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Confession, Obsession and Memory in the Selected Early Russian and Later English Works by Vladimir Nabokov

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma: Confession, Obsession and Memory in the Selected Early Russian and Later English Works by Vladimir Nabokov vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V ……..… dne…… Podpis…….

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Contents

Introduction

"The act of vividly recalling a patch of the past is something that I seem to have been performing with the utmost zest all my life…"[1] writes Vladimir Nabokov in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*. This is true with regard to many of his characters. It is apparent that memory plays a crucial role in shaping Nabokov's characters, who are haunted and obsessed by the past. The burden of memory leads them to confession, which can be either in a form of a letter, or a book they write, or the narrative form which provides an access to the protagonist's thoughts, revealing his inner struggle to come to terms with themselves.

The themes of confession, obsession and memory will be the focus of the present paper. It will be argued that the three themes shape the characters of the analyzed works by Nabokov. Moreover, the paper suggests the way the three themes developed in Nabokov's writings, starting with his earlier works written in Russian before the writer moved to America in 1940, and the later works written in English.

The first chapter will provide the information about Vladimir Nabokov and his works. It is followed by the discussion of his earlier works written in Russian. These are: the novel *Despair,* written in 1936, the 1936 short story "Spring in Fialta", the 1939 novel *The Enchanter* and the later works, written in English, such as: the 1943 short story "That in Aleppo Once…", the 1948 short story "First Love" and his most well-known novel *Lolita* written in 1955. First, an overview for each work will be given and then the analysis.

The discrepancy between the way Nabokov's characters perceive the world and present it to the reader and the way they are seen by the reader can be explained by the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian theoretic and Nabokov's contemporary, who introduced the notion of heteroglossia into the literary theory. In his essay *Discourse in the Novel,* Bakhtin writes:

> The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorečie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory (*London: Everyman's Library, 1999), 55.

> genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorečie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized).[2]

Bakhtin explains heteroglossia as another's speech, another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. According to Bakhtin, such speech serves simultaneously two speakers, and expresses at the same time two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. Bakhtin later explains, that the narrator's story is structured against the background of normal literary language. According to him, every moment of the story has a conscious relationship with this normal language and its belief system and is, in fact, set against them *dialogically:*

> One point of view opposed to another, one accent opposed to another… This interaction, this dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems, permits authorial intentions to be realized in such a way that we can acutely sense their presence at every point in the work. The author is not to be found in the language of the narrator… - but rather, the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his work.[3]

As Bakhtin points out, the reason for this dialogue of languages is in order for the author to remain neutral with regard to language, as a third party in a quarrel between two people, despite the fact that he might be biased.

Nabokov's works are written mostly from the first person narrator whose voice is predominant on the background of voices of other characters of the literary work. The narrator imposes their vision of the world and the confessional mode

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[2] M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," In *Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin: The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austen: University of Texas press, 1981) , 263.

[3] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 263.

emphasizes the effect and gets the reader on his side. These characters haunted by their memories and obsessed with love or an idea are reluctant to face any other vision of reality.

The aim of the present thesis is to analyze the three recurrent themes of confession, obsession and memory in the selected works by Vladimir Nabokov: *Despair*, "Spring in Fialta", *The Enchanter*, "That in Aleppo Once…", "First Love" and *Lolita* to reveal the way these themes shape the characters and their understanding of the world. The hypothesis is that the three themes analyzed developed throughout the Nabokov's works during the time. The later works, it will be argued, present more complex characters in respect to the key themes of confession, obsession and memory.

1. Nabokov and his works

> I am an American writer, born in Russia and educated in England where I studied French literature, before spending 15 years in Germany. I came to America in 1940 and decided to become an American citizen, and make America my home.[4]

This is how Vladimir Nabokov characterizes himself in the interview to Alvin Toffler for *Playboy* issued in January 1964, Nabokov says. In his another interview to Alfred Appel Jr. Nabokov elaborates on the nationality of a writer:

> I have always maintained, even as a schoolboy in Russia, that the nationality of a worthwhile writer is of secondary importance… The writer's art is his real passport. His identity should be immediately recognized by a special pattern or unique coloration… I think of myself as an American writer who has once been a Russian one.[5]

John Burt Foster Jr. in his book *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism* asserts that the Russian tradition alone cannot account for Nabokov's cultural multiplicity. He provides examples of his émigré works, such as *Despair*, "Spring in Fialta"' and "Cloud, Castle, Lake". According to Foster, even Nabokov's contemporaries sensed something non-Russian in his work. Foster than provides a quote from Nabokov's critic, Adamovich, who stated that Nabokov is a major Russian writer "out of step with Russian literature". [6] Foster explains this European tendency in Nabokov's works by the circumstances of his childhood. "As an émigré author who had earned a place in Russian culture during the difficult conditions of exile, but at the same time in the interstices of these works he was forging an

[4] Alvin Toffler, "Interview: Vladimir Nabokov." *Playboy*, January, 1964. http://reprints.longform.org/playboy-interview-vladimir-nabokov

[5] Alfred Appel, Jr. and Vladimir Nabokov, "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov", University of Wisconsin Press Vol. 8, No. 2, A Special Number Devoted to Vladimir Nabokov (Spring, 1967), pp. 127-152. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207097

[6]John Burt Foster, Jr. *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 8. file:///F:/Diploma/John%20Burt%20Foster%20Nabokov's%20Art%20of%20Memory%20and%20European%20Modernism.pdf

unusually broad outlook on European culture."[7]

Born in St.Peterburg, in 1899 in a nobel family, he was exposed to English and French from the early childhood. In his autobiography Speak Memory, he recalls very vividly his childhood and the years before his move with his wife and son to America. One of the chapters of the autobiography is dedicated to his French governess. It is worth noting that even before the first edition of the autobiography was published in 1951, the story known as Mademoiselle O. written in French had been already published. Thus, Nabokov wrote freely in three languages. What is also significant, is that Nabokov translated into English the masterpieces of the Russian literature, such as nineteenth century verse by Pushkin and Lermontov, later Tyutchev and Fet, and also the least accessible prose by Gogol as well as the medieval poem *Slovo o Polku Igoreve*. According to Brian Boyd, Nabokov made Pushkin part of the world's heritage and not only Russian.[8]

After the Revolution of 1917, Nabokov's family fled first to Crimea and later to western Europe. For a while Nabokov studied at Trinity College, Cambridge. And only after that Nabokov moved to Berlin, where he had lived and worked for fifteen years. There he met his wife Vera in 1923. Martin Amis, in his book *Visiting Mrs Nabokov*, recalls his interview with Vera Nabokov. As he discusses his visit, he states that having had the same kind of multilingual upbringing, Vera had been a serious rival with Nabokov as an English teacher in Berlin.[9] Vera was a source of Nabokov's inspiration, at the same time being his editor and translator.

In 1940 the Nabokov family moved to the United States. Brian Boyd while discussing Nabokov's move from writing Russian into writing English by the fact, that he could not earn a living by continuing writing for Russian audience in the United States.[10] It deserves attention, that Nabokov used to write under the name Sirin to avoid being taken for his father, whose name was also Vladimir Nabokov, was politic and criminologist, who had published a significant number of papers.

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[7] Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, 10.

[8] Brian Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 198.

[9] Martin Amis, *Visiting Mrs Nabokov and Other Excursions* (London: Vintage, 2005), 118.

[10] Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov*, 189.

In 1947 Nabokov was offered a permanent position in Cornell. He later became a regular writer for *Atlantic Monthly* and *New Yorker.* He started writing *Lolita,* his most famous novel in 1950 and published it in 1955. His next novel, *Pnin*, came out in 1957 in form of series in *New Yorker*. Next year, according to Brian Boyd, *Lolita* "caught attention of America"[11] According to Boyd, George Weidenfeld's publishing firm had been virtually made by Lolita's success.[12] The novel's success let him leave his position at Cornell and dedicate his full time to writing.

Nabokov passion for butterflies is widely known, but the fact that Nabokov is a well-known scientist lepidopterist is not. As Brian Boyd states, in Europe Nabokov was a talented collector, but in America he became a scientist.[13] Butterflies and moths are represent in the vast bulk of his works, being a recurrent motif.

Jonathan Yardley in his review of Nabokov's autobiography *Speak, Memory* notes that Nabokov was haunted and obsessed by the past.[14] "The act of vividly recalling a patch of the past is something that I seem to have been performing with the utmost zest all my life…"[15] Yardley continues by stating that even those of us who are cursed with defective or selective memory can find parallels to our own attempts to figure out where we came from and who we are.

> I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip. And the highest enjoyment of timelessness - in a landscape selected at random – is when I stand among butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy, and behind the ecstasy is something else, which is hard to explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love.[16]

Like Nabokov, his characters like "to fold the magic carpet" of their memory where the reader eventually trips and is sometimes trapped, moreover the narrators

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[11] Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov*, 84.

[12] Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov*, 84.

[13] Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov*, 80.

[14] Jonathan Yardley, "Nabokov's Brightly Colored Wings of Memory". *Washington Post. (May 26, 2004).* http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A56034-2004May25.html

[15] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 55.

[16] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 106.

themselves are confused by their own memories and are haunted by them. This obsession makes them want to write, to confess and to relieve the burden.

2. Despair

2.1. Overview of *Despair*

Nabokov himself translated his 1936 novel *Otchajanie* from Russian into English. The novel is written from the first person point of view. The main character of the story is Hermann, a thirty-six year old émigré citizen of Berlin. The novel is a tale written by Herman, which by its end shifts into being a diary. He starts by claiming that if he had not been sure in his writing skills, he would have never started the present tale, because nothing would have happened without this skill. From the very beginning of the first chapter he points out at two features of his character that will be important for understand of the novel. First, he is sure of his writing talent. Second, lying is one of his most striking features.

Hermann recalls a day in Prague when he met his double, as he claims. While walking aimlessly he comes across a homeless man, sleeping on the grass whose resemblance strikes Hermann. Hermann describes the moment as unbelievable. The mystery of the seen makes him tremble. The homeless turned out to be named Felix. He does not display any recognition of the resemblance, which surprises Hermann. He takes Felix's address not promising anything particular, but already thinking of a crime. Back in Berlin, he does not tell anybody about Felix, even to his wife, Lydia, whom he describes as a silly and forgetful woman. When describing their relationship, Hermann admits that he loves her simply because she loves him. He despises Lydia's cousin Ardalion, a poor artist, not very talented, according to Hermann. The fact that he does not tell anyone about Felix sets a precedent of being a mystery.

Hermann then writes a letter to Felix, planning to meet him. When they meet Felix guesses that Hermann is an artist, and it gives an idea to Hermann, he introduces himself as an actor in need of a double. He lies about having an estate in the countryside and about being single. Here he admits that even if though has never been an actor, he used to play different roles all he life. For Felix, the allusion to cinema and theater is unpleasant. However, he willingly accepted the invitation to spend the night in the hotel. Having met Felix's reluctance to play the role of a double, Hermann offers him an illegal operation. Namely, to drive Hermann's car dressed like as the later, for which Felix would receive a considerable reward. Next day, while Filix is still sleeping, Hermann leaves the hotel.

After some time Hermann receives letters from Felix, where he agrees to accept the job. Hermann talks finally to Lydia, but he does not tell her the truth about Felix, instead, he invents an unbelievable story about his younger brother, named Felix, looking exactly like him and who decides to commit a suicide. Telling all this, Hermann cries and acts heartbroken. Lydia is frightened to such an extent that she agrees to do everything Hermann offers her to do.

Finally, Hermann gets to actual fulfillment of the plan he has been cherishing since the moment he saw Felix. The detailed description of dressing up follows. When everything is ready, there follows a shot in the back. Felix is dead. The resemblance is so striking, according to Hermann, that looking at dead Felix he cannot tell who is dead, the double or he himself.

The last two chapters describe Hermann's disguise. He learns from the newspapers that the crime is being investigated. Hermann decides to reread his tale, describing a perfect crime, in order to give it a name. While reading it he finds out that he made the most stupid mistake, which enables the police to find out who committed the crime. What disappoints him the most is the fact that the resemblance between the murdered tramp and the murderer is not even mentioned. At this moment, he comes up with a name for his tale, *Despair*.

2.2. Crime as Art and Art of Writing in *Despair*

The novel is dealing with the protagonist's obsessive idea of crime as an art, a perfect crime, based on the similarity of his double and his obsession with writing. The idea of the crime comes to Hermann‘s mind as soon as he sees Felix sleeping on the grass. While he is walking by, he notices the man, whose pose attracted Hermann's attention. The moment he throws away the cap from the man's head with his boot, he is stunned. He even doubts the reality of the moment. He is sure he is looking at a miracle, and the uselessness of it astonishes him. Then, Hermann mentions a remark which is worth noting:

> A clever Lett whom I used to know in Moscow in 1919 said to me once that the clouds of brooding which occasionally and without any reason came over me were a sign of my ending in a madhouse. He was exaggerating, of course; during this last year I have thoroughly tested the remarkable quality

> of clarity and cohesion exhibited by the logical masonry in which my strongly developed, but perfectly normal mind indulged.[17]

Although, Hermann claims that his acquaintance exaggerated, it is clear that the remark about the madhouse is put there on purpose. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on heteroglossia and dialogues in the language can be applied to *Despair* to provide a deeper understanding of the cgaracter of Hermann. The author utilizes the language to introduce another character's voice in the novel, in order to "avoid giving himself wholly to either of them".[18] In such a way, Nabokov warns the reader against biasedness of Hermann's claims and to be more attentive to the details.

The fact that Felix does not see the similarity between them surprises Hermann but does not stop him.

> Slowly I raised my right arm, but his left did not rise, as I had almost expected it to do. I closed my left eye, but both his eyes remained open. I showed him my tongue.[19]

Hermann is so sure of the likeness between them, that he not only expects Felix to recognize it too, he almost expects him to behave like his mirror reflection. Having lost his patience, he asks directly if Felix does not notice anything. He gets a mirror and holds it in such a way that Felix could see both their faces closely reflected in it. Still, Felix does not seem impressed by that.

When Felix asks him, if there could be any job for him, Hermann immediately notices that Felix was the first one of them to feel the link between them, based on the similarity. Which obviously could not be true. This way of shifting responsibility on others becomes characteristic of Hermann. In the course of the story, the same happens several times. For instance, when having written a letter to Felix, in which he offers him some work, Hermann does not send the letter himself, but asks an unknown child from the street to put it into the box. Afterwards feels relief for not having actually committed the act of sending the letter. Another instance of shifting responsibility can be seen in the passage where Hermann receives a letter from Felix, in which the later expresses his willingness to accept any job. Hermann's reaction to the letter is as follows:

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[17] Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair.* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 7.

[18] Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, 314.

[19] Nabokov, *Despair*, 20.

> Felix on his own accord, without any prompting from me, had reappeared and was offering me his services; nay, more: was commanding me to make use of his services and, withal doing everything I wished, was relieving me of any responsibility that might be incurred by the fatal succession of events.[20]

Thus, according to Hermann, Felix takes from him all the responsibility for any further succession of events, despite the fact that he himself willingly started the whole affair and planned everything.

Another crucial point is the way Hermann claims that it was easier for him to recognize the double, since he is so fond of his own face and knows it better than others do. "…was not I, who knew and liked my own face in a better position than others to notice my double, for it is not everyone who is so observant…"[21] Herman's love for himself is clearly seen in the paragraph, where he describes his wife and explains the reason why he loves her is simply that she loved him. According to Claire Rosenfield, "what he loves is the image of himself he imagines is reflected in her face. His love is self-love"[22] Hermann throughout the whole novel does not express any affection for his wife, but the fact that she loves him is crucial for him. Herman further argues that he needs the painter's art in order to prove to the reader the similarity. However, the description he provides speaks clearer than his claims.

