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**THE OUTSKIRTS OF DREAMLAND:
GENNADY BARABTARLO'S *INSOMNIAC DREAMS***

Love only what is fanciful and rare,
What through the outskirts of dreamland
moves unseen <...>.

*The Gift*¹



Olga Voronina and Gennady Barabtarlo
in Vladimir Nabokov's Suite at the Montreux Palace, July 2011

i. Art through a Heartache

Nabokov's manuscripts are a death-defying affair: scholars who drag them out of obliviousness make ideas of the man on the other side of an overwritten index card come back to life again. But not just that. The more Nabokovian drafts, marginalia, and little-known or previously unpublished texts emerge, the better we get acquainted with the author's

¹ The first line of the epigraph is taken from Michael Scammell's translation, the second is offered in my rendering – O.V. *G*, 156.

commitment to illumination – artistic and philosophical – of the void that surrounds our existence, the “two eternities of darkness.”² It is both serendipitous and heart-breaking that *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time by Vladimir Nabokov* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2018) came out fifteen months before Gennady Barabtarlo’s untimely demise on February 24, 2019. Written by the remarkable translator and one of the most perceptive analysts of Nabokov’s oeuvre, this little volume adds a momentous new perspective on the Nabokovian metaphysics. It also makes a compelling closure to Barabtarlo’s critical legacy. The discovery of Nabokov’s deep engagement with a theory of time’s reversibility and its influence on his perception of the afterlife happened to become the last exploit of the critic who first deciphered the perplexing Italianesque phrase “Mali è trano t’amesti” in *Invitation to a Beheading* as “Death is sweet, this is a secret.”³

Like *The Gift* and *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, the two of Nabokov’s dream-infused, *chronopoetic* works Barabtarlo alludes to frequently, *Insomniac Dreams* consists of five mutually enriching parts, one of which stands out in form and in essence. As we learn from his essay on artistic time in Nabokov’s oeuvre placed in the very back of the volume, the “Dream Diary” Nabokov kept in the last months of 1964 reveals – ontogenetically – the author’s preoccupation with replicating and shaping, reversing and “taming” of time in fiction. “A time-craft in writing, compositional time-management,” Barabtarlo suggests, is the prime feature of the novel as a genre (160). Nabokov’s very special genius in this technique stems from his relationship with time as a dimension that embraces human life and endures fore and aft. When, stimulated by the theory of the British philosopher John William Dunne (1875-1949), Nabokov chose to link this awareness to his life-long fascination with dreams as a window on the otherworld, the elaborate temporal structure that had already been in place in his narratives turned out to be woven even more intricately. The severance of time and space occupies the centerstage of plot in *Ada* and *Look at the Harlequins!* The work of storytelling is relegated to ghostly narrators in *Transparent Things* (163-167). And in all three of these novels, “Consciousness without Time (the future of the immortal soul),” as Nabokov defines it in his 1951-1959 diary, acquires unprecedented agency – sometimes, visible, but more often than not, hidden from an unexperienced, superficial sight.

² *SM*, 19.

³ Gennady Barabtarlo, *Aerial View: Essays on Nabokov’s Art and Metaphysics* (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 193-197.

Due to the skillful exposition lovingly prepared by Barabtarlo, the “Dream Diary” that confirms Dunne’s influence on Nabokov also becomes a window on the writer’s mature philosophical views and aesthetics. Akin to the Chernyshevski chapter that verifies the anti-positivist stand of the author of *The Gift* and Van Veen’s treatise on time that substantiates Nabokov’s transcendental imagination, this collection of seemingly disjointed somnambulistic remembrances and observations elucidates a third stage in the evolution of Nabokov’s metaphysics. Barabtarlo explains it both straightforwardly and with a great metaphorical dexterity: “Death, as a personal end of time, <grows> into an overarching theme. <...> Nabokov seems to be testing Dunne’s idea that Time is not an inexorable, Heraclitic river-stream that cannot be entered twice and so on; rather, it is an alternating electric current that pulses in both directions” (163). In Barabtarlo’s view, the “dream experiment” allows Nabokov not only to run a trial of Dunne’s hypothesis that time flows forward as well as backwards, connecting the two worlds – visible and invisible, – but it also transforms dreams into tools of supermundane cognition. Recording dreams and detecting post-factum “trigger” events that possibly provoke them is Dunne’s way of proving that the flow of time is recursive. For Nabokov, dream records serve this purpose, but they also give figurative and verbal body to the mystery of our existence and the “sweet” secret that follows its end.

