizes rarely make a writer more admired or studied unless he or she is already in that category. There are few writers who intrigue and gratify discerning readers more - and these are the only readers Nabokov ever cared about, and the only readers he truly deserves. They will stay with him for many generations to come.

Michael Juliar: The Nobel Prize is irrelevant. It is not a prize for popularity, success, literary depth, or academic interest. Its impermanent relevancy is that it pins a badge on the puffed out covers of the winning author's books and so a few more copies are sold.

Olga Voronina: When Nabokov sent a copy of his "Pilgram" in French to the king of Belgium, he described the gesture to Vera as a pleasant walk on "the grass lawn of tradition." Although patronage of the arts has a long and respectable pedigree, literary prizes are mostly a 20th-century phenomenon. The award distinguishes the giver rather than the awardee. Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Mandelstam, and Akhmatova have never received the Nobel. Their "symbolic capital," however, continues to soar.

Yuri Leving: *The distinguished manuscript dealer Mary Benjamin wrote: "Autograph collecting, whether in the historical or the literary realm, is more than a hobby. It is a*

philosophy of quiet pleasure."¹⁴ Nabokov seemed always to be quite aware of the future value of his own material. Provide a historical and socio-economic perspective to Nabokov's manuscripts and rare editions for sale.

Olga Voronina: Akhmatova gave out her manuscripts to friends and acquaintances like clippings from an old newspaper. The poet could not keep them all in a battered suitcase which she had to carry around in fear that her archive would be perused and/or confiscated. In the 1940s, she also knew that only the most devoted of her admirers would risk preserving her drafts - even a short autograph could implicate the keeper. Unlike Akhmatova, Nabokov lived (for the most part) in liberal societies where the value of a manuscript matched the popularity of the author. And unlike her, he knew that liberalism, with its plurality of opinions, could also put an author in danger of having his work posthumously distorted, misinterpreted, or mistranslated. A scholar of Pushkin and Tolstoy and a connoisseur of Shakespeare's legacy, he commented on the failure of authorial control in *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire*. A collector himself, he made sure that copies of his books, decorated with his butterfly drawings, would provide "quiet pleasure" for those who possessed them.

In my opinion, VN's autographed first editions, generously given to family and friends, and his closely watched and smartly institutionalized manuscripts represent two ends of the power spectrum. While the butterfly autographs raised the aesthetic and sentimental values of the book that was leaving the author's hands, the tight supervision increased the worth of manuscripts that would, metaphorically speaking, never part with their creator.

Yuri Leving: *The effect of scholarly use and publication on the monetary value of manuscripts is often a factor to consider. Some dealers encourage collectors to disregard requests for use and not permit access, and certainly not publication, because they feel that publication automatically reduces the resale value. On the other hand, the scholar and the editor may suggest that its value would be enhanced by publication in an*

¹⁴ Mary Benjamin, "Autographs; A Key to Collecting," *The Collector* September 1948.

*important and prestigious edition.*¹⁵ *Could you address the market vs. institutional / research value of Nabokoviana (manuscripts, correspondence, rare and inscribed editions)?*

Olga Voronina: Both are high and will not deteriorate with time.

Galya Diment: Dmitri Nabokov's answer in the Introduction of *TOOL* is basically that he did what he did simply because he could. Elsewhere in his interviews, the explanation focuses on the otherworldly presence of Vladimir Nabokov giving the son a blessing and seemingly encouraging him to make a nice profit while at it. I have no doubt that the loving father in Nabokov would sacrifice everything, including his reputation, for the well-being of his son. I just wish his loving son had not exposed his father to such a barrage of negative publicity, amplified as it was by the hullabaloo accompanying the publication.

Eric Naiman: I nearly always agree with Galya, but not here. Even dead, Nabokov is still a big boy who can take care of himself. The publication of *TOOL* will lead to more reading - and rereading of Nabokov's other works ... and of work about them. In other words, Dmitri's profits will trickle down; all who write about his father will be the richer for it. (Except, perhaps, the inconceivable soul for whom *TOOL* would be Nabokov's first book, but the initial edition would have to be very deeply discounted before such a thing could happen).

Galya Diment: That's a scary thought, especially since one can buy it on Amazon by now for \$10.