> Look, this is my nose; a big one of the northern type, with a hard bone somewhat arched and the fleshy part tipped up and almost rectangular. And that is his nose, a perfect replica of mine… look nearer: I possess large yellowish teeth; his are whiter and set more closely together, but is that really important? And look at those ears… the convolutions of his are but very slightly altered in comparison with mine: here more compressed, there smoothed out. We have eyes of the same shape, narrowly slit with sparse lashes, but his iris is paler than mine.[23]

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[20] Nabokov, *Despair*, 104.

[21] Nabokov, *Despair*, 23.

[22] Claire Rosenfield, "Despair" and the Lust for Immortality". Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, Vol. 8 no. 2, A Special Number Devoted to Vladimir Nabokov (Spring 1967): 177. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207100

[23] Nabokov, *Despai*r, 24.

The obsession with the similarity is so great, that even when Hermann sees the differences and writes them down he does not pay attention to them. He is interested only in the similarity. According to Claire Rosenfield, Hermann only sees Felix's exterior, he denies the existence of the victim's being. She provides the example from the text, where Hermann noting the difference between their eyes, discounts the fact. "Nabokov's subtle intention to inform the reader that Hermann cannot look beyond the eyes to the soul of another, beyond the image on the surface of the glass – becomes clear if the reader has a sense of the pattern involved. By exchanging cloths with tramp, he symbolically assumes only an external disguise, a role with no substance."[24] Hermann carefully shaves Felix, puts on him his clothes and even makes him manicure and pedicure so that there would be no doubt that it is Hermann's corpse that the police would find later. After he shoots Felix in the back, Hermann notes "I could not say who had been killed, I or he."[25] He looks at Felix's photo, and although he notes that in the photo Felix does not look so much like him, he still keeps clinging to the idea of the double.

Partly, the obsession with the double can be explained by looking closely at the third chapter, Hermann wonders whether the roots of his criminal genius come from his youth. Hermann recalls a nightmare he used to see in the past.

> Was I… making my way along that ordinary corridor of my dreams, time after time shrieking with horror at finding the room empty, and then one unforgettable day finding it empty no more? Yes, it was then got explained and justified – my lomging to open the door, and the queer games I played, and that thirst for falsehood, that addiction to painstaking lying which has seemed so aimless till then. Hermann discovered his alter ego. This happened, as I have the honour of informing you, on the ninth of May.[26]

It follows, that Hermann had been unconsciously looking for his double since his childhood and the idea might have come to him much earlier than when he met Felix. It also reveals the reason why Hermann so readily and without having second thought accepted the idea of the double.

As far as similarity is concerned, the novel provides two points of view on

[24] Rosenfield, "Despair" and the Lust for Immoetality", 186

[25] Nabokov, *Despair*, 144.

[26] Nabokov, *Despair*, 49.

that. There is an instance in the novel, when Ardalion tries to draw Hermann's portrait and complains that his face is "difficult" and that the pencil simply cannot deal with it. Interestingly enough, Hermann's reaction to that remark is expecting to hear something about the doubles, but Ardalion does not mention anything concerning them. There arises an argument between them, in which Ardalion explains that what an artist sees is the difference, not the similarity and that only common people see the likeness. This idea contradicts to Hermann's view on similarity, upon which the whole story is based. As it has been shown, Hermann prides himself in being more attentive and cleverer than others.

As to a crime as art, Hermann writes that the nature of crime is like that of every art. If the did is performed correctly then even if the criminal would give himself up nobody would believe him. The more is Hermann's astonishment, when after discovering the crime, the police do not mention any slightest likeness between the victim and the criminal, thus denying the very idea that Hermann's crime was based on.

Obsession in *Despair* is also connected with writing Hermann's obsessive idea with a crime as art is closely related to the idea of being talented. From the very first lines of his tale Hermann makes it clear that had not he had the talent for writing, there would not have been the tale. He is very impatient with writing, willing to proceed to description of the actual crime. Especially at the very beginning of his tale he writes that it is deadly boring to report the details about his work and the purpose of his visit to Prague, where he met Felix.

According to Hermann, he knows everything about literature, as it is his passion. He says that in his childhood he used to compose poems and short stories defaming acquaintances. He confesses that there was hardly a day that he would not lie, that his lies brought him satisfaction. He admits to lie constantly during the ten years of marriage with Lidia, and believes that having a bad memory, she had never remembered the details of his "inspired" lies.

Hermann shows his mastery of writing the book by numerous uses of metafiction in the novel. For instance, he starts the third chapter with a question of how to name it. He provides some examples of possible beginnings of the chapter and comments on their advantages and disadvantages and even comments on the usage of the ellipsis as a punctuation mark. Hermann is also concerned that he will prove the similarity that he will convince the reader to believe in it. He only regrets

that words, in their nature, are not capable of showing the resemblance of human faces, he regrets he cannot paint them both, to show the reader what he means by the similarity. He claims that the greatest wish for the writer is to make out of his reader a spectator. For Herman, writing is a way to prove the others his artistic genius.

> And so, in order to obtain recognition, to justify and save the offspring of my brain, to explain to the world all the depth of my masterpiece, did I devise the writing of the present tale.[27]

After finishing writing the tale, he feels healed by it, until rereading it. Having reread the tale and having found the mistake, that enables the police to find him, he does not admit that the whole idea was wrong. He is only concerned by the foolishness of the mistake (leaving in the car the cane with Felix's name on it) but not by the actual murder he committed. What he refuses to admit is that the mere resemblance between him and Felix is based on a completely wrong idea. The reports of the police in newspapers only irritate him by the fact that they oversee the similarity. He is convinced in the biasedness of the resolution the police comes to and continues by saying:

> …but I keep on firmly believing in my double's perfection. I have nothing to blame myself for. Mistakes – pseudo mistakes have been posed upon me retrospectively by my critics when they jumped to the groundless conclusion that my very idea was radically wrong… I maintain that in the planning and execution of the whole thing the limit of skill was attained; that is perfect finish was, in a sense, inevitable; that all came together, regardless any will, by means of creative intuition.[28]

Although he claims that everything was inevitable, it has been proven that Hermann has been cherishing the idea of a double long before. He remains reluctant to admit his mistakes till the very last line of the novel. It is true, that Hermann asks himself "What on earth have I done?"[29] at the end of the novel. This, however, is not an expression of the remorse, or understanding, but rather a surprise to see all the people gathered to under the hotel window wanting to see him. That makes him

[27] Nabokov, *Despair*, 162.

[28] Nabokov, *Despair*, 41.

[29] Nabokov, *Despair*, 52.

want to perform. The novel has an open ending, the readers must decide themselves what awaits Hermann.

As for memory, it constitutes an integral part in *Despair*. During the course of the novel, the protagonist underlines that it is the memory, which writes the tale, not him. In fact, he blames his memory of writing the tale four times. The first time it happens in the second chapter, when Hermann describes the area around Ardalion's cottage as a silent and lonesome place, with the ground covered by snow. Then the narrator corrects himself wondering how the snow is possible, if it is a day in June. This note is followed by an explanation, that it is not him who writes the tale, but his impatient memory, that he does not have anything to do with it.[30] The snow, without doubt, comes as a glimpse of the future, when Hermann commits the crime. The next occasion, is in the third chapter. Hermann asks the reader to forgive the incoherence of the tale, for it is his memory writing the it, not him, and that it has its own tamper and rules. [31]

The crime scene takes place in the ninth chapter, which he calls the most important for the reader. Here, for the third time, Hermann blames his memory, and only memory, for the process of writing. He constantly keeps interrupting the tale with some details not connected with the actual story, for instance predicting the future success of his book in the USSR or, describing a new world, where all the humans would look the same.

> …I am, as you see, twisting and turning and being garrulous about matters which rightly belong to the preface of a book… But I have tried to explain already that, however shrewd and wary the approaches may seem, it is not my rational part which is writing, but solely my memory, that devious memory of mine.[32]

As the quote illustrates, the closer Hermann is to description of the crime, the more difficult is task seems to him. Later, in the tenth chapter, memory is mentioned again in connection with writing. Hermann meditates on the primary force of the crime. He questions whether it was the money that led him to kill Felix, and again, it was the memory writing for him. As an artist, he has no doubt in the perfection

[30] Nabokov, *Despair*, 31.

[31] Nabokov, *Despair*, 43.

[32] Nabokov, *Despair*, 134.

of the work done by him, thus, that there is a dead man in the forest, perfectly resembling him, and the money is only the secondary reason, for he is definitely an unselfish artist.

Memory, that Hermann relies on so heavily, fails him. At the end of the novel he rereads his work in order to find a name for it. He is not sure whether he is reading the work or recollecting the past. Hermann comes across a passage describing the day of the crime. In the tale Felix pointed with a stick to the direction of the journey they were going to undertake to Ardalion's estate. While reading, Herman stumbles upon the word "stick" and is deadly surprised that his artistic memory failed him. He looks at the black words written on white paper by him. And he is shocked. What astonishes him the most, is not the fact that the stick with Felix's name on it was left in his car and will lead consequently to his arrest, but understanding that his work of art, so thoroughly produced is essentially destroyed. This is where the name of the tale comes in. The feeling of despair overwhelms him.

It should be noted that, Herman's voice is dominant only on the background of the other voices which the author provides the reader in order to show the whole picture. For instance, Ardalion's letter in which he accuses Hermann in being arrogant and contemptuous with Lydia, in his way of ridiculing her, his petty cruelty towards her and his oppressive coldness. The letter annoys Hermann. He notes that the unbiased reader of the tale has seen the benevolence with which he, Hermann has treated ungrateful Ardalion, which is not obviously true. The other thing that Ardalion points on is that it is not enough to dress someone in one's clothes and then kill them, there should be resemblance. Thus, there is no question of the resemblance between Hermann and Felix. In support of this fact, the police does not mention it either.

In the fourth chapter Hermann for the first time mentions that he has several handwritings, when he writes about his reply to Felix's letter. In the next chapter, Hermann gives a precise number of his handwritings, which is twenty-five in total and he ended up using all of the twenty-five of them while writing: his tale. This reference could be seen as alluding to Hermann's state of mind"…it is also extremely probable that some rat-faced, sly little expert will discover in its

cacographic orgy a sure sign of psychic abnormality."[33] He himself realizes it and so does the reader. One more example of another's voice contradicting Hermann is Orlovius, who told the police that Hermamm was "mentally deficient"[34] and that he was sending letters to himself.

In conclusion, *Despair*, represents an early work, written in Russian in 1936. The key themes of confession, obsession and memory are not only recurrent in the novel, but constitute its core. Hermann's vision of the world is shaped by his obsession. The tale he writes with an intent to confess the world in the crime he committed, the crime as an art, turns out to contain a mistake he made due to the memory that failed him. It is the memory he so much relies on while writing that he underlines it several times throughout the novel, that it is not him who writes the tale, but his memory. Hermann's point of view is contradicted in the novel by the other voices. No matter how hard he tries to convince the reader in the similarity between him and his double, there is always the author between the narrator and the reader, who sounds different opinions, perhaps not in an open dialogue, but in the form of the comments Hermann mentions or the letter he receives.

[33] Nabokov, *Despair*, 74.

[34] Nabokov, *Despair*, 159.

3. “Spring in Fialta”

3.1. An Overview of “Spring in Fialta”

The short story “Spring in Fialta” was first written by Nabokov in Russian in 1936 as “Vesna v Fial’te” during Nabokov’s Berlin period. It was later translated by Peter Pertzov with numerous Nabokov’s corrections. *The Atlantic Monthly* rejected the story, claiming that it was too long for them. The story was later printed in *Harper’s Bazaar* in May 1947, predominantly a high fashion magazine.[35] “Spring in Fialta” is also included in the short story collections “Nine Stories” and “Nabokov’s Dozen”.

“Spring in Fialta” is written from the first person narrator Victor, or Vasen'ka, in the Russian version of the story. In the narration, there are several timelines: first, the particular time Victor is writing the story, second, the day in Fialta he met Nina for the last time and further, having seen Nina, he remembers all the previous encounters with her during the fifteen years. The narrative line is complicated by the fact that Victor juxtaposes all the memories with the memories from the day in Fialta and provides a commentary from the time of writing the story.

The story is set in Fialta, a fictional resort town by the sea. Victor claims to be fond of Fialta, and one of the reasons he provides is that the name of Fialta brings to mind a Crimean town, meaning Yalta, which is nostalgic for a Russian émigré. He describes spring in Fialta as cloudy and dull and where everything is damp. He remembers one day in the early thirties, when having made a short break in a business trip, he visited Fialta, where he met Nina, another émigré. Victor fails to give a name to their relationships. Having met Nina he starts remembering all the other occasions of seeing her.

His memory brings him back to Russia around the year 1917, when they first met. Although they were both the same age and „of that of the century“, Nina was already engaged. He recalls a kiss in the darkness of the Russian winter night, which was interrupted by a snowball fight. Soon after that they parted without

[35] Dmitri Nabokov, Maxim D. Shrayer, “After Rapture and Recapture: Transformations in the Drafts of Nabokov’s Stories”, Vol. 58, no. 4 (October 1999): http://www.jstor.org/stable/2679227

having talked to each other.

Victor's memory shifts to other occasion he met Nina. The next time, in Berlin, at his friends' house, he learned that she had broken up with her fiancée. Victor himself was about to marry. He saw Nina surrounded by her friends and intuitively started looking among them to find those who knew her better than he himself did. At their third meeting, Victor, already married, learned with "a ridiculous pang" that she was going to marry Ferdinand, a Franco-Hungarian writer. Several years later, they met by chance in a hotel in Paris, where Victor followed Nina along the passage into her room. Soon after, they joined Ferdinand and his friends at a café, where Victor jealously tried to identify those who had been intimate with Nina. Victor then remembers his stay at some friends' in the Pyrenees, where Nina and Ferdinand were also present. He recollects how he waited for Nina to come to his room at night, without even his telling her to come, and how desperate he felt when she did not. His memory of their last encounter before Filata is from Berlin.

In the course of the story, Victor remembers episodes from the day in Fialta elaborating on their relationships with Nina. The last episode he recalls from Fialta, is their stroll with Nina. As a response to her kiss, Victor told Nina that he loved her, addressing you with a "you" instead of the Russian "thou" to express his feelings. Although, seeing Nina's reaction, he hurriedly added that it was only a joke and felt that their "romance was even more hopeless than it have ever been." Soon after he learned from a newspaper, that Nina died the same day beyond Fialta.

3.2. Obsession with Love in "Spring in Filata"

The way the narrator introduces Nina to the reader is very significant. In just one sentence, which constitutes a whole paragraph, Victor makes clear two significant details about their relationships.

> Every time I had met her during the fifteen years of our — well, I fail to find the precise term for our kind of relationship — she had not seem to recognize me at once; and this time too she remained quite still for a moment, on the opposite sidewalk, half turning toward me in a sympathetic

> incertitude mixed with curiosity, only her yellow scarf already on the move that those dogs that recognize you before their owners do, and then she uttered a cry, her hands up, all her ten fingers dancing, and in the middle of the street, with merely the frank impulsiveness of an old friendship (just as she would rapidly make the sign of the cross over me every time we parted), she kissed me thrice with more mouth than meaning, and then walked beside me, hanging on me, adjusting her stride to mine, hampered by her narrow brown skirt perfunctorily slit down the side.[36]

First, he fails to give their relationship a precise term. In the Russian version of the story, Васенька, asks himself whether this kind of relationship was friendship or a love affair. Thus, from the very beginning of the story, he suggests the answer to the reader. Second, he states that Nina never seemed to recognize him at once, even after fifteen years of their relationship, in spite of the implication of the love affair between them.

