

Max Prokofiev

TERRA FALSA

‘Please go away, this is private property,’ said Van in Vulgar Latin, French, Canadian French, Russian, Yukonian Russian, very low Latin again: *proprieta privata*.
Ada, or Ardor

In introductory notes to the American edition of his short story *Ultima Thule*, Vladimir Nabokov wrote: “Perhaps, had I finished my book, readers would not have been left wondering <...> was Falter a quack? Was he a true seer?” [Nabokov 1995b, p. 653]. Indeed, the question seems to be the main one concerning this particular text. Nevertheless, the more you read the story, the stronger is temptation to change an object of these doubts: not whether this time the writer took the role of a quack himself. Starting its way in the middle of *Ultima Thule*, the platitudinal Plato-Socratic crate driven by Sineusov and Falter is doomed, after a back boom, to run off the plateau of the text; afterwards, we can only say “Good riddance of bad riddles!” whose glaring keys and no less glaring mistakes will enchant us nevermore.

It might be interesting that in the same notes Nabokov (perhaps with hidden sorrow) mentioned passingly: “Freudians are no longer around” [Ibid., p. 654], insofar as Andrei Arieiev presumes that “the death of the Italian professor appears to be not only an evidence of the fatal power of Falter’s revelation, but also Nabokov’s permanent well-aimed arrow directed at ‘the Vienna delegation’.”¹ (I can add here, that the writer immutably called Freud “the Viennese quack,” while Sineusov said about his attempts “to persuade himself that he [Falter] is a half-

¹ Arieiev 2000, p. 355. All quotations from the Russian texts (apart from Nabokov’s stories and introductory notes) are translated by me unless otherwise stated.

wit or a *kvak* (as you [he addresses to his wife] used to Russianize the English synonym for «charlatan»)» [UT 496]².)

However, Andrei Arieu himself falls into another trap – he is distracted by the lustre of money, especially the “foreign currency” with which “Falter measured vividly the truth” [Arieu 2000, p. 358] (100 francs the character charged for the visit are meant)³. The scholar shows that Nabokov could use Plato’s concept of money and one Dostoevsky plotline to create the metaphysical conversation full of regular sophistication and true sophisms; but then Arieu likens the author of *Ultima Thule* to this writing (unlike his teacher) philosopher from Greece and that philosophizing writer from Russia. The only way is left for me: to establish the fact that such a doubling makes the mirror structure of the story even more complicated. After all, it might be not Falter but his brother-in-law who decided to charge (it was he who made a call to the artist), particularly as Sineusov utters that his former tutor lost “all interest in money” after the catastrophe had happened to him [UT 504].

The reason for Arieu’s turn to this topic is quite clear: the coincidence of Falter’s phrase (“[o]ne can believe in the poetry of a wildflower or the power of money”) and the funny trifle Sineusov’s wife wrote being already confined to her bed (“«verse, wildflowers, and foreign currency»)”) was noticed by readers a long time ago. It is no accident that I have quoted the wife’s triad twice, with various brackets: Nabokov himself quoted it in the text. Moreover, the writer highlighted this motif in the translation of the story and finally revealed it in the same American introductory notes [Nabokov 1995b, p. 654]. Vladimir Nabokov evidently wanted us to pay our attention to the fact, but it does not mean that Falter was “a medium, signaling that he communicates with Sineusov’s dead wife” [Arieu 2000, p. 358]. Most significantly, such an artistic device as “echoing” phrases contrasts with the almost authentic philosophical *dialogue* and moves its eternal problems somewhere in ancient Attica. Nabokov leaves notional “Dostoevsky readers,” seeking for some answers, with nothing (or with the Bible, if you like) and makes his own admirers to marvel at the adroitness he shows eluding a special circle of hell created for those who dare to empower their characters with a gift of omniscience and *the* truth.

² The quotations from *Ultima Thule* will be followed by references to the following edition: Nabokov, Vladimir. *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* [1st edition]. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, pp. 496-518.

³ By the way, during the conversation Falter, lacking the will to think of one more boring question, answered off the mark: “Барыня прислала сто рублей” (it could be translated as “Madam’s sent a hundred rubles,” but Nabokov preferred a line more familiar to an American reader: “This is the house that Jack built”). This money rhymes with one hundred francs finely.