Yuri Leving: *What, in your judgment, might be the reasons for the flop of Lot 95 (Nabokov's TOOL manuscript) during the Christie's auction in New York in early*

¹⁵ See Carolyn H. Sung, "Your Manuscripts and the Scholarly World," *Autographs and Manuscripts: A Collector's Manual*, Ed. by Edmund Berkeley, Jr (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1978), 160.

December 2009 (held just three weeks after the international release of the long-anticipated book)?

Michael Juliar: The *TOOL* manuscript of 138 index cards didn't sell at Christie's on 4 December because it hadn't had time to develop the cultural resonance that arouses a man or woman to spend a large amount of money on a desired object. Simply, the public didn't know the book well enough, didn't care about it enough, and had an image of it being an incomplete artifact. Some years from now (twenty? fifty?), though, I think that people will have come around to "seeing" *TOOL* as the last flowering of Nabokov's genius, as fragmented as it may be, and find it very desirable. And the \$280,000 level that the bidding got to isn't to be sniffed at. That was a very fair price, especially in these shallow-pocket times.

Addendum: It did sell, finally, at Christie's London on 23 November 2010 for £64,000 plus the buyer's premium of £14,050. Altogether, that's about \$124,000. Compare that to the \$280,000 (without the premium) it didn't get knocked down for in December 2009 because it didn't reach the reserve price.

Leland de la Durantaye: I can only imagine that the failed crying of lot 95 was the result of the largely negative reviews of the book's publication coupled with the disappointed reactions of so many readers who bought the book during the three weeks between publication and crying.

Olga Voronina: I don't think that the negative publicity has anything to do with it. The timing of the auction was poor, though. The much-advertised publication of the new (and last) Nabokov novel could have excited an individual buyer but, as Michael says, in this economy individuals continue to part with their money carefully. For an institution, however, the publishing fever and media commotion were not significant enough reasons to justify an expensive purchase. The manuscript of *TOOL* might have been sold for \$400,000 or even \$600,000 a year or years before the publication, with special precautions made about Dmitri Nabokov's sole control of publishing rights.

Galya Diment: I second Leland here. I believe it was the over-the-top marketing campaign in the United States and England that led to the flop of Christie's Lot 95. As a reviewer in the *Independent* stated, to many the auction simply could not "escape the musty air of an estate sale."¹⁶ I would like to see the cards go to the Berg Collection at the NYPL or, my distant second choice, the Library of Congress. Even though they have already been reproduced, for many of us there is a special feeling in viewing or holding Nabokov's originals.

Yuri Leving: *The fate of the 138 index cards is still undecided. Some believe that, to provide scholars with primary materials for examination of the editing, the holograph cards should be preserved in one of the two major Nabokov manuscript repositories. What is your opinion about this, especially considering that all cards have already been faithfully reproduced in high resolution, reprinted and sold as simulacra?*

Michael Juliar: A manuscript is still a unique item no matter how often it is reproduced, photographed, copied, or facsimiled. There is information of real value buried in the original: the paper, the graphite in the pencil, the red and blue lines, the smudge of the eraser. It must all be preserved and made available in an institution.¹⁷

Olga Voronina: I am a big fan of the Berg Collection, which should receive all the kudos for maintaining the Nabokov archive in impeccable order. If Dmitri Nabokov could deposit the cards at the Berg, the institutional value of the collection would certainly go up, while the cards would acquire a safe home. But I don't want to disregard the Nabokov Museum as a possible repository, either. The symbolism of Nabokov's last manuscript returning to the house where the writer was born is rather transparent. And the popularity

¹⁶ Thomas Leveritt, "The Original of Laura, By Vladimir Nabokov," *The Independent* 3 January 2010).

See <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-original-of-laura-by-vladimir-nabokov-1850030.html> [accessed 18 June 2011].

¹⁷ See Nicholson Baker's *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House 2001).

of *TOOL* in Russia just might motivate one of the many Russian oligarchs to buy it for the museum.

Yuri Leving: *What can be said of the writer's manuscripts and memorabilia as mechanisms of generating public interest beyond scholarship?*

Olga Voronina: The manuscripts and memorabilia amplify the value of Nabokov's art for those who already appreciate it, but they have little to do with "generating public interest." People who come to the Nabokov Museum (or, at least, used to come there ten years ago) want to see the house and the first editions because they have already read *Speak, Memory*, *Lolita* or "Spring in Fialta." I know a number of readers for whom the encounter with the memorial space and its objects has heightened their appreciation of Nabokov; I know no one in whom the visit has instigated it. This is why I believe that Nabokov's manuscripts or lepidopterized books cannot be "mechanisms" of anything. In my experience, they are visible only to those who have already sprouted a Nabokovian "third eye."