Their relationship started around the year 1917 "judging by the certain left-wing theater rumblings backstage".[37] Victor, aged seventeen, had just graduated from the lyceum, visited a party at his aunt's country estate near Luga. Although, Nina was of his age, she looked somewhat older, twenty at least and was already engaged. He does not remember why the guests went outside into the snow, but he does remember having dropped the flashlight, his curse and Nina's laugh.

> I call her Nina, but I could hardly had known her name yet, hardly could we have had time, she and I, for any preliminary; "Who's that?" she asked with interest – and I was already kissing her neck, smooth and quite fiery hot from the long fox fur of her coat collar, which kept getting into my way until she clasped my shoulder, and with the candor so peculiar to her gently fitted her generous, dutiful lips to mine.[38]

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[36] Vladimir Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," In Vladimir Nabokov: Collected Stories (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 472-491, 474.

[37] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 475.

[38] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 476.

The first kiss forever haunts Victor, since their relationship started with it. Soon after, they departed without having talked, without making any plans for future. It is worth mentioning, that this first kiss and the way they parted without a word set the tone for the further fifteen years of their lives and the habit never to discuss the relationship.

Later, they met in Berlin. Victor was about to get married and Nina had just broken up with her fiancé. When Victor was introduced to Nina, she "squinted" at Victor and slowly and joyfully exclaimed:

> "Well, of all people –" and at once it became clear to everyone, beginning with her, that we had long been on intimate terms: unquestionably, she had forgotten all about the actual kiss, but somehow because of that trivial occurrence she found herself recollecting a vague sketch of warm, pleasant friendship, which in reality had never existed between us. Thus the whole cast of our relationship was fraudulently based upon an imaginary amity – which had nothing to do with her random good will." [39]

As John Burt Foster notes in his book *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, Nina's "good will" suggests that in spite of her forgetfulness of the actual kiss, she has persisted the generous feelings. Forgetfulness and inattention towards Victor is characteristic of Nina. In the course of the story, Victor notes it several times. It was already mentioned in the introductive sentence dedicated to Nina that during the fifteen years, she never seemed to recognize Victor at once. It can be argued, that for Nina, these meetings with Victor were mere fleeting episodes, while for Victor, who remembers all the times he had ever seen her, they are full of significance. After the scene of the first kiss, Victor observing Nina, was astonished not so much of her inattention to him "as by the innocent naturalness of that inattention."[40] The quote suggests Nina's attitude to Victor throughout the whole short story.

Similar reaction can be seen in the passage, following the one, after the love-making scene in Paris. They met by chance in a hotel, where Victor was on a business trip. Nina, having reported conversationally that Ferdinand had gone

[39] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 478.

[40] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 476.

[7] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 483.

fencing, led Victor to her hotel room. Soon after, having joined her husband at the café, she showed no concern for Victor.

> I had been obstinately seeking, still not being able to cope with the fact that she had had time to forget what had happened early in the morning – to forget it so thoroughly, that upon meeting my glance, she replied with a blank questioning smile, and only after peeping more closely did she remember suddenly what kind of answering smile I was expecting.[41]

It is only Victor, who during those fifteen years was counting the meetings and remembering all those details. At the same time, however, never intending to make a step towards Nina.

Furthermore, there is one more episode in the story, showing Nina's restrained relation to Victor. It was in Paris, the last time they met before Fialta. At friends' house, Victor was introduced to Nina by a friend. Her body was Z-wise shaped on a couch,

> …she took a long turquoise cigarette holder from her lips and joyfully, slowly exclaimed, "Well-, of all people –" and then all evening my heart felt like breaking…[42]

The reason of the misery is the repetition of the scene. Although, Victor does not mention it in this particular abstract of the story, it can be found in the abstract, describing his second meeting with Nina. The same Z shape of her body curved on the couch, cigarette holder in her lips, even the same "slowly and joyful"[43] exclamation, that showed her forgetfulness of their first kiss many years ago. Looking at her from the distance, Victor overheard a peace of conversation that hurt him. "Funny, how they all smell alike, burnt leaf through whatever perfume they use, those angular dark-haired girls."[44] The reason this phrase mattered for Victor, lies in the memory he cherished. After the lovemaking scene in a Paris hotel, he stepped out on the balcony

> …to inhale a combined smell of dry maple leaves and gasoline - the dregs of the hazy blue morning street; and as I did not yet realize the presence of the growing morbid pathos which was to embitter so many subsequent

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[42] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 490.

[43] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 478.

[44] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 490.

> meetings with Nina, I was probably quite as collected and carefree as she was, when from the hotel I accompanied her to some office or other to trace a suitcase she had lost, and thence to the café where her husband was holding session with his court of the moment.[45]

The smell of the maple leaves together with the gasoline remained connected in his memory with Nina and the subsequent years of the undefined and unnamed relationships with her. Foster explains his melancholic reaction to the overheard phrase as a comparison of a promising beginning and the relatively hopeless present. He also compares Victor's emotion without identifying the details with Nina's reaction when seeing Victor the first time after the first kiss, having forgotten the kiss, as Victor believes; she only remembered some warm emotion towards him

As for Ferdinand, Nina's husband, Victor does not mention his name. He does not praise Ferdinand's works, although he admits to have read his books even before meeting him. "Having mastered the art of verbal invention to perfection, he particularly prided himself on being a weaver of words, a title h valued higher than that of a writer; personally I had never understood what was the good of thinking books, of penning things that had not really happened in some way or other:" Victor prided himself on telling Ferdinand his opinion on writing: "were I a writer, I should allow only my heart to have imagination, and for the rest rely upon memory, that long-drawn sunset shadow of one's personal truth."[46] Victor follows his statement and the way he writes the story proves that he relies heavily on his memory.

There is a certain passiveness with which Victor notices how the fate repeatedly would bring them together in different parts of Europe. He refers to the fate several times in the course of the story. He had never sought an opportunity to find her, to tell her about his feelings. For instance, after the first kiss Victor writes:

> And soon after, we all dispersed to our respective homes, without my having talked with Nina, nor made any plans for future, about those fifteen itinerant years that had already set out toward the dim horizon, loaded with the parts of our unassembled meetings.[47]

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[45] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 480.

[46] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta,"480.

[47] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta,"476.

The horizon is “dim” from the point of the narrative time, since then Victor could not know anything about the way their relationships would unfold. In the next paragraph Victor goes back to the day, he met Nina in Fialta. He asks her where they had last met. She replied with shaking her head and a puckered brow, which meant, as he is sure, not forgetfulness, but a reaction to a flatness of his joke.

> It was as if all those cities where fate had fixed our various rendezvous without ever attending them personally, all those platforms and stairs and three-walled rooms and dark back alleys, were trite settings remaining after some other lives all brought to a close long before and were so little related to the acting out of our own aimless destiny that it was almost bad taste to mention them.[48]

According to Victor, it is the fate, which fixed their meetings. As the story unfolds, he does not mention any attempt to meet Nina. The “aimless destiny” suggests that he still tries to understand what was the meaning of their relationship, as the following example will prove.

> I still wonder what exactly she meant to me, that small dark woman of the narrow shoulders and “lyrical limbs” (to quote the expression of a mincing émigré poet, one of the few men who had sighed platonically after her), and still less do I understand what was the purpose of fate in bringing us constantly together.[49]

Victors asks himself what Nina means to him at the moment of writing the story. He remembers all the occasions he met her, all of them unplanned, unexpected. On the other hand, Victor claims that she had never influenced his life. “Again and again she hurriedly appeared in the margins of my life, without influencing in the least its basic text.”[50] It can be argued, that the whole story, written by Victor contradicts to this statement, since he writes about his feelings to Nina and tries to understand what place she occupied in his life. It is worth noting, that if Nina appeared “in the margins” of Victor’s, it does not mean that in the center of his life there was his family. Earlier in the story, Victor, comments on his wife and children as:

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[48] Nabokov, “Spring in Fialta,” 476.

[49] Nabokov, “Spring in Fialta,” 484.

[50] Nabokov, “Spring in Fialta,” 485.

> …an island of happiness always present in the clear north of my being, always floating beside me, and even through me, I dare say, but yet keeping on the outside of me most of the time.[51]

Both Nina and the family are somewhere at the "margins" of his life, not in the center of it. Victor writes about choosing between his happy family life and Nina.

> Was there any practical chance of life together with Nina, life I could barely imagine, for it would be penetrated, I knew, with a passionate, intolerable bitterness and every moment of it would be aware of the past, teeming with protean partners. No, the thing was absurd.[52]

Victor's comments on the probability of them being a couple explains why he had never made an attempt towards defining their relationships. If, as he writes, Nina never influenced his married life, he enjoyed the random encounters with Nina, thinking that life with her constantly would be full of bitterness and jealousy. In fact, however, there is no indication in the text, that Nina had been unfaithful to her husband with any other man than Victor. His feelings towards her and the undiscussed position caused him always to search for competitors among the men surrounding her.

Gradually, with numerous episodes from the previous meetings with Nina, Victor comes back to his memory of the day in Fialta. The last memory from Fialta is that of strolling together with Nina on a terrace. Nina smiled and kissed him carefully "so that not to crumble her smile"[53]. Again, Victor unconsciously comments on Nina's restraint character of relationship towards Victor. In response to that kiss, Victor finally relieved his feelings, "all that had ever been between us beginning with a similar kiss..."[54] He replaced the Russian "thou" with more elaborated "you" to show his affection. "Look here – what if I love you?" A "quick, queer, almost ugly expression"[55] that passed across Nina's face made him add that it was only a joke.

Standing there with Nina, before she left him to join her husband, Victor realized that there romance was even more hopeless than it have ever been before.

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[51] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 473.

[52] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 487.

[53] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 491.

[54] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 491.

[55] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 491.

In fact, it was the only time, when Victor shared his feeling with Nina. In the course of the story he only referred to the fate, constantly bringing them together and not making any attempt to be closer to the woman he loved. Therefore, it is significant, that the very first time Victor tells Nina about his love, she did not encourage him and, on the contrary, looked embarrassed.

Another important point to be noted is that Victor, also for the first time mentions his love to not only Nina, but also the reader. As it can be seen from the provided quotes, Victor, although writing about Nina, has never mentioned love before and even claimed that the relationship never influenced his life.

Victor's way of remembering all the instances they met with Nina also illustrates that there is no questioning about her influence on him. Memory is one of the recurrent themes of the story.

> Back into the past, back into the past, as I did every time I met her, repeating the whole accumulation of the plot from the very beginning up to the last increment — thus in Russian fairy tales the already told is bunched up again at every new turn of the story. This time we had met in warm and misty Fialta, and I could not celebrated the occasion with greater art, could not have adorned with brighter vignettes the list of the fate's former services, even if I had known that this was to be the last one; the last one, I maintain, for I cannot imagine any heavenly firm of brokers that might consent to arrange me a meeting with her beyond the grave.[56]

Right after introducing Nina, Victor reveals that this day in Fialta was that last time they met and that she would die. The story, written by Victor is his attempt to look at the past and identify the place Nina occupied in his life, after he learned about her death. The last sentence of the story suggests that he found the answer to this question.

> …and our romance was even more hopeless than it had ever been. But the stone was as a warm as flesh, and suddenly I understood something I had been seeing without understanding — why a piece of tinfoil had sparkled so on the pavement, why the gleam of a glass had trembled on a tablecloth, why the sea was a shimmer: somehow, by imperceptible degrees, the white

[56] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 474.

> sky above Fialta had got saturated with sunshine, and now it was sunpervaded throughout, and this brimming white radiance grew broader and broader, all dissolved in it, all vanished, all passed, and I stood on the station platform of Mlech with a freshly bought newspaper, which told me that the yellow car I had seen under the plane trees had suffered a crash beyond Fialta, having run at full speed into the truck of a travelling circus entering the town, a crash from which, Ferdinand and his friend, those invulnerable salamanders of fate, those basilisks of good fortune, had escaped with local and temporary injury to their scales, while Nina, in spite of her long-standing imitation of them, had turned out after all to be mortal.[57]

The quote, although seeming to imply that the understanding came to Victor right there in Fialta, refers to the time after. The cinematographic image, captured in one sentence, of Victor, standing with Nina, feeling hopeless and heartbroken, and then suddenly being transferred into the platform at the train station illustrates that only after having read the newspaper and learning about Nina's death Victor comes to understanding. In the course of the story, Victor asks himself what was the purpose of the fate to bring them together; he refers to the fate as being aimless. As he writes the story, he sees that there was no slightest chance of him and Nina being together.

According to John Burt Foster, Victor, while writing his final thoughts, gains a new profound insight into his feelings to Nina. If before, he was full of fears concerning the probable relationships with Nina "with passionate, intolerable bitterness" and "accepting Nina's life, the lies, the futility, the gibberish of that life", then after Nina's death the fears disappeared. Her death rescued her from her "faithful long-standing imitation" of her companions. As Foster suggests, the last words in the story: "Nina, in spite of her long-standing, faithful imitation of them, had turned out after all to be mortal"[58] means that Nina reaffirmed her common humanity.

In conclusion to the chapter, the structure of the story is complicated by the fact that Victor shifts the timelines. All the memories of his previous encounters with Nina are blended with the recollections of the last scene in Fialta and Victor's

[57] Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta," 491.

[58] Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, 139

the comments from the time he is writing the story. While writing it down, he seems to figure out what he feels for Nina. Writing helps him to understand better what place she occupies in his heart and his life.

Victor represents a more complex character then Hermnann, in a way that if the reader clearly sees Hermann's follies in Despair, with Victor it is much more complicated. Nevertheless, in spite the fact that Nina does not have a voice in the short story, the only few her words Victor provides implicate that if there was a relationship between them, his love remained unrequited. Except for the kisses and the time they spent in the Paris hotel, Nina had not expressed her feelings. The only attempt from Victor's side to finally reveal his adoration was met by Nina's embarrassed reaction which was caused Victor to lie that his love words were only a joke.

4. The Enchanter

4.1. Overview of *The Enchanter*

As Vladimir Nabokov writes in "On a Book Entitled Lolita" appended to the novel, he calls *The Enchanter* "the first little throb of *Lolita"*[59] that went through him in 1939 or early 1940 in Paris. He claims, that the inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper article about an ape who produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal. The sketch showed the bars of the ape's cage. He admits that the sketch had no textual connection with the novel he eventually wrote, it was a short story of about thirty pages long written in Russian. Dmitri Nabokov comments on that, explaining, his father had not seen the novel for years and that he could have forgotten the actual length of the work.

> The man was a central European, the anonymous nymphet was a French, and the loci were Paris and Provence. I had him marry the little girl's sick mother who soon died, and after a thwarted attempt to take advantage of the orphan in a hotel room, Arthur (for that was his name) threw himself under the wheels of a truck.[60]

The plot of the earlier work cannot be summarized more aptly than Nabokov does. He then adds that he was not pleased with the work and destroyed it after moving to America in 1940. Later he returned to the idea, although the result turned out to be a completely different work:

> Around 1949, in Ithaca, upstate New York, the throbbing, which had never quite ceased, began to plague me again. Combination joined inspiration with fresh zest and involved me in a new treatment of the theme, this time in English – the language of my first governess in St. Petersburg, circa 1903, a Miss Rachel Home. The nymphet now with a dash of Irish blood, was really much the same lass, and the basic marrying-her-mother idea also subsisted; but otherwise the thing was new and had grown in secret the claws and wings of a novel.[61]

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[59] Vladimir Nabokov, "On a Book Entitled Lolita" In *Vladimir Nabokov: Novels 1955-1962: Lolita/Pnin/Pale Fire*, 293-299. New York: The Library of America, 1996, 293.

