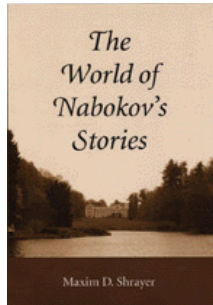
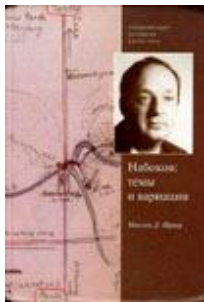


***The World of Nabokov's Stories*, by Maxim D. Shrayer. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999; ISBN 0-292-77756-6, xix+396pp., \$24.95. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index.**



***Nabokov: Temy i variatsii*, by Maksim D. Shraer. Translated by V. Polishchuk and M. Shraer (Sovremennaia zapadnaia rusistika, t. 31). St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000; ISBN 5-7331-0197-0, 384pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index.**



In *The World of Nabokov's Stories* Maxim D. Shrayer takes on the ambitious task of documenting "Nabokov's original contribution to the Russian tradition, to the genre of the short story, and to modernism" (3). The first section of the book traces the evolution of one of Nabokov's primary themes, the entry into the "otherworld," through readings that illustrate how the reader, as the author's double, might perceive "textual openings" to enter privileged zones as do Nabokov's protagonists (69). The second section treats Nabokov's dialogic relationships with Chekhov and Bunin. Here Shrayer elucidates Nabokov's admission that he continued Chekhov's tradition in Russian prose into the second half of the twentieth century; that is, he "closed Chekhov's open-ended structure but endowed it with a textual opening" (236), a passage into the otherworld. In his chapter on Nabokov and Bunin, Shrayer explores the implications of artistic rivalry for literary evolution and Bloomian anxiety, with obfuscations and allusions impelling the two writers to produce some of their finest work. In a concluding section,

Shrayer proposes "a three-stage development" in which the short stories occupy an intermediary, fictionalizing function between the recording of autobiographical information in letters and diaries and its "defictionalized presentation as remembered historical past in his autobiographies" (297).

Each section of *The World of Nabokov's Stories* details the maturation of Nabokov's poetics and provides exemplary readings of the short stories of the Russian period. Shrayer's exhaustive research and detailed analyses are best described as generous, for in addition to demonstrating how the stories and their attendant texts function within Nabokov's oeuvre, they offer potentially productive avenues for future study. Might the list of short stories Nabokov planned to discuss in a creative writing course (11), for example, disclose further dialogic relations with short story writers outside of the Russian tradition? In what ways might Nabokov have helped to shape early American postmodernism (19)? What are the implications of the evolutionary structure Shrayer delineates for the stories of the American period?

At the same time Shrayer indicates such directions for future research, he acknowledges that he has "tried to elaborate approaches to [Nabokov's] poetics that stem directly from his text, are unique to it, and are sustained by it at every point of analysis" (319), and his investigations of the rigidly organized short stories would seem to have comprehensively considered Nabokov's short works on their own terms. This, perhaps, leads Shrayer to begin *Temy i variatsii* with a daunting characterization of Nabokov's texts as impervious to theoretical approaches that find productive application elsewhere, and then to propose a possible key to the locked gates of Nabokov's critically hermetic world: "strange as it may seem, of all directions in contemporary literary criticism, Nabokov would likely be more amenable to New Historicism than any other" (Как это ни странно, из всех направлений современного литературоведения, Набокову бы, вероятно, более других приглянулся Новый Историзм; 11). Although Shrayer does not belabor this point, it deserves further consideration in the light of recent developments in Nabokov scholarship and Shrayer's own work.

It is difficult to imagine Nabokov endorsing any critical approach to his work, no less such overarching umbrella terms as Cultural Studies or New Historicism. And yet, both encompass varied critical approaches that traverse disciplinary boundaries and renegotiate traditional distinctions between cultural practices (including literature) and the social, historical, and political in ways that recent Nabokov scholarship has linked with the author's work. Most

importantly, these approaches reveal an awareness of the very processes and institutions that contribute to the production, circulation, and reception of texts. In considering this dynamic, it is especially interesting to look to Nabokov's constructions of the self and his awareness (and subsequent suppression) of the cultural and historical vantage points that had a hand in their production.

In his article "Nabokov as a Russian Writer" (*The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*; Cambridge, 2005) Alexander Dolinin refers to the revisions Nabokov incorporated into his self-translations of his Russian works as "English paraphrases that downplay and suppress Nabokov's vital literary origins." "In a sense," Dolinin observes, "the Russian writer Sirin fell victim to the tricky mythmaking and playacting Nabokov indulged in during his later years" (53). As Dolinin makes clear, Nabokov displays a self-conscious awareness of being confronted with an earlier, supposedly autonomous self and the cultural and social institutions that in fact produced that self. In *Temy i variatsii* Shroyer sheds light on Nabokov's relationship with his early translator Peter A. Pertzoff to reveal an as yet unresearched part of the process that contributed to the early construction of Nabokov's English-language self, one that came before Nabokov had "elaborated a full-fledged poetics of Englishing" (*The World of Nabokov Stories*, 128) and had perfected the presentation of himself as "a born cosmopolitan genius who has never been attached to anything and anybody but his autonomous imagination and personal memory" (Dolinin, 53). While Shroyer himself is more likely to locate power with Nabokov's formidable abilities than with contemporary events or institutions in the New Historical sense, his willingness to engage the relationships between texts and cultural practices and challenges to traditional perspectives contributes to *Temy i variatsii*'s diverse range, also notable in chapters as varied as "Jewish questions in Nabokov's life and work" and "Nabokov's sexology."

It is particularly in the "interludes" interspersed among the articles and recontextualized and expanded selected chapters from *The World of Nabokov's Stories* which contribute to *Temy i variatsii* (of which the discussion of Nabokov's correspondence with Pertzoff is one), that Shroyer demonstrates how Nabokov's work mediates the social and cultural contexts that play a part in its construction. The interludes pose provocative questions ("Why didn't Nabokov like women writers?"), and like much of *The World of Nabokov's Stories*, yield valuable readings while indicating possible methods and topics for continued study. Indeed, Shroyer's more recent work on Nabokov's influence on W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* ("Netting the Butterfly Man,"

coauthored with Adrian Curtin; *Religion and the Arts*, 9:3-4, 2005) continues and develops his approach to intertextual dialogue, demonstrating that both Sebald and Nabokov emphasize reading, writing, and remembering as acts that "constitute the post-Shoah consciousness as they bridge the gulf between past and present, between the difficulty in ever properly expressing or understanding and the greater danger of not even countenancing the attempt" (278).

*The World of Nabokov's Stories* and *Temy i variatsii* are valuable additions to Nabokov scholarship, not least for their potential to move readers to further explore the materials and approaches Shrayer shares.

*Lisa Ryoko Wakamiya,  
Florida State University*