No one in Nabokov studies has explored death as Nabokov’s main theme and a storytelling device with greater subtlety than Gennady Barabtarlo. Acutely aware of his own fate as an émigré and bitterly proud of the Russian emigration’s mission to carry the cultural legacy of their ravaged, subjugated, doomed and dumber *Patria* into the “afterlife” of another terrain and a different civilization, Gennady Aleksandrovich was unable to return to the Soviet Union and loath to step over the actual – guarded at the gangway by camouflage-wearing men with guns – threshold of its Post-Soviet reincarnation. The closed doorway for him was real as well as it was discarnate. “Russia is no more,” he once told me, “because St. Petersburg is the capital of the Leningrad Region and there is a body of a monster in the mausoleum in the Fair Square in Moscow.” For a person of such passionate commitment to the Russian literature and language, history and spirit, bereavement for a deceased birthplace was desolating and endless. Nabokov studies helped to fill in the void.

Prof. Barabtarlo surveyed death as a border-crossing trope in the novel about the plight of poor Cincinnatus, but also in *Pnin*, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, and short stories. His monographs – *Phantom of Fact: A Guide to Nabokov's Pnin* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1989), *Aerial View: Essays on Nabokov's Art and Metaphysics* (New York: P. Lang, 1993), *The Sparkling Hoop* (*Сверкающий обруч: О движущей силе у Набокова*, St. Petersburg: Hyperion, 2003), and especially *Nabokov's Creation* (*Сочинение Набокова*, St. Petersburg: Ivan Limbakh Press, 2011), – along with essays and commentary to his translations of *Pnin*, *Pale Fire*, and *The Original of Laura*, testify to his intense preoccupation with Nabokovian transitions between conscious representations of reality and gray subliminal zones, artistic realms and metaphysical dimensions, worlds and words that the writer mastered so deftly and he, as his critic, detected with acuteness and flair. Take “St. Petersburg,” for example, which came out in *Nabokov in Context*, edited by David M. Bethea and Siggy Frank (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2018). In this jewel-like essay on the significance and accidentality for Nabokov of his native city, Barabtarlo discusses St. Petersburg as a portable homeland, a place that can be revisited commemoratively, rather than in the flesh. Having encompassed only eighteen years of Nabokov's childhood and adolescence, the city provided him with an endless array of blueprints for future settings in fiction, Barabtarlo remarks. He also observes the gradual erasure of pain the emigration had inflicted on the two generations that left Russia after 1917 – the one that died abroad mourning the loss, and the other, that contained and transformed it. This observation helps him to imbibe Nabokov's remembrance of the abandoned country with the immediacy and intensity of a spectral return, “the memory itself transfusing into a masterful image of it – a memory committed to memory, commandeered by imagination” (79). It is not hard to notice that this kind of changeover is intrinsic to Barabtarlo as well as to his subject: they are united in their metaphysical ability to amplify estrangement in thinking and language, art and the heartache it helps to cure.