[60] Nabokov, "On a Book Entitled Lolita," 293.

[61] Nabokov, "On a Book Entitled Lolita," 294.

In the "Author's Note Two" to *The Enchanter*, Dmitri Nabokov provides his father's further discussion on the earlier novel, where Vladimir Nabokov writes that he was sure he had destroyed it long time ago, yet found with his wife its single copy.

> The thing is a story of fifty-five typewritten pages in Russia, entitled *Volshebnik* ("The Enchanter"). Now that my creative connection with *Lolita* is broken, I had reread *Volshebnik* with considerable more pleasure than I experienced when recalling it as a dead scrap during my work on Lolita. It is a beautiful piece of Russian prose, precise and lucid, and with a little care could be done into English by the Nabokovs.[62]

Volshenbnik eventually found its way into English. It was translated by Dmitri Nabokov in 1986. In Russian it was published only on 1991.

4.2. *The Enchanter*

"How can I come to terms with myself?"[63]

The opening lines of the novel imply the protagonist's trouble with trying to make sense of his identity. Throughout the whole novel he is torn between the rational sense of self-preservation and his obsessive love for little girls. Furthermore, as his thought is developing, he continues: "So what if I did have five or six normal affaires – how can one compare their insipid randomness with my unique flame?"[64] Thus he makes difference between the "normal" affairs and the uniqueness of his feelings. He, later on, asks himself whether it is a sickness or criminality.

> And is it compatible with consciousness and shame, with squeamishness and fear, with self-control and sensitivity? For I cannot even consider the thought of causing pain or provoking unforgettable revulsion. Nonsense – I'm no ravisher.[65]

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[62] Nabokov Vladimir, *The Enchanter* (London: Pan Books, 1987), 16.

[63] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 21.

[64] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 21.

[65] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 22.

This unwillingness and fear to cause pain and revulsion is crucial for the analysis of the novel and it will appear again on the very last pages of the book. The way the protagonist's thoughts are presented illustrate his moral dilemma, they skip from one extreme to another within just one paragraph.

> I am not attracted to every schoolgirl that comes along, far from it – how many one sees, on a gray morning street, that are husky, or skinny, or have a necklace of pimples or wear spectacles – *those* kinds interest me as little, in the amorous sense, as lumpy female acquaintance might interest someone else. In my case, independently of any special sensations, I feel at home with children in general, in all simplicity; I know that I would be a most loving father in the common sense of the word, and to this day cannot decide whether this is natural complement or a demonic contradiction.[66]

Although he feels comfortable with children in general, yet he is not attracted by all the schoolgirls, and those with pimples present no interest for him at all. In spite the fact that the thought starts with his "unique" felling for young girls it ends up with his consideration that he would make a good father. His explanation of the word "father" as understood "in the common sense" of the word adds irony to the passage as well as the confession that he still cannon decide whether it is a "natural complement" or a "demonic contradiction."

The self-reflexive protagonist of the novel, according to the narrator, by the age of forty, had learned to regulate his longings and had hypocritically resigned himself to the notion that only a most fortunate combination of circumstances and the fate could result in the impossible fortune. Meanwhile he enjoyed rare moments. The narrator shares the protagonist's treasured memories. First, back in his student days, he was helping his classmate's younger sister. Although he had never touched the girl, her very nearness, made the lines he was drawing quiver and caused everything to change its dimension. Another earlier memory would be quoted:

> …or the other one, with shoulders the color of gingerbread, showing him, in a crossed-out corner of a sunlit courtyard, some black salad devouring a green rabbit. These had been pitiful, hurried moments, separated by years,

[66] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 23.

> yet he would have paid anything for any one of them (intermediaries, however, were asked to abstain).[67]

The quote provided shows the extent to which the girls make the protagonist nervous when near him. He cannot focus on the objects and concentrate properly. And, as seen, for him these memories are the most cherished. In the course of the novel there will appear more of such examples, where the protagonist is fully absorbed in his sensations.

As the story unfolds, the protagonist sits on a bench in a city park. The place and the time in the novel are not clearly set. For all, the reader knows, the story starts in July. He notices, that the woman sitting next to him is rather talkative and thinks of moving, when suddenly "the curtain rises".[68] He sees a little girl of twelve years old treading on skates. The girl attracts his attention. The narrator comments, the protagonist never erred in the age. He appreciated the girl from tip to toe. A very precise description of the girl follows:

> …the liveliness of her russet curls (recently trimmed); the radiance of her large, slightly vacuous eyes, somehow suggesting translucent gooseberries; her merry warm complexion; her pink mouth; slightly open so that two large front teeth barely rested on the protuberance of the lower lip; the summery tint of her bare arms with the sleek little foxlike hairs running along the forearms; the indistinct tenderness of her still narrow but already quite flat chest; the way the folds of her skirt moved…[69]

All these details of the perception of the girl at the first sight reveal the protagonist's watchful eye and his obsession with little girls' features. It is very much the way Humbert Humbert perceives Lolita, not only noticing the details but also appreciating them. When the girl takes undoes the straps of the skates, there follows the narrator's commentary; "Then, returning to earth among the rest of us, she stood up with an instantaneous sensation of the heavenly barefootedness."[70] This is not the protagonist's thought but the narrator's ironical observation. The protagonist is so concentrated on the girl and the way she was skating, that when she steps bare

[67] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 25.

[68] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 26.

[69] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 27.

[70] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 27.

footed seems as if she as an angel descends from the heaven to the rest of common people like the narrator, the protagonist and the readers.

The protagonist tries to engage into conversation with the woman on the bench to find out more about the girl. When he leaves, he looks in the girl's direction. The following quote will illustrate his inner struggle.

> Despite his sense of self-preservation a secret wind kept blowing him to one side, and his course, originally conceived as straight traverse, deviated to the right, toward the trees. Even though he knew from experience that one more look would simply exacerbate his hopeless longing, he completed his turn into the iridescent shade, his eyes furtively seeking the violet speck among the other colors.[71]

This quote clearly shows the protagonist's trouble, being torn between his "self-preservation" and the longing to see the girl again. On his walking past her "with clenched teeth, stiffing his exclamations and his moans" he gave a passing smile to a toddler. He notes pathetically in his mind, that the smile he gave the child was absentminded, and the n adds "only *humans* are capable of absentmindedness."[72] It is worth noting that the protagonist's observation shows his constant self-reflection. Thus, if only humans are capable of absentmindedness, then he is a human and not a monster.

Next time the protagonist meets the girl with the woman knitting on the bench he starts the conversation. He learns, that the woman is a friend of the girl's mother, who is very ill and the illness is the reason why the girl does not live with her widowed mother, but with the woman. He finds out that the widow is planning to move. The following night he spends in rehearsing the question whether the widow is not interesting in selling him some of the furniture. Receiving a positive answer he visits the widow. After weeks of visits and persuasions he finally marries the widow for whom he felt both sorry and repelled. He thinks of the widow as of "his monstrous bride"[73] and only the thought of being closer to the little girl makes it tolerable for him to continue what he once started. He has to repeat to himself that it is worth it.

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[71] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 27.

[72] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 27.

[73] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 49.

There is abstract in the novel, which clearly illustrates the protagonist's feelings, when one day before the wedding he hopes to find the girl alone at home: "…and the foretaste of finding the girl alone melted like cocaine in his loins."[74] But when he comes home, he finds her chatting with a charwoman. "He picked up a newspaper (dated the 32nd) and, unable to distinguish lines, sat for a long while in the already done parlor…"[75] The unfulfilled anticipation causes his frustration. Dmitri Nabokov in the afterword to the novel named "On the Book Entitled The Enchanter" writes:

> His violent emotions- anticipation of finally encountering the girl alone, the infuriating surprise and disappointment of finding the bustling char – have simply imparted a moist blur of his vision and made him see an absurd date. The month is immaterial. A Nabokovian irony is there, but a bit of compassion for the monster seeps through as well.[76]

As with Humbert Humbert, no matter the controversial topic, the compassion for the protagonist is there. As for the date, the vision caused him see the 32nd, but it is his mind, that has not even notice the absurdity of it, being preoccupied with his disappointment.

The first night after the marriage deserves attention. First, the protagonist, having left his bride, while walking outside, started to panic. The thought of how far his obsession has brought him seemed frightening. On the second thought, he continued his monologue, how simple it would be if the girl's mother were to die soon. Thus, his thoughts shifted to the idea of poisoning her. But he abounded the idea, thinking "they'll inevitably open her up, out of sheer habit."[77] Nevertheless, he clears his throat and enters a pharmacy. Whether he buys something there or not is not clear from the novel. The text continues with his return home and the hope that his bride would be asleep, but he finds the light in under her room door. He exclaims in his mind; "Charlatans…"[78]The access to the protagonist's thoughts during the night described shows his desperation and helplessness when faced with

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[74] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 50.

[75] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 50.

[76] Dmitri Nabokov, "On a Book Entitled *The Enchanter"* In *The Enchanter,* 99-127. 1986. London: Pan Books. 1987, 123.

[77] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 57.

[78] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 58.

the reality he created himself.

Although during the whole time after the marriage the protagonist was "unfailingly attentive" and "always even-tempered, always self-controlled"[79], the tension started to overwhelm him. When in the spring, his wife starts feeling worse, the tension gives a way in his behavior. The following scene where the protagonist receives a phone call from a doctor informing him that the operation his wife has gone through "had been a total success' is comic.

> "Success, eh? Total, eh?" he muttered incoherently, rushing from room to room, "Isn't that just dandy…. Congratulate us – we're going to convalesce, we're going to bloom…. What's going on here?" he abruptly cried in a guttural voice, giving the toilet door such a slam that the crystalware in the dining room reacted with fright. We'll see about this," he continued amid the panic-stricken chairs, "Yes sirree… I'll show you a success! Success, suckercess… I've had enough of this![80]

The given abstract clearly shows the protagonist's state of mind. The news that the operation has been a success is not perceived as such. The news is far different from what he hoped to hear. The quote illustrates his exasperation and exhaustion due to the constant pretention. Nevertheless, his wife dies and after the funeral he goes to take hold of the girl, who was sent away no to disturb her ill mother. The girl seems happy hearing the news that they would head to the south, to the seashore and so they start their journey. The girl insists on sitting near the taxi driver.

Later on, they reach a hotel, where while he orders a room, the child is so sleepy that the cat she is looking at is doubling in her eyes. The night turns out to be a complete farce. The old man "the stooping, groaning gnome" trying to open their room door, an old woman emerging from the toilet next door with her face tanned "to a nutlike hue"[81] and wearing azure pajamas. The girl almost falls asleep on his lap in the chair, when there is a sudden knock on the door. The protagonist is so scared that he gives her a shake ordering her to wake up and get off. It y a mistake he is called downstairs to talk to somebody from the police, and before he learns that there is mistake, he gives a speech on justice and asks to wait until

[79] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 59.

[80] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 64.

[81] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 81.

somebody would complain. Certainly, he feels guilt even not having done anything yet. When he returns, he finds the door locked, only then realizes that he does not know the number of the room. After that he discovers that not only the door is wrong but also the landing. Having found the girl, finally, the man starts carefully to stroke her body. At the moment, when he can no longer control himself he thinks that "nothing mattered now"[82], when "his life was emancipated and reduced to the simplicity of paradise… he saw that she was fully aware and looking wild-eyed at his rearing nudity."[83] His is deafened by the horror and cannot hear her screams. Awakened by her screams, the neighbors start gathering. The man rushes outside barefoot.

> His desperate need for a torrent, a precipice, a railroad track – no matter what, but instantly – made him appeal for the very last time to the topography of his past. And when, in front of him, a grinding whine came from behind the hump of the side street… - then, as if it were a dance, as if the ripple of that dance had carried him to stage center, uder his growing, grinning, megathundering mass…[84]

The quote illustrates the protagonist's desperate need for a torment for the revulsion he caused the girl he liked. As it was shown earlier in the chapter, he was unwilling to cause pain or revulsion. The girl's reaction made him search for his death.

The protagonist of *The Enchanter* as Humbert refer to their feelings as "unique flame". As Brian Boyd writes the fact, that

> Because Humbert tells his own story, every page of Lolita crackles with tension between his free self-consciousness and his unrelenting obsession, between his guilt and his confidence that his case transcends everyday morals.[85]

It can be argued, that although the protagonist of *The Enchanter* lacks Humbert's charm, the tension is presented there. The most striking difference between the two, is that in The Enchanter, the protagonist as soon as he realizes that he caused harm to the girl, frightened her, he rushes away from her looking for a way to end his life

[82] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 92.

[83] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 92.

[84] Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 95.

[85] Brian Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 552.

and suffering. Humbert elaborates on the harm he has done to Lolita only after her escape.

Another character to consider in *The Enchanter* is certainly the little girl. Dmitri Nabokov in his *On A Book Entitled The Enchanter*, that although writes Dolores Haze may be "very much the same lass" as his the Enchanter's victim, but only in an inspirational way. The girl, he explains, is very different, she could be seen perverse only in the madman's eyes. She is incapable of anything Lolita does, like intriguing Quilty, she is sexually unawakened and physically immature.[86]

Brian Boyd writes that "in *The Enchanter*, the third person narrator neither animates nor enchants."[87] According to him, Nabokov in *The Enchanter* is eager to reveal his character's mind, but at the same time does not want to appear limited by its capacity. He further adds that even if Lolita had never been written, *The Enchanter* would still have be judged as a failure.

[86] Nabokov, "*On a Book Entitled The Enchanter*," 127.

[87] Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 552.

5. “That in Aleppo Once…”

5.1. Overview of “That in Aleppo Once…”

The short story “That in Aleppo Once…” was written in Cambridge in 1943. The story is written in a form of a letter. The narrator addresses his friend writer, whom he refers to as V., and asks him for help. He writes, that he has a story for V. and continues by recalling his marriage. Although, the narrator claims to have all the documentary proofs of matrimony, he is certain, that his wife never existed. He does not tell V. her name, since he could find it from other source. Moreover, her name is not important, since “it is the name of illusion”. [88] That is the reason why he can write about her with a detachment, as if she were a character in V.’s story.

The reader learns from the very first paragraph that the narrator is a émigré poet. According to the narrator, he married a few weeks before the Germans invaded Paris. He mentions, that it was not love at first sight, but rather “love at first touch”[89]. He adds, however, that he cannot discern her and he does not remember the way she looked. His wife was much younger than he was and liked his poetry. The narrator wonders if his wife had not been attracted solely by his poetry. Although he had been thinking about moving to America, there had been little advancement in getting the necessary papers, but as soon as the invasion began, the couple fled.

Endless train journeys followed to Nice, where they had decided to move on. At a place called Faugères, the narrator left the train for a couple of minutes to buy them some food. On his returning, he found out that the train had gone. He possessed both the tickets and most of the money. Moreover, they had never discussed with his wife what to do in such a case. The telephone calls and telegrams proved to be useless. He decided to continue his journey to Nice in hope that she would have been there by the time he arrives.

His attempts to find his wife were unsuccessful for some time. After a week,

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[88] Vladimir Nabokov, “That in Aleppo Once,” In Vladimir Nabokov: Collected Stories (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 441-450, 641

[89] Nabokov, “That in Aleppo Once…,” 641

passing by a queue in front of a food store, the narrator saw her, standing at the very end of the line. She did not express any surprise when seeing him. The story she told him seemed rather banal. She continued the trip without making enquiries at the train station where he left message for her. She joined a group of refugees who also provided her with some money to reach Nice, where she was told her husband was looking for her and sure they would meet.

