

ChatGPT

“UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD AROUND US...”

Experimental Coda

Editor's Note

Publication of the second part of the round table “Nabokov and Religion” comes with a little bonus. In early 2023, public debates on new Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have revived old questions about life, creation, authenticity, and meaning. Taking advantage of these recent discussions and timely curiosities, we also decided to experiment with AI using the ChatGPT platform [version Feb., 2023]. The prompt was formulated as follows: *Write a scholarly essay about Vladimir Nabokov and religion and faith.* The resulting essay by an anonymous yet, undoubtedly, benevolent robot is presented here as a playful homage to Nabokov’s relationship with Otherworldly powers.

The title is borrowed from the last sentence of the composition below.

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Vladimir Nabokov was a Russian-American novelist, poet, and lepidopterist known for his distinctive writing style and complex narratives. He is often regarded as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, with works such as *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Ada or Ardor* earning him critical acclaim and a devoted following. Nabokov’s views on religion and faith have been the subject of much debate among scholars, as his work often contains

subtle references to religious themes and motifs. In this essay, we will examine Nabokov's views on religion and faith through an analysis of his life and work.

Nabokov was born into a wealthy family in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1899. His father was a liberal politician who was assassinated in 1922, and his mother was a wealthy socialite who was raised in a strict Orthodox household. Nabokov's family was secular and liberal, and he was raised in a cosmopolitan environment that exposed him to a variety of cultural and intellectual influences. Despite this, Nabokov was deeply interested in religion and spirituality from an early age, and he was known to have studied the Bible and other religious texts extensively.

Nabokov's interest in religion is evident in his writing, which often contains references to religious themes and motifs. In *Pale Fire*, for example, the character Charles Kinbote is described as a "madman and poet" who believes he is the king of a mythical country called Zembla. Kinbote's delusions are often compared to religious fervor, and his obsession with his own identity and destiny mirrors the quest for salvation found in many religious traditions. Similarly, in *Ada or Ardor*, the character Van Veen is described as a "pantheist" who believes that God can be found in all things, including art and nature.

Despite his interest in religion and spirituality, Nabokov was skeptical of organized religion and dogma. He was critical of the authoritarianism and intolerance he saw in many religious institutions, and he often mocked religious figures and symbols in his writing. In *Lolita*, for example, the character Humbert Humbert describes a priest as a "sterile fellow" who is "proud of his obedience." Similarly, in *Pale Fire*, the character John Shade is described as a "doubting Thomas" who is skeptical of organized religion and its claims to truth.

Nabokov's skepticism of organized religion is perhaps best exemplified in his famous statement that "reality is a very subjective affair." For Nabokov, reality is not something that can be objectively defined or understood through dogma or tradition. Instead, reality is a fluid and personal experience that is shaped by individual perception and interpretation. This view is reflected in his writing, which often contains multiple layers of meaning and interpretation that are open to the reader's subjective experience.

In conclusion, Vladimir Nabokov's views on religion and faith were complex and multifaceted. He was deeply interested in spirituality and religious themes, but he was also critical of organized religion and dogma. Nabokov's writing reflects his skepticism of traditional religious

institutions, but it also contains subtle references to religious motifs and themes. Ultimately, Nabokov's view of reality as a subjective and personal experience is perhaps the most important aspect of his views on religion and faith, as it reflects his belief in the importance of individual perception and interpretation in understanding the world around us.