EVALUATING TOOL

REPUTATION IN FRAGMENTS?

Yuri Leving: *The public debate on whether Nabokov's incomplete novel should be published significantly lacked scholarly voices. While bloggers, journalists and notable fiction writers fiercely exchanged their opinions, participants in the major electronic forum NABOKV-L, mainly academics and reputable Nabokov scholars, seemed to be extremely cautious. How would you explain this silence about or even suppression of something that the non-academic world has taken as a vital issue?*

Olga Voronina: The non-academic (or, rather, non-Nabokovian) world was curious about the publication of *TOOL* as an act of filial disobedience and a failed case of literary

auto-da-fe. The academic world waited for the text to be published and now needs time to read it and ponder its riddles. If journalists enjoy the luxury of voicing their opinions before being asked a question, scholars luxuriate in their ability to ask a question no one has thought of previously. It is hard to do this with *TOOL*, though. The novel's authorial intent is obscured by Nabokov's last will and by the fact that we can only guess what and how much is missing from the book. Even if the question were asked, its answer would necessarily have to end in ellipsis.

Leland de la Durantaye: I don't agree that scholars were silent. Many wrote reviews (one need only think of Brian Boyd and Michael Wood). The caution of the electronic forum is a separate matter - and it should be borne in mind that the majority of major critics rarely enter into those discussions. Brian Boyd is a very notable exception, but does not disprove the rule. If we discount NABOKV-L, what we have are the reviews that have already appeared in major publications by major critics, and the scholarly work that takes time to reach print and which we, thus, have not yet seen.

On another note, those who were what you call cautious should be separated into two camps. The first consists of those who were cautious because they had not read the manuscript - a group that included virtually everyone until the book was published. There were very few who had access to the manuscript in the past (such as Brian Boyd, of course), and those who were able to read the proofs in the months leading up to publication, but only those ready to go to Knopf's offices (review copies were not circulated) and read them onsite and who were writing reviews. That this first camp would have been reserved while others debated the manuscript sight unseen in newspapers, blogs and the like is the most natural thing in the world. The second camp consists of those who were silent or reserved *after* the publication of the work. In many cases I think this can be attributed to the sense that everything relevant had already been said and that it was time to turn to other matters.

Galya Diment: Why have so few, with the exception of Eric Naiman in *The SF Chronicle* and Brian Boyd in *The Financial Times*, rushed to write reviews for the mainstream press? Partially, I believe, it's because while we can argue among ourselves,

when confronted with the outside world we tend to treat Nabokov as a member of our own family: If you cannot say nice things, better say nothing at all. And then there is, of course, the “Dmitri factor.” Being called a “moron” in print is nothing compared to his potential refusal to allow one access to the materials or necessary copyright permissions for one’s book or article, so angering him can definitely impede one’s professional goals.

Yuri Leving: *Let’s turn now to the critical reception of Nabokov’s TOOL upon its publication. What tendencies can be discerned in the massive corpus of reviews that appeared in virtually all major newspapers and magazines?*

Eric Naiman: How to approach *The Original of Laura*? Kindness to which author? One of the principal fault lines running through the initial spate of reviews seems to have been the difficulty of determining whether or not to treat the book as a unified aesthetic object, and whether it was appropriate to offer an interpretive reading of Nabokov’s last gasp. The book is beautiful, the book is a fraud, the book is a toolbox with butterflies or birdies just waiting to fly free - the reader’s task is to carefully detach the cards; an act of liberation that can only lead to the necessity of buying another copy. The kindest thing, some readers seem to suggest, would be to give the text a decent burial at the back of a scholarly edition.

Leland de la Durantaye: Disappointment. With a few notable exceptions. As for the source of the disappointment, some reviewers attributed this to the waning of the author’s powers with age, while others attributed it to the simple fact that Nabokov had not been granted time to bring the work to anything approaching a state of completion. This is an interesting question to reflect upon, but it is ultimately based on the reader’s intuition. My personal sense is that Nabokov’s final novel, *Look at the Harlequins!* was less compelling than what went before it not because of waning power but because of a certain self-indulgence. Consequently, I see no reason that, given world enough and time, *The Original of Laura* could have developed into as fine a work as, say, *Ada*.