Later on, according to the narrator, his wife confessed in having lied to him. She admitted to have spent several nights with another man she had met on the train. The confession made the narrator want to find out every detail and only after decide if he could bear the truth. At the same time, they were both trying to get the needed papers for moving to the U.S.A. One evening, being not able to control his emotions, he started weeping and cursing the world, where millions of people were suffering and dying. He added that it would not have mattered so much if she had not done what she had. His wife was crying too and said that she had not done anything. He finally accepted the first version of her story and tried to avoid her.

Meanwhile having received their visas to the USA, the narrator returned home to find a rose in a glass left on the table and no trace of his wife. There was not any note or letter left for him, no explanations. His enquiries of their mutual friends did not lead anywhere. Nobody could say anything. The only exception being an old lady, who due to her age thought that she had a right to say that the narrator was "a bully and a cad."[90] He also learned, during the following weeks, that his wife had told everyone an extraordinary story with many unpleasant details for the narrator. On his way to America, he met an old doctor, his acquaintance, who had met the narrator's wife. She, as the doctor said, was waiting for the narrator to join her with the tickets and the bag.

The narrator ends the letter pleading V. to clarify the story for him, through the prism of the literary art. He writes that it may all end up in Aleppo if he would not be careful.

[90] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 648.

5.2. Obsession and the burden of memory in "That in Aleppo Once.."

The narrative in "That in Aleppo Once…" is dominated by the narrator's point of view. As the short story represents a letter, there are no dialogues and no characters present in the story, except the characters described by the narrator and the dialogues retold by him. He struggles to find the truth about his marriage, but even more so about himself.

The narrator writes the letter to V. with a hope, that it would be turned into a story, which would clarify his vision of himself, and the events happened to him. He writes: "I have a story for you."[91] Although he himself writes poetry, he confesses that "just now I am not a poet". What he needs is to see the other's point of view, not just anyone, but someone who knows him and whom he trusts. That they are close with V. can be seen from the abstract where he remembers the way they wrote their first verse.

What confuses the narrator is his love for his wife, if she have ever existed, which he is no longer sure of, his memory seems to play tricks with him. He writes:

> "Although I can produce documentary proofs of matrimony, I am positive now that my wife never existed. You may know her name from some other source, but that does not matter: it is the name of an illusion. Therefore, I am able to speak of her with as much detachment as I would of a character in a story (one of your stories, to be precise)."[92]

The existence of his wife, however, prove the characters he introduces during his confession, the marriage certificate he still possesses and the visas to U.S.A. that he gets, not one visa, but grammatically in the plural form. The people who openly spoke about his wife were the old lady and the doctor. After his wife's disappearance, the only person to talk to the narrator was the old lady, Anna Vladimirovna, who due to her age did not spare his feelings and told him everything she thought about him. "…she informed me that, being twice my age, she had the

[91] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 641.

[92] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 641.

right to say I was a bully and a cad."[93] Later, describing the scene for V. to imagine it, the narrator adds "…Anna Vladimirovna, the folds of her cheeks jerkily dangling as she flung at me a motherly but quite undeserved insult." Anna Vladimirovna confirms his wife's existence by telling the story his wife told to people they both knew. Namely:

> "That she had madly fallen in love with a young Frenchman who could give her a turreted home and a crested name; that she had implored me for a divorce and I had refused; that in fact I had said I would rather shoot her and myself than sail to New York alone; that she had said her father in similar case had acted like a gentleman; that I had answered that I did not give a hoot for her *cocu de pèee."*[94]

Furthermore, the old lady made the narrator swear that he would not seek to pursue the lovers with a pistol. What proves Anna Vladimirovna words is that all the acquaintances refused to tell anything to the narrator about his wife's disappearance.

> "I went to the Vereternikovs, who could tell me nothing; to the Hellmans, who refused to say anything; and to Elagins, who were not sure whether to tell me or not."[95]

The example from the text shows their mutual friends' reluctance in communicating the information about the narrator's wife, since their disapprove of him. The next character, the doctor he met on the boat during the voyage. The "pleasant old doctor" seeing the narrator alone, asked him whether his wife was suffering by the rough seas, to which the narrator answered that he sailed by himself. The doctor looked taken aback by the news, saying that he had seen his wife a couple of days before going on board, in Marseilles, "…walking rather aimlessly he thought, along the embarkment. She said that I would presently join her with bag and tickets."[96] Interestingly enough, precisely at this point, after reporting his dialogue with the doctor, he claims: "It was at that moment that I suddenly knew for certain that she had never existed at all."[97]

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[93] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…" 648

[94] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 649.

[95] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 648.

[96] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 649.

[97] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 650.

Nevertheless, provided quotes illustrate, that the narrator's wife, surely, existed. Not only those papers that he has, but also the characters he introduces into the latter in their ways confirm the reader that the narrator in fact has been married.

As shall be seen further, the complaints in having a problem in remembering his wife's appearance, however, this fact, is not accidental. Examining what the narrator tells about his wife's appearance in the letter will provide a glimpse on his selective memory. Writing about his love, the narrator notes:

> "It was love at first touch, rather than at first sight, for I had met her several times before without any special emotions; but one night, as I was seeing her home, quaint she had said made me stoop with a laugh and lightly kiss her on the hair…"[98]

The narrator fell in love with his wife after kissing her on the hair. The next paragraph gradually reveals his problems in recalling the way she looked, as he insists in the letter.

> "But I cannot discern her. She remains as nebulous as my best poem- the one you made such generous fun of in *Literaturnïe Zapiski*. When I want to imagine her, I have to cling mentally to a tiny brown birthmark on her downy forearm, as one concentrates upon a punctuation mark in an eligible sentence. "[99]

It is worth noting that, in spite of the memory problem he mentions, not so much time has passed since their marriage and the moment to the period of writing the letter. As he notes at the beginning of the letter, they had married about a month after V. had left France, and a few weeks before the German's invasion. A week passed since he lost her, having left the train, and found her in Nice. After that there were the visas preparation and when he received them finally, she left him. As he starts the letter, in the very first sentence addressing V, he writes that, "at last I am here, in the country whither so many sunsets have led". [100] This information is crucial in the way, that the narrator could not simply forget the way his wife looks. Continuing the description of his wife, the narrator writes:

[98] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 641.

[99] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 642.

[100] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 641.

> "Perhaps, had she used a greater amount of make-up or used it more constantly, I might have visualized her face today, or at least the delicate transverse furrows of dry, hot roughed lips: but I fail, I fail− although I still feel their elusive touch now and then in the blindmind's buff of my senses, in that sobbing sort of dream when she and I clumsily clutch at each other through a heartbreaking mist and I cannot see the color of her eyes for the blank luster of brimming tears drowning their irises."[101]

From this quote, it is follows, that the narrator, although claiming to fail to remember her lips, describes them with a perfect detail. What he really fails to remember, is the color of her eyes, however, providing the reason for his failure, saying that they were full of tears. His poetical language in observation of the most intimate moments with his wife may shift the reader's focus from the tears in her eyes. In another abstract where he mentions his wife appearance, he expresses no difficulty in describing her:

> "Sometime later, as I set on the edge of the only chair in my garret and held her by her slender young hips (she was combing her soft hair and tossing her head back with every stroke), her dim smile changed all at once into an odd quiver and she placed one hand on my shoulder, staring sown at me as If I were a reflection in a pool, which she had noticed for the first time."[102]

The quote proofs that the narrator does not fail, as he insists, in remembering his wife. Moreover, when it comes to describing her body, he recalls it without any difficulty. Only her eyes remain nebulous for him, although he unwillingly gives the answer to question why it is so. Her tears suggest is that she was not happily married to the narrator. As the narrator admits, his wife was younger than he was.

> "She was much younger than I − not so much younger as was Natasha of the lovely bare shoulders and long earrings in relation to swarthy Pushkin; but still there was a sufficient margin for that kind of tetrospective romanticism which finds pleasure in imitating the destiny of a unique genius (down to the jealousy, dowm to the filth, down to the stab of seeing her

[101] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 642.

[102] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 646.

almond-shaped eyes turn to her blond Cassio behind her peacock-feathered fan) even if one cannot imitate his verse." [103]

This is one of the most crucial quotes in the whole story with the allusion to Alexander Sergeyvich Pushkin, the greatest Russian poet.[104] In the age of thirty-two, the poet married nineteen-year old Natalia, a well-known Moscow beauty. After six years of marriage, full of rumors of her infidelity, Pushkin challenged his rival, George d'Anthès for a duel and eventually he was fatally wounded. Here, just in one sentence, the narrator mixes Pushkin's biography with the fictional character in William Shakespeare's play *Othello,* Cassio. The jealousy being the reason of the great poet's death, and the main theme in the play.

Further, the narrator claims that his wife liked his poetry, on the contrary to the other poets' wives, that she would not yawn every time her husband happen to write a poem longer than a sonnet. He confesses:

> "If she has remained a phantom to me, I may have been one to her. I suppose she had been solely attracted by the obscurity of my poetry; then tore a hole through its veil and saw a stranger's unlovable face."[105]

The quote reveals the problem they faced as a married couple. Being attracted by the narrator's obscure verse only, his young wife, however, did not love him and found "a stranger" in him. As it happened, the time of their marriage was full of fear and uncertainness of the future.

> "So we started upon our disastrous honeymoon. Crushed and jolted amid the appocaliptic exodus, waiting for unscheduled trains that were bound to unknown destinations, walking through the stale stage setting of abstract towns, living in a permanent twilight of physical exhaustion, we fled and the farther we fled, the clearer it became that what was driving us on was something more than booted and buckled fool with his assortment of variously propelled junk – something of which he was a mere symbol, something monstrous and impalpable, a timeless and faceless mass of

[103] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 642.

[104] Alexander Sergeyvich Pushkin (1799 - 1837) was a Russian poet, playwright and novelist. His most notable works are: Eugene Onegin, *The Captain's Daughter, Boris Godunov* and the poem Ruslan and Ludmila. Note also that *Eugene Onegin*, a novel written in verse, was translated by Nabokov and published in 1964.

[105] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 643.

immemorial horror that still keeps coming at me from behind even here, in the green vacuum of Central Park."[106]

During this fearful period, the narrator instead of surrounding his young wife with love and care, frightened her with his attacks of jealousy. Keeping the tickets for the train and the money by himself, he left the train, during ten minutes stop, to buy some food. When he returned he was told that he had no right to leave the train. Later on, having found her in Nice, he expresses no sign of happiness. On the contrary, he starts torturing her with asking constantly about that day, in spite the fact, that, it was he, who left her. He received her first version of the story, which seemed to him "trifle hazy, but perfectly banal". [107] According to this version, she returned to Faugères, where he left the train, and without making enquiries, continued her way. She joined a group of refugees who also supplied her with a little money and eventually she reached Nice.

Nevertheless, when they were alone in the room and he was holding her by the hips and watching her combing her hair, he remembered the case again. As the narrator notes, it was his wife, who looking down at him started the conversation as follows:

"I've been lying to you, dear,' she said. "*Ya lgunia*.[108] I stayed for several nights in Montpellier with a brute of a man I met on the train. I did not want it all. He sold hair lotions." [109]

This is the second version of the story, but subsequently there will be more. This abstract in the letter is followed by the narrator's confession in forcing his wife to tell him the details of the events that perhaps had never happened. The narrator becomes interested in the details, while holding her in his arms and watching her combing her hair. This makes him jealous of her. He writes that he spent that night and many other nights in getting information from her bit by bit.

"I was under the strange delusion that first I must find out every detail, reconstruct every minute, and only then decide whether I could bear it. But

[106] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 643.

[107] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 645.

[108] "a liar" in Russian

[109] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 646.

> the limit of desired knowledge was unattainable, nor could I ever foretell the approximate point after which I might imagine myself satiated…"[110]

Here, the narrator for the first time shows his cruelty to his wife. He confesses, that the first time of his inquiry, she was too tired to mind, the next time, she did not mind, being sure, that it was the narrator who deserted her, which is obviously true. However, as if it was not enough, the narrator continues:

> "It went like that foe eons, she breaking down every now and then, but soon rallying again, answering my unprintable questions in a breathless whisper or trying with a pitiful smile to wriggle into the semisecurity of irrelevant commentaries, and I crushing and crushing a mad molar till my joe almost burst with pain, a flaming pain which seemed somehow preferable to the dull, humming ache of humble endurance."[111]

The quote provided shows clearly the intolerable jealousy the narrator was pushing at his young and beautiful wife. Endless nights he was crushing his teeth and asking "unprintable questions" while not believing any of her word. A little bit later in the letter he mentions "as she shook and rattled and dissolved in my violent grasp". [112]

This, however, is not the end of his brutal actions. When writing about their escape, the narrator mentions the time his wife was sobbing in the train carriage. She explained her tears by saying that they had left the poor dog and she could not forget it. He confesses to V. that he recalls neither the dog nor any discussion of buying one, but the honesty of her grief shocked him. The mentioned dog is important for understanding the narrator in that in the end of the story, the old lady who accused him of being a bully, also reminded him of the same dog, which he does not remember:

> "But one thing I shall never forgive you – her dog, that poor beast which you hanged with your own hands before leaving Paris."[113]

As it follows, the two characters he writes about in his letter mention the dog versus his memory, which does not contain any dog.

Having written all these details in the letter to V., in describing his

[110] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 646.

[111] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 646.

[112] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 647.

[113] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 649.

misfortunes in the marriage, the narrator seems to fail to connect in his mind his jealous behavior and his wife's disappearance. In the end of the story, he adds that he views the past graphically. Their romance stays for him in a valley of mist in between the two matter-of-fact mountains: life had been real before the marriage and will be real from now on, as he hopes. He calls V. a happy mortal with a lovely family and asks him about his wife and children. He admits to be hideously unhappy and asks V. to clarify things for him through the prism of his art. The narrator finishes the letter asking V. to write a story.

> "Somewhere, somehow, I have made some fatal mistake… It may all end up in *Aleppo* if I am not careful. Spare me, V.: you would load your dice with an unbearable implication if you took that for title." [114]

According to Brian Boyd, the narrator of the story would like to believe that the recent past was a protracted nightmare, but its rhythms are inexorable rhythms of reality.[115] When asking V. to write his story"as if an artistic shape will alley the private horror of jealousy, the public horror of the refugee."[116] But as soon as he remembers the final words Othello pronounce before killing himself, the narrator asks V to "spare him". Nevertheless, the title of the story suggests, that V has taken the story as it is and have seen in the narrator's confession in his obsessive love for his young wife the allusions to *Othello*.

It is characteristic of the narrator of the short story to provide several visions of the same events. For instance, the versions of the story about his wife's disappearance, although he himself left her in the train. First, the story she told him, then, the version about the man selling hair lotions in the train. The third time in the story, when the narrator recalls a dialogue, during which his emotions burst and he was weeping because of the cruelty of the world, but more so because of his wife. She was weeping too and swore she had never done it, however, according to him she herself told him about her lover earlier. The next version was told by the old woman, namely, about his wife's love for a Frenchman. The narrator's obsession for his wife is so overwhelming, that his memory provides all the version so that he

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[114] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 650.

[115] Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 62.

[116] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: the American Years*", 62.

no longer knows which one is true.

The example with the dog given above illustrates the same tendency. His version of not having a dog versus his wife's "honest grief" for the dog left behind the locked door in Paris. Furthermore, the old lady's words, not only confirm the existence of the dog, but provide additional information, the narrator's act of hanging it. This last one version also implies the narrator's cruel personality, which is emphasized by the dialogues with different characters the narrator gives, although not willingly. In spite of the fact that he seems to be confused by the people's reactions, his last words in the letter alluding to *Othello,* implicate that he realizes the extent of his obsessive jealousy.

