

## INTRODUCTION TO A SPECIAL ISSUE “NABOKOV AND POPULAR CULTURE”

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This special issue brings together research by contributors working on three continents, ranging from long-time Nabokovians to those newer in the field, and by contributors whose approaches demonstrate the breadth of popular culture studies and its relevance for Nabokov studies. The essays moreover affirm that intermediality—be it in the form of incorporating two or more media in one work of art or in the form of transferring a work from one artistic medium into another—looms large in any discussion of Nabokov’s oeuvre in relation to a variety of cultural products and practices subsumed under the broad concept of *popular culture*. This issue of our journal features exciting supplementary material. It combines traditional critical analyses of literary and filmic texts with visually and aurally buttressed inquiries into digitally mediated worlds unimaginable in the fictional realms of Nabokov’s novels. Our multifaceted, multi-channel investigation of Nabokov and popular culture attests to the ubiquitous and medially variegated interests of contemporary literary and artistic expression related to Nabokov and his writings in the widest sense.

Three papers further develop a prevalent strain in the study of Nabokov and popular culture by analyzing visual elements in his fiction and in film adaptations of his works. Marie Bouchet scrutinizes what she calls “non-canonical pictorial references” in Nabokov’s works and, most prominently, Nabokov’s use of popular culture and of advertising as an intermedial device that assumes various functions on “the level of plot, characterization, structure, motifs, and poetics.” Bouchet includes Nabokov’s *Lolita* screenplay in her discussion of how the writer envisioned ‘filmic translations’ of his literary devices. Following a related hermeneutic trajectory, Péter Tamás argues that in addition to discussing Nabokov’s references to films in

his fiction and to re-reading his novels through their cinematic adaptations, we need to become aware that particularly *Lolita* demonstrates how the writer adapted film-specific features into stylistic strategies in his narrative texts. Frank Göbler’s transnational analysis of two film adaptations of *Masen’ka / Mary* expands the breadth of critical reflection around movie versions of Nabokov’s works by drawing our attention away from *Lolita*.

Juan Martinez’s essay moves beyond the filmic in the special issue’s purview by also investigating television shows, pop novels, and popular songs. His essay highlights the cultural significance and possible motivations behind referencing Nabokov in specific contexts in the sense that the central element is not a Nabokov work per se but rather its aura as cultural capital—an aura that is strategically evoked, for instance, as a means of characterization. Martinez provides additional depth to his essay with an extensive list of references that amply demonstrates the ubiquity of Nabokov in contemporary popular works and invites further research.

Suellen Stringer-Hye offers new insights into the poetics of Nabokov’s texts from a technologically innovative perspective. She shows how the query language Cypher—which allows us to visualize and link nodes within text-based data sets—indicates hitherto unexplored pathways into the textures and thus the poetics of literature. By providing access to her graphic rendering of a narrative text, Stringer-Hye invites readers to fathom the analytical opportunities embedded in a computer-generated depiction of Nabokov’s story “The Vane Sisters.”

Pan Shan and Ulrich Eschborn draw us back from virtual worlds to a very real, but often overlooked venue of Nabokov reception: the publishing industry of the People’s Republic of China. On the one hand, they present and interpret the publication history of Chinese-language *Lolita* translations. On the other hand, they illustrate ways in which such translations manage to integrate Nabokov’s novel into Chinese cultural contexts and literary traditions, and the ways in which a determinedly popular novelist evokes *Lolita* to further his own success. In doing so, they contribute to an opening-up of Nabokov and popular culture discourse beyond the traditional preoccupations of Western researchers.

Finally, Nassim Balestrini and Silke Jandl investigate the intermedial nature of the American singer Lana del Rey’s (a.k.a. Elizabeth/Lizzy Grant’s) artistic infatuation with Nabokov, which informs not only her work as a singer-songwriter (including her music videos) but also her self-representation in social media. Looking at Del Rey’s artistic personae through the lens of how internet memes emerge and thrive reveals how the singer-songwriter incorporates a veritable palimpsest of *Lolita* references in her work, including the

text of Nabokov’s novel, the film adaptations, and their promotional materials. Their analysis delineates the intermedial footwork with which Del Rey interlaces allusions to well-established visual features of *Lolita* derived from the movie versions with adaptations of non-visual cinematic features and with quotations from Nabokov’s novel.

This special issue demonstrates that Nabokov’s public personae, fictional works, and reputation as a seminal writer continue to be firmly entrenched in popular culture on a global scale. In addition to addressing international and medially diverse phenotypes of his cultural longevity, the contributions published here contemplate the possibilities of understanding Nabokov and his impact on cultural processes and products through digital forms of analysis and representation as well as through the discussion of popular culture that mainly resides online in digital formats. It is, therefore, more than timely and necessary to go beyond the novel–film nexus and the focus on *Lolita*, although this central text nearly always looms large and contributes at least to the discussion of adaptations and other intermedial acts of perception that establish Nabokov and his works as major inspirations in popular culture.

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