All the same, another coincidence does not seem less paramount to me. The Boulevard de la Mutualité (Reciprocity) is meant now. It was there that Falter “lightened his loin” in a small women’s hostel turned into “a small bordello” in the translation [UT 502]. The Boulevard bears such a name because Falter had sex there; cause and effect are artistically mixed. Actually, the whole “hotel episode” is rather artistic (or even artificial): how could Sineusov advise one the right way to picture this hotel while he had never been there? How did he know all “these reflections and impressions” which “formed perhaps the most favorable medium for the flash, the unearthly lightning <...> that struck Falter that night”? How did he know that “[t]he newlyweds who were toiling in the nearest bed paused” hearing “those dreadful sounds”? Or how did he know (feel sorry for this unwitting anaphora) that, during her brother’s meeting with Dr. Bonomini, Eleonora L. was knitting “a grey shawl” (*a scarf*, “шарф” in the original) on a terrace? There is no way that Mr. L. mentioned it, even being a “prattler.”

I hope that these questions haven’t seemed idle. Let’s begin with the latter one. While the victim of the wreck which wreaked havoc on his mind was having a tacky talk with Sineusov, “[h]is sister settled down to her knitting” [UT 508]. When the guests started dressing before heading home, Eleonora “was nimbly extracting a long gray woolen scarf from the sleeve of the overcoat already being offered to him [Falter] by his brother-in-law” [UT 518]. Later we will see that this scarf, which is being and has been knit simultaneously, embodies the whole narrative of *Ultima Thule*.

One should analyze the first part of the story more attentively. As Valery Timofeev has proved through a close-reading of the first page of *Ultima Thule*, Sineusov is an extremely self-reflexive narrator [Timofeev 2017]. The introductory passages are so dense, their form commingles so granoblastically and organically with their essence, that readers can barely agree with the main character who compared his narration with “the torn silks.” Observing the last sentence of the first passage, Timofeev claims:

Skład [translated as ‘cast’] is a storing place, hence *ne xrjašči, a podšipniki* (not cartilages but ball bearings), which are best stored in a warehouse. But ‘not cartilages’ means it is not only *skład* as a warehouse but also as a body-build. ‘Ball bearings for cartilages’ is all about bodily movements, derived from the malephysical build. <...> *Teper’, zadnim čislom* means ‘now, in retrospect,’ or literally: ‘now, by back number.’ The word *číslo* (number) actualizes still another meaning of *skład* as *složenie*, Russian

for ‘mathematical addition,’ adding a pun of withstanding the subtraction: ‘now, in retrospect, explains why he survived the shock: the original figure was large enough to withstand the subtraction.’ [Ibid., p. 90-91]

We can consider another case also, when, after quoting Pushkin’s poem *Wondering the noisy streets* [Pushkin 1999], Sineusov exploits one of its motifs “turning it inside out, inverting it” [Timofeev 2017, p. 97]. The baby, which existence reminds the lyric character that he will be dead while those who are young now will be in the prime of life, turns into a “cadaverkin” (“трупсик”).

Nonetheless, the reflexive mind of Sineusov, permanently finding and catching itself, appears to lose its own position during the pseudo-Socratic game. A reader should be astonished when Falter says to his opponent: “you placed your own self in the position of an enigma, as if the seeker himself were to hide” [UT 513]. It should be added that such an answer was Falter’s reaction to the artist’s question about God. What could it mean that by mentioning God Sineusov hid himself?

The only plausible answer seems to be the following: Sineusov is not just the narrator but the Creator of the story world. The advanced hypothesis may seem a weird one, but I will try to prove that “on the basis of their human core” Sineusov wasn’t “an amateur” like Falter, but “a professional” [UT 502], though he desired to become just a *recruit* of some author. Here I refer to another short story by Nabokov, *Recruiting* [Nabokov 1995a], whose plot is dedicated to a process of finding a model for a text. Its narrator introduces his own character into the story in the third person and then reveals him(self), explaining the difficulty of describing this man: “a self-portrait is seldom successful, because of a certain tension that always remains in the expression of the eyes—the hypnotic spell of the indispensable mirror” [Ibid., p. 400]. Maybe, the nature of Sineusov’s self-reflexivity was the same, with the only difference that (I say, recruiting and reconstructing a phrase from *Recruiting*) the *Ultima Thule* narrator tended his face was made up to look like that of (not a reader, but) a character.