Alfred Appel Jr., calls "That in Aleppo Once" as one of the earliest and best Nabokov's stories written English and according to him, the title of the story alluding to *Othello,* suggests the narrator's future suicide.[117] The letter-form of "That in Aleppo Once…" provides the narrator's confession at its best to his colleague and a friend V.. By asking him to "puzzle out his misfortune"[118] through the art of writing, though, the narrator shows his complete perception of his actions and their consequences. His memory, however, lets him down, which is due to the obsessive love of his young wife, who did not share his feelings.

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[117] Appel, Alfred. "The Road to "Lolita," or the Americanization of an Émigré." Journal of Modern Literature 4, no. 1 (1974): 3-31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3830980.

[118] Nabokov, "That in Aleppo Once…," 650.

6. “First Love”

6.1. Overview of “First Love”

The short story “First Love” was first published in *The New Yorker*, July 31 in 1948. It also constitutes the seventh chapter in Vladimir Nabokov’s autobiography *Speak, Memory*, published in 1951. The Russian version of the book, under the title *Other Shores* (*Drugie Berega*) was published in 1954. Later, in 1999 there appeared a new English *edition Speak, Memory: an Autobiography Revisited*.

The narrator of “First Love” recalls his childhood summer train journeys to France. His recollections of the journeys are very bright and vivid. In particular, he remembers his trip to Biarritz in the year 1909. What makes this it special is his memory of Colette, a little French girl he fell in love with in the age of ten. One day he found himself digging in the sand side by side with Colette, whom he first had taken for a boy. Although, the narrator confesses that two years ago, at the same place he had attracted by another girl, when he met Colette, he knew that “this was the real thing”. The passion for Colette suppressed the narrator’s passion for butterflies.

The narrator remembers that his parents were not keen to meet hers, the beach remained the only place they could meet, but it did not prevent him to think about her constantly. He remembers feeling that she was less happy than he was and less loved. He once even had a fist fight with a red-haired boy who had been rude to her. If the narrator noticed Colette had been crying, it brought tears to his own eyes, such was his love for her.

One day the narrator planned an elopement with Colette. He had a gold coin and assumed it would be enough. He does not recall where exactly he wanted to take her, nor does he remember well the actual getaway. His memory provides a glimpse of Colette putting her shoes on the flapping tent, another glimpse of him folding the butterfly net into a paper bag, Next, he remembers holding hands over her dog with her in the darkness of the cinema. The last glimpse shows the narrator being led away by his tutor, who in his another hand was holding the narrator’s brother. The last paragraph of the story is dedicated to the last memory of Colette in Paris, where she had returned since the school year had started.

6.2. “First Love”

The short story “First Love” can be divided into two parts. In the first part, the narrator gives an account of his visits to France as a child, he singles out the summer of 1909. In the second part, he remembers Colette, a little French girl he met that summer. According to him, when he met Colette, he knew “at once that it was the real thing”.[119] He felt that “she was less happy than he, less loved”, he tried to protect her and he even planned to flee with her. Their actual getaway ended up in failure, the narrator being led away by his tutor.

What is significant for analyzing the story, is that in the first part of the short story, the narrator remembers the past without any difficulties. He describes the journey in a great detail. However, as soon as the part about Colette starts, the memory does not prove to be so detailed. For instance, the story starts with the narrator’s description of a sleeping car displayed by a travel agency on Nevsky Avenue, in the beginning of a century. The sleeping car represented an oak-brown three-foot-long model. The narrator then gives a detailed account of the train’s interior.

> One could make out the blue upholstery inside, the embossed leather lining of the compartment walls, their polished panels, inset mirrors, tulip-shaped lamps, and other maddening details. Spacious windows alternated with narrower ones, single or geminate, and some of these were of frosted glass. In a few of the compartments, the beds had been made.[120]

The narrator remembers that the trains were running twice a week, connecting St. Petersburg and Paris. Then he adds that the trip was not direct, and the passengers were obliged to change the trains. He gives the exact information on the difference between the trains: “the ample and lazy Russian sixty-and-a-half-inch gauge was replaced by the fifty-six-and a half-inch standard of Europe and coal succeeded birch logs.”[121] The narrator remembers five such journey to Riviera or Biarritz.

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[119] Vladimir Nabokov, “First Love,” In Vladimir Nabokov: Collected Stories (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 691-699, 697.

[120] Nabokov, “First Love,” 691.

[121] Nabokov, “First Love,” 691.

Here, the metaphor he uses for his memory is important: "In the far end of my mind I can unravel, I think, at least five such journeys to Paris, with the Riviera or Biarritz as their ultimate destination." [122] This particular year he remembers, his two small sisters were left at home with their nurses and aunts. He tells the reader about the journey, how he shared a room with his younger brother, his father – with their tutor, his mother and her maid together, and how his father's valet had to share the compartment with a stranger. The narrator remembers that a decade later that very valet was shot by the Bolsheviks, because he appropriated their bicycles instead of turning them over to the nation. The narrator remembers exactly what would his mother tell him, while playing card game, named durachki. He then remembers the way she would be lost in thoughts and how he would look at the corridor window and notice every detail seen through it.

At nights in the train, the narrator would look at the shades moving along the compartment, wondering whether his brother was asleep, or even whether he was there at all. The narrator remembers the way he would put himself to sleep by imagining being the engine driver. He remembers the exact time train would reach Paris, at four p.m., and the way he would always purchase something, like a little brass Tour Eiffel "rather roughly coated with silver paint".[123] He tells the reader that the next day they would board Sud Express, which would drop them at ten p.m. at the La Negresse station of Biarritz, on its way to Madrid.

Later on, the narrator recalls Biarritz. He remembers that in 1909 the Carton was still being built. He also recalls the fashion of that season.

> Men sported white trousers that to the eye of today would look as if they had comically shrank in the washing; ladies wore, that particular season, light coats, with silk-faced lapels, hats with big crowns and wide brims, dense embroidered white veils, frill-fronted blouses, frills at their wrists, frills on their parasols.[124]

All these details of the narrator's memory of the journeys provided in the quotes are crucial in the way that they all happen in the first part of the story. Interestingly enough, the first time memory fails the narrator is at the very last lines of the same

[122] Nabokov, "First Love," 691.

[123] Nabokov, "First Love," 694.

[124] Nabokov, "First love," 695.

first part of the short story. He remembers that he has learned from a Basque bather the following:

> From him I learned, and have perceived ever since in the glass cell of my memory, that "butterfly" in the Basque language is misericoletea – or at least it sounded so (among the seven words I have found in dictionaries the closest approach is micheletea).[125]

Even though the narrator has looked the word up in the dictionary, he still provides the way the word sounded to him and associates in his mind with the past. Ending with "misericoletae", the first part flows into the second one, dedicated to Colette.

The second part of the story starts with introducing a little French girl Colette. The narrator finds himself digging the sand side by side with her. He admits that at first, he had taken her for a boy and then the bracelet on her wrist and the curls under her cap made him understand that she was a girl. He remembers what she was wearing. He recalls the way she spoke, mixing "governess English and Parisian French"[126]. According to the narrator, two years ago he had been attached to another girl, "a suntanned little daughter of a Serbian physician", but when he met Colette, he knew "at once that this was the real thing"[127] He somehow felt that she was less happy and loved than he was.

The felling might have come after her explanation that the bruise on her forearm left by a crab "he pinches as bad as my mummy"[128] He was thinking of the ways of saving her from her parents, "des bourgeois de Paris" as he heard someone told his mother about them. He does remember that her parents travelled from Paris in a fashionable limousine, while Colette was sent with her dog, a female fox terrier and her governess.

The second instance the memory plays a trick with the narrator is the passage mentioned above, when he cannot remember the name of the dog. This fact of not remembering the name of the dog bothers him. "I remember the sail, the sunset, the lighthouse pictured on that pail, but I cannot recall the dog's name, and this bothers me."[129] This memory is as well connected to his first love and contains

[125] Nabokov, "First Love," 696.

[126] Nabokov, "First Love," 697.

[127] Nabokov, "First Love," 697.

[128] Nabokov, "First Love", 697.

[129] Nabokov, "First Love," 697.

less details in itself, in comparison with the first part of the story.

According to the narrator, his passion for Colette suppressed his passion for butterflies during those two summer months. He remembers that his parents were not keen on meeting hers, but he does not speculate on the topic. He met her only on the beach, but thought about her constantly. A very touching recollection follows. If the narrator noticed that Colette had been crying, it brought tears to his own eyes. His love for the girl was so great, that he was furious at the mosquitos that bit her, although he could not help it. However, he could have a fistfight with a red-haired boy who had been rude to her. Here, again, the narrator neither mentions the reason of the fight, nor does he provide further details.

The narrator remembers later, that Colette used to give him handfuls of hard candy. Then he recalls that one day she kissed him on the cheek. His surprise was so great that the only thing he could think of saying was, "You little monkey."[130] After that, the narrator tells the reader about his plan to flee with Colette. He thought a gold coin he owned would be enough to pay for their getaway. He wonders where he wanted to take her. "La-bas, la-bas, dans les montagne,"[131] as he heard in the opera.

The next time the memory fails the narrator, is when he tries to remember their getaway with Colette. As he writes,

> Of our actual getaway, I have little to report. My memory retains a glimpse of her obediently putting on rope-soled canvas, on the lee side of a flapping tent, while I stuffed a folding butterfly net into a brown paper bag. The next glimpse is of our evading pursuit by entering a pitch-dark cinema near the Casino (which, of course, was absolutely out of bounds). There we sat holding hands across the dog, which now and then gently jingled in Colette's lap, and were shown a jerky, drizzly, but highly exciting bullfight at San Sebastian. My final glimpse is of myself being led along the promenade by my tutor.[132]

What he also remembers is that his younger brother was held by the tutor's other hand. He kept "trotting out forward to peer at me with awed curiosity, like a little

[130] Nabokov, "First Love," 697.

[131] Nabokov, "First Love," 697.

[132] Nabokov, "First Love," 698.

owl."[133] He does not explain why his brother was also present in the scene and curiously look at him. As the story unfolds, the narrator describes his favorite souvenir from Biarritz, a penholder, it reminds him of the name of Colette's dog. Here, a metafictional reflection on memory follows.

> And now a delightful thing happens. The process of re-creating the penholder and the microcosm in its eyelet stimulates my memory to a last effort. I try to recall the name of Colette's dog – and, sure enough, along those remote beaches, over the glossy evening sands of the past, where each footprint slowly fills up with sunset water, here it comes, here it comes, echoing and vibrating: Floss, Floss, Floss![134]

David Shields in his article writes that this passage in the short story is not only about memory, but that "it is a wondrous demonstration of its process. Memory is not only merely being used here, it is under microscopic examination."[135] According to Shields, "memory through language rediscovers language and succeeds in uniting the present moment of composition with the historical instant of "real life".[136] The narrator, while re-creating the penholder also re-creates the memory.

The last paragraph of the story is dedicated to the narrator's last encounter with Colette. They met in a park in Paris, where she returned to go back to school. He believes, that the meeting was arranged by their tutors. He remembers very well how stylishly Parisian Colette looked. She had a hoop and a short stick to drive it with. He remembers that she took from her governess a present, and put it into his brother's hand. Then he describes the way he saw her for the last time, running with her hoop, disappearing in the shadows.

The close analysis of the memory theme shows clearly two separated parts of the story. First, where the narrator recalls the train journeys to France shows a perfect command of the memory. The narrator remembers all the details clearly.

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[133] Nabokov, "First Love," 698.

[134] Nabokov, "First love," 698.

[135] David Shields, "Autobiographic Rapture and Fictive Irony in Speak, Memory and "The Real Life of Sebastian Knight" In *The Iowa Review* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter, 1987), 44-54, 61. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20156348

[136] Shields, "Autobiographic Rapture and Fictive Irony in Speak, Memory and "The Real Life of Sebastian Knight", 61.

The second part of the story displaces passages, where the narrator forgets the details. It starts right before the passage that introduces Colette, when he talks about the word "butterfly" in the Basque language. Despite the fact that he has looked in the dictionary and has found out the translation, he still mentions that for him, the word sounded as "misericoletea". He adds that at least, it was the way the word sounded. Right after this recollection, the narrator shifts to the next paragraph where he introduces Colette and tell the reader about his first love. Thus, "misery" in "misericoletea" precedes the part dedicated to Colette. Nevertheless, he never directly speaks of any misery. One approach could be given in relation to misery, in the last paragraph.

> She took from her governess and slipped into my brother's hand a farewell present, a box of sugar-coated almonds, meant I knew, solely for me, and instantly she was off, tap-tapping her glinting hoop through light and shade, around and around a fountain choke with dead leaves near which I stood.[137]

The narrator does not elaborates on the fact why the present, if meant solely for him, was given instead to his brother. The image of a boy, seeing his first love for the last time, and observing the way she gives a farewell present to his younger brother is emphasized with the metaphor of a fountain "choked" with the late summer leaves.

The narrator's brother is mentioned in the story only several times. The first time, while the narrator describes the journeys, he notes that he and his brother were sharing a compartment. The second time, when he describes the magic of the journey at night, where he almost doubts his brother's existence:

> From my bed, under my brother's bunk (Was he asleep? Was he there at all?) in the semidarkness of our compartment, I watched things, and parts of things, and shadows, and sections of shadows cautiously moving about and getting nowhere.[138]

His fascination with the journey and the trains is so great, that he even questions his brother's existence. The next time, the younger brother is mentioned, it is in the memory of the unsuccessful escape with Colette. The memory is not clear. The narrator is led by the tutor, who, in the other hand was holding his brother's hand,

[137]Nabokov, "First Love," 698.

[138] Nabokov, "First Love," 693.

who was curiously looking at the narrator. Finally, the last time, the brother is mentioned in the very last paragraph of the story, when he is given the farewell present.

These are the only two episodes in the story where the younger brother is mentioned in the same context as Colette. Although, the narrator does not explain the relations between his brother and Colette, the fact that it was the brother, who received the present, is significant.

There is a sense of enchantment in the way the narrator writes about the train journeys. The motif of the trains, as well as cars, appears in Nabokov's writing repeatedly. In "First Love", the journeys by train are especially vividly depicted. For instance, the narrator confesses that he felt a twofold excitement looking at a city from his compartment window and at the same time putting himself in the place of some passerby and feeling moved, as he imagined, he would be moved by seeing "the long, romantic, auburn cars." [139] However, it was the night, according to the narrator, when that International ties "lived up to the magic of their name." At night, the narrator would put himself to sleep by identifying himself with engine driver.

> A sense of drowsy well-being invaded my veins as soon as I had everything nicely arranged – the carefree passengers in their rooms, enjoying the ride I was giving them, smoking, exchanging knowing smiles, nodding, dozing; the waiters and cooks and train guards (whom I had to place somewhere) carousing in the diner; myself, goggled and begrimed, peering out of the engine cab at the tapering track, at the ruby or emerald point in the black distance.[140]

This romantic and magic view of the trains is felt in every line of the short story. The narrator describes the nights on the train.

> It was marvelously exiting to move to the foot of one's bed, with part of the bedclothes following, in order to undo cautiously the catch of the window shade, which could be made to slide only halfway up, impeded as it was by the edge of the upper berth.[141]

[139] Nabokov, "First Love," 692.

[140] Nabokov, "First Love," 693.

[141] Nabokov, "First Love," 694.

Another enchanting description follows, when the narrator describes the moths around the lamp as "moons around the Jupiter". Someone's cough is described as "somebody's comfortable cough". Although the narrator writes that there was nothing particularly interesting in the platform he was looking at through the window, still he could not "tear" himself away. The train is not only a motif, but also an obsession, as it could be seen from the extracts given above.