Galya Diment: Many reviews raised largely the same issues: that it is not a novel in fragments but just fragments; that it was oversold and under-delivered; that it features an unhealthy preoccupation with sex with minors (leading such devoted fans as Martin Amis to wonder whether Nabokov was, after all, suffering from “nympholepsy”); that it reveals not just an old and dying human being but a rapidly dying talent; that it is full of immature puns and “fragile spelling,” etc., etc. Special acerbity has been reserved for Dmitri Nabokov’s introduction, which some critics found “atrocious,” “petty,” and bent more on revisiting past slights than framing the work and the decision to publish it in a serious way that would truly respect Nabokov’s numerous admirers.

To me, the most curious tendency was some sympathetic reviewers’ struggle to come to terms with their conflicting critical emotions. Brian Boyd, for example, recently detailed his initial reaction to *TOOL* (“Destroy it”) and how he has come to change his opinion about it (“It’s not another *Lolita* or *Pale Fire*, but could have been, and already is, another fascinating Nabokov novel”).¹⁸ I usually trust Brian’s intuition when it comes to Nabokov but I do think he tries too hard here to attribute the imperfections of what we have in front of us to Nabokov’s wily technique to “mislead our expectations.”

Olga Voronina: I have already commented on some of the critical responses to *TOOL* and would like to repeat here that, to me, the reviewers’ opinions seem surprisingly uniform. Most of the essays pay tribute to sensational journalism rather than literary analysis. The central, and rather comic, trend consists of critics’ attempts to summarize the novel’s plot to the reader who is warned beforehand that not only is there no story but that there won’t be one, no matter how hard we try. Some of the reviewers, perhaps inspired by Peter Brooks’ idea that reading (and, by a Freudian analogy, writing) is a gratification of death urge, insist that Nabokov had no desire to finish his novel. (“*The Original of Laura* was never intended to be shuffled into any sequence whatsoever,” claims Michael Dirda in *The Washington Post*).¹⁹ Others, on the contrary, doubt that “A

¹⁸ Brian Boyd, “Nabokov Lives On,” *The American Scholar* 79, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 45-58.

¹⁹ Michael Dirda, “Vladimir Nabokov, Reduced to Notes,” *The Washington Post* 19 November 2009.

novel in fragments” is an appropriate subtitle. For David Gates of *The New York Times*’ *Sunday Book Review*, *TOOL* is not “some deliberate experiment in form” but, rather, a literary puzzle, “arranged in sensible, if debatable, order.”²⁰

Yuri Leving: *Were you surprised by what emerged in this critical discourse?*

Galya Diment: It should not come as a surprise from everything I stated above that I was not at all surprised by the many dismissive reviews of *TOOL* here in the United States and devastating ones in the United Kingdom. I was actually more intrigued by the exceptions, as when Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times*, despite her reputation as a tough critic, was rather magnanimous in her evaluation. Likewise, John Lancaster treated it with kid gloves in *The New York Review of Books*.

Leland de la Durantaye: No, not really. I was mildly surprised by a few blandly positive reviews, just as I was (less) surprised by the vehemence of a few negative ones - reviews whose vehemence, it should be noted, was directed not at the author but at his son.

Olga Voronina: There are a lot of surprises to discuss here. Mine was to discover how many journalists did not even make an attempt to read *TOOL* as a work of literature. Enthralled by Knopf’s solution to the problem of the novel’s fragmentary nature, they prefer to discuss it as a book and not as text. Sam Anderson in *The New York Magazine* calls *TOOL* an “object,” “an exquisite thing.”²¹ Alexander Theroux in the *Wall Street Journal* goes even further. For him, *TOOL* has a “play-kit quality,” as if there is not enough play kits around Borders already. Curiously, for the same reviewer the style of a book about dying should not be anything but tragic. “There are witty Nabokovian moments as well,” Theroux exclaims, obviously in shock.²² The rather artificial, in my opinion, subtitle “Dying is Fun” is probably intended for just this kind of reader.

²⁰ David Gates, “Nabokov’s Last Puzzle,” *The New York Times*’ *Sunday Book Review* 11 November 2009.