The affinity transpires further, in *Insomniac Dreams*. All five parts of the elegantly written and gracefully designed book aim to elucidate Nabokov's desire to look beyond what is physically tangible and understand death while estranging it doubly and triply – through a study of dreams as glimpses into the invisible realm, through ruminations on time, the supra-conscious complexity of which remains unrecognized by the majority of mere mortals, and, finally, through art that can convey the correlation between the two. Part I, “Chronic Condition,” allows us to learn about

Nabokov's interest in Dunne and the resemblance of his ideas to those of Pavel Florensky (1882—1937), but also provides a rich biographical background for the “dream experiment”: the suffering of the insomniac, the link to the discursive writings that preceded the recording of dreams, including the very important 1951-1959 diary, and Nabokov's prior interest in all kinds of theoretical, scientific, and artistic matters that extend “Time into and beyond the philosophical realm, into the hereafter” (31). Part III, that follows the diary proper, supports some of the claims made in the introductory essay. It offers citations about dreams from letters and journals that Nabokov wrote between 1926 and 1976, all of them carefully composed, none of them, subjected to the same kind of authorial scrutiny the dream log's entries received in 1964. (The author of *Insomniac Dreams* supplements that oversight by supplying his own Dunne-inspired dream interpretations). In Part IV, Nabokov's fictional dreams are collected under the rubrics that in some measure correspond to the author's own: “Professional,” “Doom,” “Memories of the Remote Past,” “Precognitive,” “Oneiric Realism,” “Father.”

Finally, there is Part 5, “Artistic Time,” Barabtarlo's final tribute to Nabokov's art and an exploration of “the riddle of human existence” that it perpetuates (191). Provocative and profound, the essay reconnoiters Nabokovian oeuvre in its entirety, placing it in the context of times and ideas the writer both experienced and foresaw. Every work of Nabokov's fiction Barabtarlo surveys in it appears as a connecting link between the past and the future: the writer's as well as ours. From Nabokov's longing for his prematurely deceased father to his anxiety about Dmitri, his reckless son who became the true guardian of the family's legacy, and from the scientific discoveries the writer made in the 1940-50s to the modern evolutionists' confirmation of his prophetic vision, the looping arc of Barabtarlo's research spans generations and reveals vistas that are yet unexplored. Because of its scope, the final part of *Insomniac Dreams* offers a perfect closure to several lives: Nabokov's, his son's, and the author's. Although such things rarely happen, Barabtarlo's visionary final words summarize both his effort and that of his subject:

<...> from these seemingly arbitrary coincidences a gentle fogwind blows coming from the unknowable, forever arrested present tense of the story's author, in the reversible perspective of space without dimension, and time without duration. (192)

ii. The Meeting of Minds

Among a number of curious things John Dunne shared with Vladimir Nabokov was an acquaintance with H. G. Wells,⁴ a particular fondness for St. George the dragon slayer,⁵ and the kind of precociousness that transforms sickly children into young wizzes obsessed with natural science (Lepidopterology in case of Nabokov, who took to studying butterflies after a prolonged bout of pneumonia) or abstract scholarship (philosophy in Dunne's case: bedridden after a serious accident at nine, he pestered his nurse with questions about time).⁶ Both were multitalented and daring. While advancing his writing career, Nabokov dabbled in soccer, tennis, and boxing and wholeheartedly considered butterfly-hunting and lepidopterological studies a part of his professional life more important than literature. Dunne fought in the Second Boer War in South Africa, designed and tested airplanes for the British military forces and private companies, then switched to writing how-to books on fly fishing and ruminating on time in volumes that brought him fame; he ended his life an author of hefty and well-illustrated children's books, issued by prestigious publishing houses.⁷

In spite of Nabokov's three-year sojourn in England at the time of his university studies, the two never met. Neither it is clear when Nabokov first read Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (London: Faber & Faber; New York: McMillan, 1927), the treatise so popular that it merited four sequels, *The New Immortality* among them (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939). Nevertheless, the "Dream Diary" Nabokov kept thirty-seven years after the first publication of this unconventional and rather prescriptive book, contains several direct allusions to the British writer. On the very first index card outlining the "dream experiment" that was supposed to replicate

⁴ Dunne became friends with Wells in 1902. In 1914, the writer made his first trip to Russia, where Vladimir Nabokov Sr. hosted him for dinner in the family's mansion at 47 Bolshaya Morskaya Street in St. Petersburg. John William Dunne, *An Experiment with Time* (New York: McMillan, 1927), 106; Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990), 178.