It is worth underlining that "First Love" is regarded as a short story, published in *The New Yorker*, but at the same time it is included into Nabokov's autobiography *Speak Memory*. David Shields writes in his article that the title for *Speak, Memory: an Autobiography Revisited* is "excruciatingly self-conscious and self-directed appellation for a book, for "Speak, Memory" is a mock-classical address from the author to his own memory as if his recollections had unto themselves not only personality but also language;

> *An Autobiography Revisited* is Nabokov's extremely arch way of saying that the present text is the revisited edition of *Conclusive Evidence*. But the comedy, as always with Nabokov, cuts considerably deeper. If autobiography is a physical place to which one can return, and if memory has words with which to communicate, then consciousness is tangible and imagination is real.[142]

With "First Love" and "Mademoiselle O", which is another short story included in the autobiography, the question is whether it is an autobiography with fictional elements, or fiction with autobiographical elements. "First Love" is obviously, the narrator's recollection of his first love, but at the same time, it is the recollection of the memories of the train journeys from the childhood and declaration of love for them.

[142] Shields, "Autobiographic Rapture and Fictive Irony in Speak, Memory and "The Real Life of Sebastian Knight", 44.

7. Lolita

In his interview for *Playboy* Nabokov states "I shall never regret *Lolita*", then he adds: "of course she completely eclipsed my other works – at least those I wrote in English."[143] Lolita allowed Nabokov to leave his teaching position at Cornell and to dedicate himself to writing full time.

As Brian Boyd notes in his book *Stalking Nabokov*, Lolita's success "virtually made" the publishing firm of Nabokov's English publisher George Weidenfeld.[144]

> Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.
>
> She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. [145]

The opening lines of the novel engage the reader in Humbert Humbert's confessional love story. Brian Boyd in his book *Nabokov: The American Years*, writes: "No other novel begins so memorably… Humbert invokes Lolita with a passion more appropriate to a lyric poem than to a novel – and sustains the intensity throughout."[146] No matter the controversy of the novel, there is no doubt in Humbert's love for Lolita. As Brian Boyd quotes Lionel Trilling's comment on Humbert's love: "in recent fiction, no lover has thought of his beloved with so much tenderness, no woman has been so charmingly evoked, in such grace and delicacy, as Lolita."[147] Boyd adds to this "except the fact, that Lolita is not a woman, but a

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[143] Toffler, "Interview: Vladimir Nabokov.", 1.

[144] Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov*, 85.

[145] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita.* In *Vladimir Nabokov: Novels 1955-1962: Lolita/Pnin/Pale Fire (*New York: The Library of America, 1996), 1-288, 7.

[146] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 228.

[147] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 227.

twelve-year-old girl, a prisoner of her stepfather's lust". [148]

What makes *Lolita* more than just a scandalous book, is the fact that there is more to *Lolita* than a treatment of a taboo topic of child sexual abuse. According to Boyd, Humbert confesses frankly to unequivocally vile behavior, he even castigates himself as a monster, but yet he somehow almost inveigles the readers into acquiescing his deeds.[149] There is nothing Humbert leaves untold. He willingly admits his guilt, which together with the poetic language he uses leaves the reader disarmed.

Humbert has a perfect command of his memory. He expresses desire to find out where his vile obsession comes from. He analyzes his past to find the root of the evil desires.

> I leaf again and again through these miserable memories, and keep asking myself, was it then, in the glitter of that remote summer, that the rift in my life began; or was my excessive desire for that child only the first evidence of an inherent singularity?.. I am convinced, however, that in a certain magic way Lolita began with Annabel.[150]

Thus before introducing Lolita, Humbert recalls his first Riviera love, Annabel. They were both thirteen and at once "madly, clumsily, shamelessly, agonizingly in love with each other…"[151] Their only attempt to make love on a desolate stretch of sand ended up unfulfilled as two bathers came out of the sea with exclamations of encouragement. Four months later Annabel died of typhus. As Humbert confesses, the shock of learning about her death "consolidated the frustration of that nightmare summer, made of it a permanent obstacle to any further romance through the cold years of my youth."[152]

It is worth noting the different ways Humbert's memory perceived Annabel and Lolita. He describes two kinds of visual memory, the first, when one skillfully recreates an image in the laboratory of one's mind, with one's eyes open. This is the way he saw Annabel in such general terms as "honey-colored skin", "thin arms", "brown bobbed hair", "long lashes" and "big bright mouth". The

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[148] Boyd, *Nabokov: The American Years*, 227.

[149] Boyd, *Nabokov: The American Years*, 227

[150] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 11.

[151] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 10.

[152] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 11.

second, when one instantly evokes, with shut eyes, on the dark inner-side of one's eyelids, the objective, absolutely objective replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors. [153]This is the way Humbert remembers Lolita. The confessional line in *Lolita* develops throughout the novel. Humbert starts the confession in a tone of apologizing himself his "singularity", finding excuses for his immoral actions. As he explains Lolita: "I am not a criminal sexual psychopath taking indecent liberties with a child." [154] He bribes Lolita for having sexual contacts with her, he makes promises before the intercourse and does not fulfil them later.

By the end of the novel, however, when he loses her forever, his tone changes. He faces all the details he tried hard to close his eyes on and ignore and all the moral questions he left unanswered before. For instance, her tennis play.

> …I insist that had not something within her been broken by me – not that I realized it then! - she would have had on the top of her perfect form the will to win, and would have become a real girl champion.[155]

Observing Lolita playing tennis Humbert grudges about the cost of the racket he bought her, which was of a small fortune. He calls himself an idiot, because instead of that he could have filmed her and could have had her immortalized with him. The way Humbert illustrates her every movement in the play shows his adoration. He pities lack of desire to win her and although he claims that he did not realized his fault then, it must be that he rather preferred not to see it. Humbert's love for Lolita never seizes, even when he sees her older, being pregnant with another man's child.

> I looked and looked at her, and knew as clearly as I know I am to die, that I loved her more than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anywhere else… I insist the world know how much o loved my Lolita, this Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another's child, but still grey-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still auburn and almond, still Carmencita, still mine… No matter, even if those eyes of hers would fade to myopic fish,

[153] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 9.

[154] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 139.

[155] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 218.

> and her nipples swell and crack, and her lovely young velvety delicate delta be tainted and torn – even then I would go mad with tenderness at the mere sight of your dear wan face, at the mere sound of your raucous young voice, my Lolita.[156]

After losing her for the second time, meaning that he has been rejected by Lolita, Humbert perceives all the burden of the guilt he had been denying before.

> Unless it can be proven to me – to me as I am now, today, with my heart and my beard, and my putrefaction – that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac, unless this can be proven (and if it can, then life is a joke), I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art.[157]

He realizes only after losing Lolita that he had never known what was on her mind. He noticed that living as they did, they had never discussed a thing with her. They would become embraced whenever Humbert tried to discuss something, even any abstract idea. His desperate remarks would meet a boredom look or rudeness from Lolita's side, that it would make any conversation impossible.

Humbert understood that sooner or later the kind of a life they both led should have ended somehow. When Lolita was by his side, however, he preferred not to dig too much into his conscious blaming himself.

> I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything, *mais je t'aimais, je t'aimais!* And there were times when I knew how it felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. Lolita girl, brave Dolly Schiller.[158]

Humbert remembers a day, when Avis, one of Lolita's fiend was visiting her, her father came after his daughter and Humbert felt obliged to invite the man into the

[156] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 261.

[157] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 266.

[158] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 268.

parlor. The man sat on a chair and Avis sat on his lap and her father embraced her. This family scene made Lolita's smile to lose its light. Humbert then wondered what Lolita might think, that Avis had a "wonderful pink dad", a small brother and a "brand-new baby sister", and a home and dogs and everything Lolita did not have. This recalls another memory of Lolita, while reading a magazine she asked him with a grunt where was her "murdered" mother buried anyway.

> Now, squirming and pleading with my own memory, I recall that on this and similar occasions, it was always my habit and method to ignore Lolita's states of mind while comforting my own base self… [159]

Brian Boyd provides a quote from Trilling: "…Humbert is perfectly willing to say that he is a monster; we find ourselves less and less eager to agree with him."[160] It is so, as Boyd further explains, because the readers accept Humbert's version of himself. By making it possible to see Humbert's story from his point of view, Nabokov warns the reader to recognize to power of the mind to rationalize away the harm it can cause, thus the more powerful is the mind, the stronger the readers' guard needs to be.

Closer examination reveals Humbert's selfishness and desire to manipulate people around him. Annabel died, but his love for young girls remained and so he married Valeria for whom he does not feel any affection. The only reason of the marriage, according to Boyd is that Valeria is "a safety valve for his sexual tension."[161] He kept torturing her and openly showing his hatred. Later on, Humbert marries Charlotte solely to be closer to Lolita. When it comes to Lolita, again, Humbert proves to be self-centered.

As far as the relationship with Lolita is concerned, Humbert's attitude towards her shifts constantly from a father's to lover's and vice versa. The morning in the motel after the first time Humbert and Lolita made love, while going to have breakfast, Humbert notes: "And so to the elevator, daughter swinging her old white purse, father walking in front (nota bene: never behind, she is not a lady)."[162] Certainly, in the quote "father" and 'daughter" are merely roles for those who

[159] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 270.

[160] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 268.

[161] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 268.

[162] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 113.

happened to be in the motel. What needs mentioning, however is that, no matter Humbert's love, Lolita is not "a lady" for him, a girl child he was in love with. Later on, Humbert elaborates on "nymphet love", he provides an example of the stipulation of the Roman law, according to which a girl can marry at the age of twelve that it was adopted by the Church, and in some of the United States is still rather tacitly preserved. He claims, that fifteen is lawful everywhere, and there is nothing wrong "when a brute of forty" blessed by the priest marries a young girl. Here, Humbert addresses the court: "Did I deprive her of her flower? Sensitive gentlewoman of the jury, I was not even her first lover!"[163]Later in his confession, Humbert comes to describing their deals with Lolita, the way she would earn her money:

> She was, however, not easy to deal with… She proved to be a cruel negotiator whenever it was in her power to deny me certain life-wrecking, strange, slow paradisal philters without which I could not live more than a few days in a row, and which, because of the very nature of love's languor, I could not obtain by force. …she managed – during one school year! – to raise the bonus price of a fancy embrace to three and even four bucks. O Reader, laugh not as you imagine me, on the very rack of joy noisily emitting dimes and quarters, and great big silver dollars like some sonorous, jingly and wholly demented machine vomiting riches;[164]

The quote given, shows Humbert's manipulative attitude towards Lolita, her love, certainly, could not be forced, but money can stimulate it. These negotiations were not fair also from the fact, that as soon as he had a chance, Humbert would burgle her room and remove the money he could found. The reason of doing so is his fear of her run away from him.

As the narrative unfolds, Humbert does his best to keep Lolita away from communicating with boys. He used to read the so-called Column for Teens in a magazine *Star,* which gives advice for fathers how not to frighten away the daughter's friends. According to the magazine, it can be hard to realize that now

[163] Nabokov, *Lolita,* 127.

[164] Nabokov, *Lolita,* 127.

the boys find the daughter attractive, even though for the father she is still a little girl. Humbert reads the column and makes ironical comments. For him, the border between being a lover and a father for her is blurred. His love gradually becomes an obsession, even a paranoia.

> And I was such a thoughtful fiend, such a passionate father, such a good pediatrician, attending to all the wants of my little auburn brunette's body. My only grudge against nature was that I could not turn my Lolita inside out and apply voracious lips to her young matrix, her unknown heart, her nacreous liver, the sea-grapes of her lungs, her calmly twin kidneys.[165]

According to Boyd, the theme of insatiability simply progresses to another stage, the insatiability of his sexual demands. Although for Humbert the bliss of possession is not sufficient. [166] Humbert confesses of an insane idea, which kept haunting him during their car journeys around the states.

> …the thought that with a patience and luck I might have her produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second, who would be eight or nine around 1960, when I would still be *dans la force de l'âge*; indeed, the telescopy of my mind, or un-mind, was strong enough to distinguish in thr remoteness of time *vieillard encore vert* – or was it green rot? – bizarre, tender, salivating Dr. Humbert, practicing on supremely lovely Lolita the Third the art of being a granddad.[167]

Whereas imagination lets Humbert as much freedom as he wants, the reality proves to be complicated and Humbert has the feeling that he failed as a father of Lolita "the First". He claims to have done his best. He read and reread a book under the title *Know Your own Daughter*, which did not help much, since the nature of their relationship was essentially different from a father – daughter one. There are neither books nor articles to read about their unique relationships.

Boyd provides a quote from review of Lolita by Robertson Davies, according to whom the novel's theme "is not the corruption of an innocent child by a cunning adult, but the exploitation of a weak adult by a corrupt child."[168] This

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[165] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 154.

[166] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 239.

[167] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 163.

[168] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 230.

view on their relationship can be confirmed by examples from the text. First of all, Lolita, at her age, was no longer a virgin, second, in the morning at the hotel Enchanted Hunters, it was Lolita, who seduced Humbert, suggesting "a game she and Charlie had played".[169]

After the long expected and desired morning for Humbert at the hotel Enchanted Hunters, when Lolita wanted to call her mother and learned that he mother had been dead, she became upset. Humbert, in order to make her happy bought her four books of comics, a box of candy, two cokes, a manicure set, a travel clock, a ring with a real topaz, a tennis racket, roller skates, a portable radio set, chewing gum, a transparent raincoat, sunglasses and other things. At night, even though they had separate rooms, she came to him sobbing. As Humbert notes: "You see, she had absolutely nowhere to go."[170] Taking this fact into account, it was much easier for him to manipulate her.

Boyd discussing Humbert's tactics mentions the following arguments that Nabokov grants Humbert, namely, the psychological trauma in childhood, meaning Annabel's death, the arbitrariness of prohibition against sex with the young that in other times other cultures have allowed it. His efforts to restraint before Lolita, more precisely, his marriage with Valeria and until Lolita seduced him. He also mentions the transcendent poetry of nymphet love, like "there is no other bliss on earth comparable to that of fondling a nymphet"[171] and others.

In spite the fact that Lolita came into Humbert's life as a reincarnation of Annabel, it must be stressed, that she has never been as close to Humbert as Annabel has been. With Annabel it was a mutual love that had never been fulfilled physically, since their parents had not provide them neither space nor time for that, much to their children's unhappiness. On the contrary, with Lolita, Humbert learned what the nymphet love was, although he confesses that he had never known what was on her mind. As Boyd puts it, "With Annabel, he could share his passion and his thoughts; with Lolita he can only secure access to her body."[172]

Going back to the discussion of the obsession theme, it should be

[169] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 125.

[170] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 133.

[171] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 231.

[172] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 238.

noted, that when Lolita tells Humbert about Clare Quilty and his role in helping her to escape from Humbert, the only thing left for him was to find Quilty and kill him. The obsession with love turns out to into the desire for revenge. Boyd writes: "…he must at all costs identify, track down, and dispose of the man who took Lolita with him and taunted him in the process."[173] According to Boyd, from the very first lines of the novel, the reader learns that Humbert and Lolita were going to be lovers, even though it was not clear how it would happen, but with Humbert's progress in reaching Lolita was measured by the reader's knowledge of the fact, that he would eventually enjoy her as a lover. Furthermore, before the start of part two, the reader already knows that Humbert is a murderer, although the question remains whom Humbert has murdered. The detective pattern of the novel, as Boyd explains is a "whocoppedit" rather than a whodunit.[174] The reader learns about Quilty at the end of the novel. Being a successful playwright, alcohol and drugs lover he also has a weakness for girls in their pubescence. He knew Charlotte two years before Humbert and even perched Lolita. Having seen Lolita with Humbert in the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, he recognized her and knew for sure that Humbert was not her father, and so he "had enviously divined the intentions of his fellow pervert."[175] He wrote a play and named it after the hotel, *The Enchanted Hunters*. The play, eventually has been decided to be staged at Lolita's school. When Quilty visits the rehearsal, they become lovers with Lolita and plan her escape.