²¹ Sam Anderson, “A Glorious Mess,” *The New York Magazine* 15 November 2009.

²² Alexander Theroux, “In the Cards, A Last Hand,” *The Wall Street Journal* (20 November 2009): W15.

Eric Naiman: One of the effects surrounding the roll-out of this book has been distraction. Would Dmitri destroy the cards? That fear looks odd now: an initial worry that thirty years from now the text would survive only as a memory in Brian Boyd's brain – or in his notes, a curious Nabokovian equivalent to the Igor Tale – quickly gave way to reviewers' comments that too much was being made of these fragments. The packaging struck some as extravagant. The introduction was too long. But there are some absolutely wonderful things in this book, and the figure of Philip Wild is marvellous - in many respects an imaginative and even logical development of Nabokov's metafictional concerns. This is a character who loves himself to death, as if Nabokov were taking to its extreme the dynamic of creative narcissism which he fascinatingly embraced and parodied throughout his entire career. "One might dissolve completely that way" thinks Fyodor as he is licked all over by the sun, and here, in a wonderful twist on a creator's Savage Love for his characters, Wild usurps the authorial power to do away with his characters, becoming the metafictional version of Kirillov. The edition captures this sense of a dissolving, collapsing text. Dmitri Nabokov and Chip Kidd seem to have understood this aspect of the novel's potential and teased it out. The resulting impression is not so much of an unfinished text as it is of a remainder - of the novel whose hero has managed to flee the text as well as of the now deceased author himself. This sensation will only be enhanced in the future, when we encounter in secondhand bookshops (or online) copies of the book from which some of the cards have been removed and gone missing.

Yuri Leving: *When we asked the two chief curators of the largest institutional depositories of Nabokov materials (the Library of Congress and the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library) if they expect that a publication of The Original of Laura would give an additional impetus to future discoveries and publications related to Nabokov's archival materials, both seemed sceptical.²³ What is your take on that issue, especially after the revelation of the text of TOOL?*

²³ See "Institutionalizing Nabokov: Museum, Archive, Exhibition," *Nabokov Online Journal* 3 (2009).

Leland de la Durantaye: I see every reason to trust their judgment (and no reason not to).

Olga Voronina: I do, too. Future Nabokovian discoveries are not the same thing as the future publications of previously unavailable Nabokov manuscripts. It is hard for me to imagine how the appearance of *TOOL* could significantly contribute to our reinterpretation of, say, *Pale Fire* or *LATH!*, but I can easily see why publishers, always ready to capitalize on media frenzy, would now want to investigate other possibilities of issuing the yet unpublished Nabokov.

Yuri Leving: *Nabokov, the canon, and the “common reader.” How do you think this triangular relationship has been affected in the wake of the recent TOOL campaign and Nabokov’s general re-branding?*

Olga Voronina: I wonder who “branded” Nabokov in the first place. “Common reader” is for “common ideas,” Nabokov would say, while any truly original literature requires a reader with “uncommon visage.” *TOOL* will probably never be canonized, but it will take its rightful place in the niche reserved for unfinished books with a tragic fate, such as Kafka’s writings, published by Max Brod, “Hero and Leander” by Christopher Marlowe, *Weir of Hermiston* by Robert Louis Stevenson, and *Answered Prayers* by Truman Capote.

Leland de la Durantaye: Oh, not at all. Not durably, at least. I’ve made clear elsewhere that I was not in favour of publication, but I tried to be equally clear about there being no durable harm that publication could do to Nabokov’s reputation – and thus none to his place in any canon or to his relationship to readers.

Michael Juliar: It is all nothing but a tiny splash in a distant northern lake.

Galya Diment: Well said. It will be soon forgotten by all but Nabokov specialists.

Eric Naiman: I'm not so sure the impact of *TOOL* will be negligible. There is a tendency in Nabokov studies for scholars to take a single work and read all of Nabokov's oeuvre back through it. Boyd's take on Nabokov is heavily indebted to "The Vane Sisters," Nafisi's to *Invitation to a Beheading* and, for all we know, they might be right. It would be equally possible – and justifiably preposterous in a Nabokovian sense – to inflect an interpretation of Nabokov's earlier fiction through this final work. Many new aspects of the older works might be illuminated in a fascinating and unexpected light.