⁵ Dunne's book for children, *An Experiment with St. George* (1938), came out two years after Nabokov set one of his most exquisite short stories in a town perched atop Mount St. George ("Spring in Fialta," in *Sovremennye zapiski*, July 1936). Nabokov, who celebrated his birthday on April 23, was aware of his two patrons, Shakespeare and St. George, whose name-days fall on that date. See Gavriel Shapiro, "Nabokov and Early Netherlandish Art," in *Nabokov at Cornell*, ed. Gavriel Shapiro (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003), 248.

⁶ *SM*, 123; Dunne, *Intrusions?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955), 85.

⁷ *The Jumping Lions of Borneo* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937); *An Experiment with St. George* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), published in the US as *St. George and the Witches* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1939). Facts of Dunne's biography are scattered through his books, *An Experiment with Time* (1927) and *Intrusions?* (1955).

Dunne's, the name of the engineer-philosopher is penciled in (32). In another dream record, there is a reference to Dunne's book Nabokov currently seems to be reading (37). More importantly, it is the method of collecting one's dreams and then observing and noting down follow-up events that coincide with the somnambular sequence wholly, partially, or in a miniscule but critical detail that Nabokov borrowed from Dunne. According to Barabtarlo, the former was interested in the latter's "serialism," the theory that "Time should be perceived as a series of new dimensions, or layers, ever unfolding before the mind of an observer into a receding mental vista: time that *times* the passage of Time, measures it to infinity" (15).

Dunne's recognition of time's recursive flow, its lack of unidirectionality, leads him to an explanation of dreams in a traditional way, as a nighttime mental activity processing experiences from the past, and, atypically, as something precognitive – our mind's response to a trigger event that, in a mundane sense, happened *after* we wake up. "Time courses back and forth, looping moebiusly as it were, depending on the terrace we take for observation, even though it somehow turns out to be one and the same in the end" (171). Due to this feature of time, a guillotine someone is dreaming of can turn out to be a heavy object that wakes the dreamer up by hitting him on the head; a church bell one admires in his sleep may become the chiming of the alarm clock, – the possibilities of cause-and-effect reversal on the outskirts of dreamland are endless (18). When Barabtarlo outlines this theory, he makes sure to explain that, although Dunne did not believe in the invisible realm, "the spirit world," that correlated with our inexplicable, postmortem, future, Nabokov championed its existence – as did another scholar of dreamtime, the Russian philosopher Florensky.⁸ If, for Dunne, dreams that are prompted "backwards" merely comment on the nature of time, namely, its lack of a unidirectional vector, for Florensky and Nabokov, they "occur in the realm that may hold the key to the fundamental truth about the world we inhabit," including the possibility of human immortality or, as Nabokov himself put it, "the future of the immortal soul" (14, 8, 161).

Dunne does not assert the existence of a link between Time's pliability and recursive flow, the view of the afterlife as a dominion where the soul survives, and proleptic dreams, but Barabtarlo does. One of the central tenets of *Insomniac Dreams* is that Dunne's ideas captivated

⁸ Prof. Barabtarlo states that Nabokov was unable to read Florensky's *Iconostasis* (1996) and other works elucidating these views, because they were published posthumously and after the collapse of the Soviet Union (14n).