Humbert craves for a revenge, he even writes a poem for Quilty to read it before his death, to know for sure why exactly he deserves the death. According to Boyd, the murder scene evolves into a farce. He also notes:

> Humbert had tried to corner Lolita in a room in the Enchanted Hunters, but it was she who turned to him and invited him to take his prey. Now at Pavor Manor he has tried to stage a final curtain call for the author of *The Enchanted Hunters*, but once again it is his victim who rewrites the future he had drafted with such care.[176]

[173] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 239.

[174] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 243.

[175] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 245.

[176] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 246.

As Boyd writes, in the hotel Enchanted Hunters, Humbert himself turns out to be the most enchanted of the hunters.[177] At the very last pages of the novel, Humbert mentions that it took him fifty-six days to write it, and it was meant not save his head, but his soul, but having decided that the novel would not be published before Lolita's death, he decided not to use it in the court. Thus, neither of them would be alive when the reader would open the present novel. What Humbert did not know while writing these lines, is that Lolita would die in childbirth only five weeks after his death. Although the novel is Humbert's attempt to immortalize Lolita and his love for her, his conduct, without a doubt hastened her death, by "thrusting her so early into the adult world"[178], as Boyd notes.

When Lolita striving for freedom suggests Humbert to pack up and head west again, Humbert is overjoyed, he is looking forward to revive those moments of their first year's journey with her. Boyd explains it as follows:

> What he does not know, of course, what he finds out too late, is that on this second trip, this supposed reprise of the past, everything has changed: Lolita has arranged the whole thing with Quilty, and Quilty's car trails them all the way out west, like a shimmer of unease, a mirage of retribution, a shadow of guilt. The attempt to repeat the past only shows how impossible it is to relive.[179]

As far as the confession is concerned, Humbert only admits his guilt concerning Lolita, and not the murder of Quilty, which he does not regret at all. "Had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty-five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges."[180] Only speaking in general terms, Humbert mentions the murder as the "other charges".

Before the last lines of the novel, Humbert recalls very vividly one scene. It happened soon after Lolita disappeared. While driving his car, felt an attack of nausea and decided to walk a little bit. He grew aware of a melodious unity of sounds rising from the town that laid at his feet.

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[177] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 246.

[178] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 250.

[179] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 238.

[180] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 290.

> Reader! What I heard was but a melody of children at play, nothing but that… I stood listening to that musical vibrations from my lofty slope, to those flashes of separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord.[181]

According to Boyd, Humbert deliberately puts this abstract at the very end of the novel to show that he can look selfless, although chronologically this memory belongs to the period right after Lolita's disappearance.

> "For two years Humbert had been quite lucidly aware that he was keeping Lolita a prisoner and destroying her childhood and her spirit, but he continued to hold her in his power. So long as he could extract sexual delight from her, he could remain deaf to his moral sense. Only after her disappearance, when she was no longer available as the thrice-daily outlet for his lust, did he allow his moral awareness to overwhelm him as he looked down into the valley.[182]

The novel, apart from its aim to immortalize Lolita, by confession, is also as a way of getting in terms with the burden of the guilt, although the further Humbert writes, the heavier the guilt he feels.

To conclude, the aim of the chapter was to analyze the novel by looking closely at the three themes characteristic of Nabokov's writing. The three themes of confession, obsession and memory are not only recurrent in *Lolita,* which belongs to the later period of Nabokov's works written in English, they also shape the novel. Humbert constructs his *Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male* relying on his memory of the most unique obsessive love story.

While memory in *Despair*, the earliest work discussed is something Hermann relies on heavily fails him in the most unexpected way by letting him make a foolish mistake, which brings him serious consequences. In "Spring in Fialta" memory for Victor is the only place to find Nina, over and over again he recalls all their encounters starting with the first one in a hope to understand whether there was a slightest chance for them being together and knowing that she died right

[181] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 290.

[182] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 254.

after his only attempt during the fifteen years to be closer to her and tell her about his feelings. In "That in Aleppo Once…" memory provides the narrator multiple variants of the same events, where he is no longer sure what exactly really happened to him due to his jealousy. In *Lolita* it is more about the fact that there is no other way to relive the past. It is worth mentioning here the passage where Humbert describes two kinds of memory. The way he remembers Annabel, recreating individual features, is similar to the way the narrator of "That in Aleppo Once…" remembers his wife, recalling a birthmark as a starting point.

As a more mature novel, *Lolita* is different from the earlier Nabokov's works in a way, that the narrator, while confessing realizes all the depth of his guilt before his love. The book he starts writing in the ward and ends being in captivity before the court represents Humbert's attempt to immortalize Lolita. While he writes the novel, he hopes that it will be published after her death, what he does not know, is that she will die soon after him.

As it has been discussed, in the novel *Despair* Hermann's confessional tale is an attempt to prove his artistic skill, a kind of a triumph illustrating a perfect crime performed, which ends up containing a mistake that enables the police to track him down. The way Hermann sees himself is opposed by the characters he introduces and rare dialogues he provides. No other character in the novel finds at least a little likeness between Hermann and Felix, while he is certain that the latter is his double. Furthermore, there are numerous hints that Hermann is probably insane. He has never expressed a slightest recognition for the murder he committed. As opposed to Hermann's *Despair*, Humbert's *Lolita* no matter the controversial topic is an honest confession, in spite the fact that in the beginning he is trying to find justifications for his immoral behavior, he comes to a complete perception of the harm he had done to the child he loves.

If compared to the short story "Spring in Fialta", where Victor writes to find the answer to the question what place Nina occupied in her life, Humbert knows and realizes that Lolita is his only love. The other short story, written already in English "That in Aleppo Once…" the narrator although writes a letter to a friend pleading for an explanation, reveals a character who is a little bit closer to Humbert in the sense that he seems to realize where his obsession is heading, in spite the fact that he cannot control it.

As far as the three themes are concerned, Humbert represents a more

complex character than those from the earlier works in discussion. Even though it could be argued that his treatment of Lolita hastened her death, there are no doubts left about his endless love for her.

Conclusion

The three themes of confession, obsession and memory chosen for the analysis of the present thesis have been proven not only as to be recurrent in the selected works by Vladimir Nabokov, but also crucial in shaping the main characters.

Despair, the earliest work analyzed represents Hermann's confessional tale as an attempt to prove his artistic skill, a kind of a triumph illustrating a perfect crime performed, which ends up containing a mistake that enables the police to track him down. The way Hermann sees himself is opposed by the characters he introduces and rare dialogues he provides. No other character in the novel finds at least a little likeness between Hermann and Felix, while he is certain that the latter is his double. Furthermore, there are numerous hints in the text that Hermann is probably insane. Hermann relies heavily on his memory, which fails him in the most unexpected way by letting him make a foolish mistake, which brings him serious consequences. As far as the obsession is concerned, Hermann has never expressed a slightest recognition for the murder he committed.

The short story "Spring in Fialta", is Victor's attempt to find the answer to the question what place Nina occupied in his life. Memory for Victor is the only place to find Nina. Over and over again he recalls all their encounters starting with the first one in a hope to understand whether there was a slightest chance for them being together. Realizing that she died right after his only attempt during the fifteen years to be closer to her and tell her about his feelings makes him suffer even more.

The Enchanter is the only work written not from the first person narrator and not representing a confession, although the access to the main character's mind enables the reader to see his motives. The protagonist of the short novel suffers from constant struggle with his inner self. From the very first line of the novel till the moment he is torn between the feeling of self-preservation and his obsession with the little girl. Eventually, the obsession and the desire for the girl takes over the mind and the reason and as a result he dies under the truck wheels as a way of self-punishment for having caused revulsion in the girl.

In "That in Aleppo Once…" memory provides the narrator multiple variants of the same events, where he is no longer sure what exactly really happened to him due to his obsessive jealousy. The confessional letter he writes illustrates his realization of the possible consequences of his jealousy for his young wife. In "That

in Aleppo Once…" in spite of pleading his friend for an explanation through the prism of the literary art, the narrator is a little bit closer to Humbert Humbert in the sense that he seems to realize where his obsession is heading, in spite the fact that he cannot control it.

"First Love" as a recollection of the childhood memory represents a variation, where the theme of confession is concerned, in a way that the narrator is not haunted by the burden of the memory and there is no need for him to confess. The narrator remembers his first love with warmth. Memory, constituting the central theme of the short story is detailed in the first part, where he remembers the train journeys he was enchanted by, and fails him several times while he tries to remember his love. What is problematic with regard to analysis of this short story, is that after being published in The New Yorker, it was also included into Nabokov's autobiography Speak, Memory, which makes it non-fiction.

Lolita, no matter its controversial topic, is an honest confession, in spite the fact that in the beginning Humbert tries find justifications for his immoral behavior, by the end of the novel he comes to a complete perception of the harm he had done to the child he loved more than everything. Humbert creates his *Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male* relying on his memory of the most unique obsessive love story. Memory in *Lolita* it is more about the fact that there is no other way to relive the past. Humbert's attempt to repeat the journey with Lolita ends up in her escape.

As a more mature novel, *Lolita* is different from the earlier Nabokov's works in a way, that the narrator, while confessing realizes all the depth of his guilt before his love. The book he starts writing in the ward and finishes being in captivity before the court, represents Humbert's attempt to immortalize Lolita. While he writes the novel, he hopes that it will be published after her death, what he does not know, however, is that she will die soon after him.

As far as the three themes are concerned, Humbert Humbert represents a more complex character than those from the earlier works in discussion. Even though it could be argued that his treatment of Lolita hastened her death, there are no doubts left about his endless love for her. The hypothesis that the later works by Nabokov analyzed in the thesis are more complex with regard to the three themes has been proven.

Resumé

Cílem předložené práce je analýza tří opakujících motivů, vyznání, obsese a vzpomínky, ve vybraných dílech Vladimíra Nabokova: *Zoufalství, Kouzelník,* "Jaro v Fialtě", "Že Kdysi Jednou v Aleppo...", "První Láska", *Lolita.* Tato díla jsou předmětem analýzy a odhalí, jakým způsobem výše zmínění motivy ovlivňují postavy a jejich nazírání na svět. Předložená hypotéza tvrdí, že se tyto motivy během Nabokovovy kariéry postupně vyvíjely. Bude analyzováno, že pozdější díla disponují komplexnějšími postavami s ohledem na předložené motivy, vyznání, obsese a vzpomínky.

První kapitola představuje informace o Vladimiru Nabokovovi a jeho hlavních dílech, ruských i amerických. Dále následuje kapitola věnovaná románu *Zoufalství*, který byl napsán v roce 1936 a později jej Nabokov přeložil. Román představuje Hermanna, jenž se vyznává z toho, co sám považuje za dokonalý zločin, když zavraždí svého dvojníka.

Následující kapitola analyzuje krátkou povídku "Jaro v Fialtě". Příběh je o Viktorově vzpomínání na patnáct let trvající románek s Ninou, pro tento vztah se mu nepodaří najít vhodný termín. Viktor vzpomíná na poslední den, který spolu trávili ve Fialtě. Další kapitola analyzuje velmi krátký román, *Kouzelník*, který byl publikován posmrtně a přeložen autorovým synem Dmitrijem Nabokovem. Tento román je některými kritiky považován za skicu *Lolity*, neboť se rovněž zabývá láskou muže a nedospělé dívky. Nicméně kromě toho, že se hlavní postava oženila s matkou dívky proto, aby jí byl nablízku, jde o zcela jiný děj. Navíc žádná z postav nemá jméno, a hlavní postava po celou dobu bojuje se svým „jedinečným žárem." Když se mu konečně podaří dívku dostat do hotelového pokoje, aby ji mohl ve spánku prozkoumat, ona se probudí a začne křičet tak hlasitě, že vzbudí všechny sousedy. Hlavní postava raději dobrovolně skočí pod auto.

Další krátká povídka, "Že Kdysi Jednou v Aleppo..." je o dopisu, který postava přítelovi V. Nepojemenovaný vypravěč žádá o napsání příběhu o jeho manželství, které má osvětlit právě pomocí literární formy. Problém ale je, že vypravěč ví to tom, že jeho manželka nikdy neexistovala, jeho vzpomínky mají několik verzí téže události a postavy, o nichž píše, nejsou součástí příběhu. Závěr povídky naznačuje, že byl vypravěč do jisté míry posedlý žárlivostí ke své mladé manželce.

Další kapitola je věnovaná krátké povídce “První Láska”, ve které vypravěč vzpomíná na dětství a letní prázdniny v Biarritzu, kam jezdívali vlakem. Soustředí se na jedno léto, kdy potkal Colette, francouzskou desetiletou dívku, do níž se zamiloval. Zajímavým momentem celého příběhu je fakt, že si dokonale vzpomíná na cestu vlakem, nicméně paměť ho zradí, když se snaží vzpomenout na samotnou Colette.

Posledním analyzovaným dílem je román *Lolita*, Nabokovovo nejslavnější a nejkontroverznější dílo. *Lolita* je vzpomínkový román napsaný Humbertem Humbertem, který zemře pár dní před svým soudem. Vyznává se z posedlosti dívkou, kterou miloval víc než cokoli na světě; nicméně, po jejím útěku váhavě čelí naturální skutečnosti, že jeho posedlost byl vlastně chtíč.

V závěru práce dospívám k tomu, že motivy vyznání, obsese a vzpomínky, zvolené pro tuto analýzu se v daných dílech vyskytují; rovněž se potvrdilo, že ve vybraných dílech Vladimíra Nabokova jsou postavy těmito motivy ovlivňovány. Ačkoli byla potvrzena hypotéza, že Nabokovova pozdní díla obsahují mnohem komplikovanější postavy s ohledem na hloubku zmíněných motivů, záběr této problematiky je mnohem širší a komplexnější.

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ANOTACE

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Název práce: *Vyznání, obsese a vzpomínky, ve vybraných dílech Vladimíra Nabokova*

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Abstrakt: Cílem předložené práce je analýza tří opakujících motivů, vyznání, obsese a vzpomínky, ve vybraných dílech Vladimíra Nabokova: *Zoufalství, Kouzelník,* "Jaro v Fialtě", "Že Kdysi Jednou v Aleppo...", "První Láska", *Lolita.* Tato díla jsou předmětem analýzy a odhalí, jakým způsobem výše zmínění motivy ovlivňují postavy a jejich nazírání na svět. Předložená hypotéza tvrdí, že se tyto motivy během Nabokovovy kariéry postupně vyvíjely. Bude analyzováno, že pozdější díla disponují komplexnějšími postavami s ohledem na předložené motivy, vyznání, obsese a vzpomínky.

Klíčová slova: první láska, vyznání, obsese a vzpomínky, Lolita, Humbert, Victor, Nina.

ANNOTATION

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Abstract:

This diploma thesis' aim is to analyze the three recurrent themes of confession, obsession and memory in the selected works by Vladimir Nabokov: *Despair*, "Spring in Fialta", *The Enchanter*, "That in Aleppo Once…", "First Love" and *Lolita* to reveal the way these themes shape the characters and their understanding of the world. The hypothesis is that the three themes analyzed developed throughout the Nabokov's works during the time. The later works, it will be argued, present more complex characters in respect to the key themes of confession, obsession and memory.

Key words: Nabokov, memory, obsession, confession, first love, Lolita, Humbert, despair, Victor, Nina.