In this case, Falter must be Sineusov’s creation, and this idea can be easily surrounded by appropriate arguments. For instance, they have a similar “handwriting” – or even a *style*. “[H]e expressed his deepest et cetera” [UT 501], writes Sineusov about Falter’s brother-in-law who found the artist sitting at the beach, but in the original it sounds like: “он выразил мне

своё болезное, соболиное” [Nabokov 2019, p. 508], which literally means “he expressed his pitiful, sable” and might be translated as “condelicate painfollences.” Nabokov plays with the rare (or even half-made up) adjective “соболезненный” (condolatory), finding another rare word “болезный” (about a person causing pity) and a contextually unexpected “соболь” (sable) included in it. Falter, for his part, creates a neologism “truthlets” [UT 511] which corresponds to the phrase “родовые истинки” [Ibid., p. 519] in original. The latter is constructed in such a way that the beginning of the first word and the end of the second, being united, form a word “родинки” (birthmarks).

In that light it might be extremely important that Sineusov, chatting with his wife about their “quack,” says: “What a fate! What a mystery! What a *handwriting!*” [My italics. UT 496]. Besides, the last time the narrator saw Falter’s handwriting was when he received that death note, which “ventured to inform him that—here-followed two lines which had been painstakingly and, it seemed, ironically, blacked out” [UT 518]. As we know, in some societies it is forbidden to pronounce and write the name of G_d⁴. If Sineusov discovered that he is the author, his imaginary world would turn into stone, like Medusa spotting her own reflection; therefore, the blackening seems to be quite appropriate. Such a censorship rhymes amusingly with another one⁵, lost in translation:

Ты-то мне ещё ни разу с тех пор не приснилась. *Цензура*, что ли, не пропускает, или сама уклоняешься от этих тюремных со мной свиданий. [Nabokov 2019, p. 504. Italics are mine]

As to you, never once since you died have you appeared in my dreams. Perhaps the authorities intercept you, or you yourself avoid such prison visits with me. [UT 498]

The definition of censorship is inverted rather notably here: it is not about a mention of some real event which should be banned from the fictional story, but about something belonging

⁴ Interestingly, Shandy Sr (about whom I will say more a little further), being interrupted by his wife, cried ““Good G—!” <...> making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time” [Stern 1997].

⁵ Enquiring minds can compare these two with HH’s excuse for his style: “I am writing under observation,” referred to both his custody and self-reflexive narration [Nabokov 1980, p. 12].

to the made-up reality which is not allowed to enter the real life. Sineusov desires fiction to break into his existence:

Но еще хуже были ночные ожидания, когда я лежал и старался не думать, что ты вдруг можешь мне ответить стуком, если об этом подумаю, но это значило только усложнять скобки, фигурные после простых (думал о том, что стараюсь не думать), и страх в середине рос да рос. [Ibid., p. 504]

Even worse, however, was the nighttime waiting, when I would lie in bed, trying not to think how you might suddenly give me an answering knock if I thought about it, but this only meant complicating the mental parenthesization, placing brackets within braces (thinking about trying not to think), and the fear within them grew and grew. [UT 498]

The narrator tries to forget or at least “not to think” about these second {curly} brackets (or “braces”), though it was he who created them. The reason is that Sineusov does not want to be an author who envelopes the newborn world in the *last* brackets; his secret ambition is to be its character included in the first (round) ones⁶.

In this sense, Falter turns out to be his mirror antipode: since he found out that all this time he had been a character, he could no longer be the one (here my reader should recall the metaphors of “the title of things,” the “muddled preface,” and “the main text” [UT 512, 517, 517], exploited by these two heroes). As it is said, Falter “knew his limitations exactly” [UT 501], but new knowledge made him overstep this borderline. Gennady Barabtarlo wrote:

For all his life, with ingenious, cunning and devious tenacity, Nabokov had been looking for a form of almost a mathematical expression, which would admit some reciprocal communication between the fictitious and our worlds, experiencing various ways of making the inhabitants of his fantasies not even to tumble to the existence of our

⁶ Here I can refer my reader to another rhyming Sineusov’s metaphor – “the dream within a dream (when you dream you have awakened)”; to its detailed analysis made by Valery Timofeev [Timofeev 2017, p. 81] I could only add that, first of all, the narrator does definitely not want to wake up and, secondly, this formula replicates amusingly Romeo’s words “Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!” [Shakespeare 1993].