Nabokov the dream-catcher and dream-teller, urging him to investigate the artistic possibilities of the overlap in his fiction. “In a sense, Nabokov conducted a lifelong nightly experiment with Time, under a condition where the term ‘chronic’ reclaims its original meaning and extends Time into and beyond the philosophical realm, into the hereafter, which Nabokov studied in life and fiction, day and night, and where ‘there should be time no longer’,” the critic suggests (31). This statement undeniably pays tribute to Dunne’s considerable influence on the writer while recognizing Nabokov’s sovereignty in figuring out and exploring the world’s fundamental truths. One question that remains unanswered in this insightful and sophisticated analysis of the relationship between the two thinkers, though, is how much of the correlation between recursive time, dreams, and the otherworld the 1964 “Dream Diary” revealed to its chronically insomniac keeper and how much it merely confirmed. If Nabokov’s nightly experiment with time was, indeed, “lifelong,” could it have already acquired certain Dunnesque and even Florenskian proportions prior to 1964? And if it did, what else can we discover in Nabokov’s seemingly fragmented, but also eerily related dream records?

Prof. Barabtarlo himself acknowledges Nabokov’s awareness of time’s pliability and recurrence before the beginning of the “dream experiment” when he draws a parallel between Nabokovian methods of storytelling and his understanding, theoretical handling, and artistic representation of time. Although references to Nabokov’s declarations on “the essential spirality of all things in their relation to time,” first made in *Conclusive Evidence* (1951),⁹ are omitted from *Insomniac Dreams*, we are offered a no less exciting glimpse at the authorial elaboration on time’s pivotal role in Nabokov’s ontology and metaphysics, entered in his diary on February 16, 1951, i.e. two days after the autobiography’s publication:

From the point of view of evolutionary dialectics the hereafter finds its beautiful proof in the following series:

1. Time without consciousness (the lower animal world)
2. Time with consciousness (man = цело век = Conscious Time)

⁹ *SM*, 275.

3. Consciousness without Time (the future of the immortal soul). (161)¹⁰

Made prior to the “dream experiment,” this observation already contains what Barabtarlo terms “Nabokov’s view of time as a primary structuring condition of existence” (xii). On February 18, it is followed by a list of themes Nabokov wishes to explore further in a sequel to *Conclusive Evidence* he by now has begun to contemplate. Reproduced in *Insomniac Dreams*, the list includes a segment on “Dreams,” which may allude to a projected publication of dream records that had accumulated in Nabokov’s journal for that year, including the one about the writer’s father that is cited in *Insomniac Dreams* as proleptic, if not prophetic (3-5; 99-102). According to Barabtarlo, “it is very likely that Nabokov meant to mold his *later* dream experiment into a literary form as well, perhaps with a view to incorporating excerpts into his second book of autobiography” (5, italics mine – OV). However, there is nothing in the diary to suggest that Nabokov was unprepared to link his investigations of time and the afterlife to that of his dreams well *before* 1964.

Other aspects of Nabokov’s dreaming and writing outlined in *Insomniac dreams* expose his pre-existing awareness of a metaphysical as well as an artistic connection between time’s reversibility, the otherworld, and dreaming. Among them is Barabtarlo’s compelling coupling of the writer’s perception of time as a magic folding carpet and Nabokov’s metanarrative strategies that require the reader to undertake recurrent – zigzagging, circular, or looping – movement through his texts. Alluding to this type of textual exploration as “time travel,” the author of *Insomniac Dreams* asserts that “rereading amounts to a spatial reversal of time” (169-170). He then drafts a timeline of Nabokov’s appropriation and elaboration of this method: “It seems that between 1937 and 1944 Nabokov was trying a complex technique of writing forward whilst narrating backward” (171). The fact that Barabtarlo admits Nabokov’s adding the embedded impetus of re-reading to his pre-Montreux novels and short stories also proves that the idea of recursive time came under the writer’s radar more than twenty years before 1964. In other words, the “dream experiment” did happen, but on Nabokov’s terms as well as on those elaborated by Dunne – and for more purposes than one.