universe – it is impossible without losing sanity (see, for instance, a story *Ultima Thule*), – but to feel the ‘thinning-down of the partition’... [Barabtarlo 2011, p. 176]

Let us observe how a moment of such a guess about the adjacent world is described:

And if, said later the innkeeper, Monsieur Paon, one were going to make comparisons, those sounds [Falter’s roars are meant] resembled most of all the paroxysmal, almost exultant screams of a woman in the throes of infinitely painful childbirth—a woman, however, with a man's voice and a giant in her womb. [UT 502]

This simile is supported further by mentioning Falter’s “animal relief as after the pangs of monster-bearing” [UT 503]. But we should not wonder these comparisons because Falter was actually turned inside out like a glove or these Matřěška dolls, the smallest one of which envelopes all the others [Timofeev 2017, p. 88]. The poor character had to bear the world, a part of which was he himself. That is why Nabokov parodies the Bible here:

— Света бы, — тихо сказал Фальтер в темноте. Мельком подумав, что он во время припадка разбил лампу, хозяин машинально проверил выключатель... но послушно отверзся свет, и Фальтер, мигая, с болезненным удивлением перебежал глазами от руки, давшей свет, к налившейся стеклянной груше, точно впервые видел, как это делается. [Nabokov 2019, p. 510]

‘One would like some light,’ Falter said softly in the dark. Thinking for an instant that Falter had broken the lamp during his fit, the landlord automatically checked the switch, but the light obediently came on, and Falter, blinking in sickly surprise, turned his eyes from the hand that had engendered light to the newly filled glass bulb, as if seeing for the first time how it was done. [UT 503]

The parody is emphasized by using a word “отверзся” in original and a two-fold “landlord” in the translation. The meaning of a German word *der Falter* – a moth – seems to be an equally important aspect of this game.

Adam Ilyich Falter is, firstly, Adam, banished from the new paradise (say, Terra Falsa) to Ultima Thule; then, a son of Ilya Falter – “Илья на боку” (Ilya on his side), as it is said in the Russian version [Nabokov 2019, p. 506] – who, in his turn, is a literary lineal descendant of a famous idle lie-abled Ilya Ilyich Oblomov crossed with his antipode, stoic Stoltz (see Falter Sr’s German surname and the practical enterprise of his son), although the reason of Ilya Falter’s lying is not sloth at all; and, finally, a galvanized doppelganger of Ivan Ilyich, whose death affected our literature so significantly⁷. Falter’s words “I am mortal in a different way than you” appealed to Sineusov [UT 514], were not said for nothing; his unfinished death – or rebirth – throw him to the next level of reality, *from characters to riches*, but he is not extremely happy with it: “I am training myself by willpower not to leave the vivarium, to observe the rules of your mentality as if nothing had happened” [UT 512].

That is the reason for such Sineusov’s thought: “Falter stands outside our world, in the true reality. Reality!—that is the pouter-pigeon throat of the snake that fascinates me” [UT 496]. The narrator hopes that Falter might “swallow” him in the new brackets (here I can remind my reader of the orange which Falter, after his stroke already, ate unpeeled), because Sineusov wants to find himself among “students in this <...> institute of learning hermetically closed to outsiders” and because he (as Falter noticed) “believes that by sharing with the sought-for object the quality of ‘hiddenness’ he brings it closer to him” [UT 496, 513].

Apparently, the sought-for object is Sineusov’s dead wife. By the way, what could we say about her? Was she real? Being afraid of hurting the artist’s feelings, I would neatly claim: yes, since she belonged to the reality of fiction. But of course, Sineusov could only imagine her grave located in the Orthodox cemetery⁸, because she had not one. She had not existed ever. (Do avoid confusion with “She will exist nevermore.”)

⁷ Andrei Babikov has noticed another connection with Tolstoy’s masterpiece, namely the refutation of Aristotelian conclusion “Socrates is mortal,” which can be found not only in *Ultima Thule*, but also in *The Tragedy of Mister Morn*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, and *Pale Fire* [Babikov 2019, p. 149-150].