¹⁰ Compare this record to Nabokov’s version of the same statement that appeared in his 1964 interview to *Playboy* magazine (SO, 30). It is not accidental that the old diary record gets recycled in that tongue-in-cheek conversation, which, chronologically, precedes the “dream experiment” by nine or ten months.

iii. Dreams and Fiction

In his introduction to the “Dream Log,” Barabtarlo explains that Nabokov’s zeal to carry out Dunne’s experiment to a tee did not endure. Although Dunne’s instructions are detailed and require the dreamer to chase clues of the future’s imposition on his or her dream life with diligence and enthusiasm, Nabokov made only a few sincere attempts at discovering his own power of somnambulistic precognition. After figuring out that a film about scientists who studied soils in Senegal might have provoked an earlier dream in which he ate slightly sugary soil samples in a “small provincial museum” (October 17; 39-40, 43) and discovering a couple of other “trigger” events that led to proleptic dream experiences (November 5; 57-60, 61), the writer continued to record his and his wife’s nighttime visions without doggedly hunting for their reverse causes during hours of wakefulness. Reading the entire log from the first card to the last makes it obvious that most of the dreams in the “Dream Diary” do not fall into the precognitive category.

Some dream narratives, for instance, demonstrate not only Nabokov’s lack of ardor for upholding Dunne’s postulates, but also his frequent deviation from the logic of the experiment. His suggesting, in a record of October 21, that Véra’s dream about an elevator is “connected with a slow lift she used when visiting doctor in Geneva yesterday,” reveals how tepid his desire to prove the existence of dream “triggers” in the future really was (44). The November 7 dream about Nabokov’s shaking hands with Véra’s clumsy hospital nurse during a shopping trip in Montreux is followed by another reflection on the roots of that vision harkening back to the past, rather than to the future: “During tour morning walk we had met the small boy of V’s hairdresser. <...> She shook hands with him, I did not” (62). On November 8, Nabokov again interprets his dream about attending a party with his nephew Vladimir Sikorski and Sikorski’s mother, the writer’s sister Elena, retroactively: “On the 6th V. had been asked by my nephew to visit the flat he was arranging for himself and his bride” (63); “Some kind of party connected with the (real) fact that my nephew V.S. is about to get married” (62).

Even Barabtarlo’s perceptive and witty interpretations of several dreams, supplied as a commentary to the log entries, often point out “trigger” events that happened before, rather than after a particular dream experience. The critic’s association of the embarrassing episode, in which Nabokov’s consumption of soil samples led to an unpleasant conversation with a museum director

turned doctor, with the 1939 short story “The Visit to the Museum” is brilliant, but out of tune with Dunne’s requirement to look ahead for clues (40-41). Ditto the parallel Barabtarlo draws between the dream in which Nabokov is seeing his mother off first at a railway station, then at a dock or a “pavilion-like affair” at the top of the hill from where a sea liner is about to depart, and Sebastian Knight’s tardy arrival at the train station to see his mother off (60-61). Although the similarities of plot are, indeed, striking, it is the work of Nabokov’s imagination, produced decades prior to the “dream experiment,” rather than a future event that serves as a foundation for the oneiric narrative.

Nabokov’s mind undeniably met Dunne’s during the short spell of dream collecting, but was it only an interest in the Englishman’s theory that moved his hand forward, prompting him to fill out one hundred and eighteen cards in the course of three months? An avid hunter of butterflies, armed with years of field and laboratory experience, the writer knew that success of a scientific project depended on its duration and scrupulousness. Hence the consistency of the dream records, their lucid structure and fussiness of detail. However, Nabokov could not but appreciate the other possibilities the gathering of dreams allowed to him as an artist. The dream narratives that kept emerging from under his pen were matter-of fact “scientific,” but also playful and revelatory, reminiscent of works of fiction he had already written and propitious for those that will come to life in the future. For example, the checking of exam papers and the mention of a sordid love affair in the December 29, 1964, dream makes us think of “The Vane Sisters” (1951), but so does the motif of shutter slats and a reference to “a passage which <Nabokov> could not identify translated into French” (89-90): the French Professor’s struggle with “translating” the message from deceased women occurs after he “slipped into sleep” in a room, where “the sun through the tawny window shades penetrated a dream that somehow was full of Cynthia.”¹¹ The episode of a “dumpy” girl crying because of her insensitive husband’s words echo the rejection of uncomely Hazel Shade by her date (66),¹² while the paternal anguish Nabokov feels in a barbershop while Dmitri is “being massaged or having his hair cut” reflects the distant, bitter, unmollified pain of the Kasbeam barber in *Lolita*.¹³

¹¹ *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Vintage, 2008), 631.