⁸ “Since the addressee is a dead person, we might suppose that our narrator is either imagining himself being at a cemetery or he is actually there”; “‘Tombal railings’ helps us visualize a cemetery. And yet I am inclined to think that the locus is highly imaginary and that the imaginary nature of the cemetery is emphasized. The reason is that a tombal railing is a distinctive feature of Russian Orthodox graveyards, while this would be quite unusual in Italy or France, where the story takes place” [Timofeev 2017, pp. 86, 94].

Is it just a coincidence that it was namely transfigured Falter who twice called Sineusov “Moustache-Bleue” in the translation? Evidence shows that any explanations of this surname are implausible⁹ except for a reference to *La Barbe bleue*, or Bluebeard. Monsieur Sineusov did murder his wife not only by “making a child to a woman when she had tuberculosis of the throat” [UT 497-498], but also literally: continuing the glorious Russian literary tradition (see Gogol), he gave her life and he also killed her. Falter, having visited her level of reality, was in the know.

Actually, Sineusov described it himself, though as if between the lines: “I imagined an eternal torment, a convict’s task, that would serve as the best punishment for such as I, whose thoughts had ranged too far during their life span: namely, to find and gather all these parts, so as to re-create that gravy boat or soup tureen—hunchbacked wanderings along wild, misty shores. And, after all, if one is supremely lucky, one might restore the dish on the first morning instead of the trillionth— and there it is, that most agonizing question of *luck*, of Fortune’s Wheel, of the right lottery ticket, without which a given soul might be denied eternal felicity beyond the grave” [UT 498]. It is quite clear: without creating a wife in your narrative you will not meet her beyond the grave – that is, after the gunshot wounds of “your own ellipsis.” Meanwhile, Falter compared himself to a monkey extracting the numbers at the lottery drawings; unwillingly, he got *lucky*.

However, finding and gathering all these parts, so as not to *re-* but just *create* someone, could be compared with the labour of the Danaïdes, since “everything disintegrated at one furtive touch—words,” for example [UT 499]. We may feel pity for the artist and express our “condelicate painfollences” only, watching how he wears his narrative scarf continuing to knit it.

The only option left for the narrator includes calling a stone “a Pompeian’s foot” and writing about “pebbles [looking] like cuckoo eggs” [UT, both 498]. Her “foot” and her “eggs” are meant, since here Sineusov plays out the phrase “мать-кукушка” (a cuckoo-mother) which refers to those parents who leave the task of raising their offspring on the shoulders of other people. The narrator perceives all the things which (could) be left after *her* as her “cuckoo eggs.” How can we know that? The artist let it out himself, mentioning that his wife was “tormenting him with her tracks on the beach, with the stones on the beach” [UT 507]. What

⁹ For instance, see Arieiev’s confusion [Arieiev 2000, pp. 365-366].

traces, however, could be left on a “strip of shingle”? The converse ones only: if a trail cannot be left on the stones, then there will be a stone reminding not of the trail but of the foot which could made one.

But in addition to reader’s guess, Sineusov reveals himself straightly: the artist names his wife “his *ghostly goal*, his darling, such a darling *earthly creation*” [My italics. UT 507] which he “is doomed <...> to finish recounting to himself” by using some “physical nature” (pebbles, for instance) [UT 518]. The desperate husband firstly loses both his own and his wife’s heads (“Do you remember <...>? Assuming, of course, that memory can live without its headdress?”), and then clarifies his phrase “were lunching” (“завтракали”) using a note “partaking of nourishment” (“принимали пищу”), because she does not know what “завтрак” (lunch) is: she has no “завтра” (tomorrow) [UT 496]. The difficulty of the task is thoroughly impressive. Therefore, he claims that “two possibilities exist: the first is his work, his art, the consolation of his art”, and Falter is the second [UT 506]. Only through his art, his narrative Sineusov could gain his goal. Seemingly, that is where “that fabled bay” – or *Lukomor’е* in original [Nabokov 2019, p. 503] – came from. *She* is a citizen of fiction, Terra Falsa, and Sineusov should perform this play, all the roles, on his own: “How much I wanted her to bear me a child, the red-nosed widower informed the walls” [UT 497]. No French garlicky doctor, no wife, no cadaverkins – just walls are around. The artist describes the process rather artistically:

... how can I reconcile myself to your disappearance, to this gaping hole, into which slides everything—my whole life, wet gravel, objects, and habits—and what tombal tailings can prevent me from tumbling, with silent relish, into this abyss? Vertigo of the soul. [UT 497]

He has taken the place of his imaginary beloved and now recounts her to himself. Notably, “душекружение” (“vertigo of the soul”) rhymes with “динамика душ” (“the dynamics of the psyche” – or souls, to be more precise), which was a subject of Dr. Bonomimi’s study.

Since his wife lives in *Lukomor’е*, which derives from Pushkin’s poem *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, then the same poet may excellently help to develop the further narration. Sineusov

argues with his lines (“‘Indifferent nature,’ says Pushkin. Nonsense!”) and borrows the motifs of youth and death, mixing them out, to create that unborn child [Timofeev 2017, p. 97]. (Besides, we can trace how this “lonely oak” from *Wondering the noisy streets* made the artist think of that “green oak at Lukomor’e,” what could be a reason for this unexpected, interrupting phrase “Oh, my love, how your presence smiles from that fabled bay” [UT 497].) Further, the motif of death “while journey, in the waves” is turned into a storyline about an epic poem *Ultima Thule* and an eponymous kingdom, situated “amid the sea mists, on a melancholy and remote island” [UT 506]. Alexander Dolinin considered the mysterious author of this poem to be an envoy from the other world and asserted that Sineusov, his wife, and “the Northern king” belong to this embedded *Ultima Thule* (which was written in an unknown language so that they could not figure the fact out) as its characters [Dolinin 2008, p. 27].

Interestingly, the dead child from the story alludes to the fourth chapter of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Stern: “Let us proceed ab ovo,” – that is the phrase Sineusov chose to start his dialogue with Falter [UT 509]. These words, for their part, refer to the earlier but contextually useless poems by Horatio to whom Stern alluded himself. As you remember also, “the newlyweds who were toiling” in that hotel, having heard the dreadful sounds, “paused, diverting their eyes in parallel and holding their breath” [UT 502]. It is a recreated episode from Stern’s novel: its illustrious ‘begetting’ beginning represents a story about the conception of its narrator which was interrupted by the woman’s question about winding clock. (1. Here you are an answer to all the questions listed above: Sineusov knows all the dramatis personae and scenes because he has invented them: the boulevard, the hotel, the newlyweds, his wife, Falter, Mr. and Mrs. L... 2. By the way, let me refer you again to Falter’s screams reminding of a woman in the throes of infinitely painful *childbirth*. Significantly, a rather rare Russian word “снутри” – MS Word, for example, underlines it as my typo now – appears in both the “cadaverkin” passage and the episode of Falter’s irradiation, linking them even more closely.) Tristram, who happened to be that fortuneless homunculus, would blame the interrupting as a reason of his future disorders. Therefore, Sineusov’s germ is destined since the moment of Falter’s roar. (Between the lines: Shandy was also a premature baby.) Apropos, I can claim that the chronology given in the story does not contradict my notes.¹⁰ The hero’s wife died “in her sixth month”; Sineusov says that she “was dying” at the moment of a scandal

¹⁰ Although the hero was a little vague about the chronology himself: for example, he began his story with a mention of a lunch which had happened “*a couple of years ago*,” but when Mr. L. met him, he “did not immediately recognize” the artist because “*more than a year had passed since their luncheon*” [My italics. UT 496, 501].

caused by Dr. Bononimi's death; the encounter of Falter and Dr. Bonomini was sometime after the former's transfiguration which took place in autumn¹¹ but before Sineusov talked to Mr. L. on a day in spring. So, if the hotel episode was in September, then six months after would be around March.

What is more, we can imagine that if lovers "pause, diverting their eyes," the man will see "her darling head, the hollow of her temple, the forget-me-not gray of an eye squinting at an incipient kiss, the placid expression of her ears when she would lift up her hair ..." [UT 497]. And then, after her death, he will "indulge in reverie" (Pushkin's line from one and the same poem), trying not to get rid but, conversely, to increase his phantom pain, his literal literary pain for want of a phantom, and dreaming of meeting it beyond the grave, the narration, and the ellipsis.

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¹¹ Mysteriously, Nabokov made a mistake (?) and translated "[к]ак-то прошлой осенью" (one day in the previous autumn) as "the previous spring." However, my assumption is valid even so.

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