¹² *PF*, 44-45, 49.

¹³ In the dream, Dmitri, in a barbershop, is being clumsily, desperately entertained by his father (44); in *Lolita*, the barber proudly mentions his son who died thirty years ago to the perplexed and unsympathetic Humbert. *L*, 213.

Insomniac Dreams does not emphasize the connection between these episodes in Nabokov's dreams and in his fiction, but it offers many examples of other autopoetic literary dreams in the "Dream Diary." For a reader trained in Nabokovian sleuthing, looking up other, yet undisclosed, bits of Nabokoviana in the author's dream log could provide hours of puzzle-like amusement. However, nothing but the major event in Nabokov's life – his own death, which he foresees in many of his dreams and the mentions of which Barabtarlo subtly incorporates into his commentary (61, 71n, 79, 86, 183-184, 191-192), – appears to be related to Dunne's experiment in the same straightforward fashion as a collapse of a headboard may be related to one's dream about a guillotine. This is why it is so gratifying to consider Nabokov's future literary output, conceivably precipitated by the dreams recorded in 1964, a direct result of the experiment. One wonders, whether there can be a link between Nabokov's encountering, in his sleep, a brigade of ridiculous Red Army men who march through the fields to do some recreational fishing, and the group of grim, foreign-looking men in dark suits who crush Ada's birthday picnic (70).¹⁴ Or whether the "intensely erotic dream" ("blood on sheet") about Nabokov's sister Olga can be another strange, but explicit precursor of siblings' sexual encounters in *Ada or Ardour: A Family Chronicle*. We won't have definitive answers to these questions, even though the latter dream contains the novel's key word (Nabokov describes himself as standing "near a window, sighing, half-seeing view, brooding over the possible consequence of incest" (87-88)), because the life of artistic imagination follows its own convoluted paths, the ones that Dunne did not survey in his treatise. But the wonderment alone is precious and very much in tune with how the writer himself described his dream experiences as "fate and farce merging" (91).

To come to the point, the ideas of the British philosopher did inspire the soon-to-be author of *Ada*, along with two other "Montreux" novels, but in oblique and multifaceted ways. In Barabtarlo's essay on the aesthetic principles and metaphysical groundworks of the Nabokovian art that the "dream experiment" supplied, augmented, or refined, the inspiration is associated not only with Nabokov's future works, but also with the writer's prophetic insights – the "clarity of vision" of the future that allowed him to "predict" in fiction such modern technological inventions as electronic clocks, Instagram, and emojis (173-74). A long list of not-so-coincidental echoes of the future in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, "Double Talk," "Time and Ebb," "Lance," and

¹⁴ *A*, 286.

Lolita graces the final pages of the critic's ultimate essay, leading him to a conclusion that "cossetting, cherishing, and adorning life in an imaginary reconstruction of its givenness accessible (1) to the senses, (2) to psychological empathy, and (3) to metaphysical intuition was Nabokov's artistic self-assignment" (191). It is hard to disagree with this argument. Perhaps, if one point can be added to it, it would be to say that the assignment lasted all of Nabokov's life and was undoubtedly his own, while Dunne's presence in his world and art remained a curious and fatidic chance, an inspiring episode, a secret, now providentially revealed to us by the masterful investigator.

Abbreviations:

A – *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969)

G – *The Gift* (New York, Vintage, 1991)

L – *Lolita* (New York, Vintage, 1997)

PF – *Pale Fire* (New York, Vintage, 1989)

SM – *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Vintage, 1989)

SO – *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage, 1990)

