

CHESS AS A KEY TO SOLVING NABOKOV'S *KOROL'*, *DAMA*, *VALET*

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## ABSTRACT

James Murray Slater: Chess as a Key to Solving Nabokov's *Korol', dama, valet*

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This thesis examines the role of chess in Nabokov's novel, *Korol', dama, valet*, and how the struggle between the narrator and the protagonist, Martha-Marta, can be justified by using chess as a key. The first portion of my analysis is based on the role of the diegetic narrator in an attempt to subvert Martha's movements toward autonomy. In explaining the narrator's subversion of Martha, I explore the nature of the protagonists, the movement of the narrative, and the structure and parameters of the novel in relation to it being a figurative game of chess. Furthermore, Martha's attempts at dominance are examined in connection to the concept of past-reconstruction. I conclude my analysis by ushering in unifying intersections of plot and characterization in Nabokov's later work.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Бархатный стук в голове:  
это ходят фигуры резные.*

-В. В. Набоков, “Шахматный конь”<sup>1</sup>

Vladimir Nabokov's “*Shakhmatnyi kon*” (1927, translated as “The Chess Knight”) is ostensibly a prelude to his 1928 novel *Korol', dama, valet* (henceforth: *KDV*, translated as *King, Queen, Knave*) wherein he conflates chess with his narrative. In the poem quoted above, which describes how an aged chess player sees the game of chess come to life before his eyes, Nabokov creates a landscape where the player becomes a part of the sixty-four-celled black and white world of the chessboard.

*KDV* is quite different from “*Shakhmatnyi kon*” in regard to the game of chess. Where “*Shakhmatnyi kon*” concerns a chess player who becomes a part of the game, none of the protagonists in *KDV* play chess, nor is chess a focus on the level of plot.

The plot can be summarized thusly: The novel is set in Berlin and concerns two Berliners, Kurt Dreyer and his wife, Martha, who take in a distant nephew from the countryside, Franz Bubendorf. After spending some time in Berlin with the Dreyers,

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<sup>1</sup> “*Shakhmatnyi kon*” is found in its entirety in the appendices.

Franz begins an affair with Martha. It does not take very long before Martha becomes frustrated by the secrecy that they must endure, and decides to kill her husband. After much desperate planning Dreyer himself reveals his weakness — he cannot swim. With this knowledge Martha has Dreyer whisk her and his cousin off to a Baltic resort, where she will attempt to drown him. Right before Martha can exact her plan, *deus ex machina* steps in as Dreyer announces he is to leave the resort to sell his *automannequins*. (There is a subplot in the novel where Dreyer, as an entrepreneur, creates these *automannequins*, which plays a larger role in the novel's poetic context.) While she is waiting for her husband to return, Martha comes down with pneumonia and soon after dies. Thus Dreyer never learns of her plot and Franz is left with relief that he did not have to follow through with it.

This summary of the plot does not proffer any correspondence between the theme of chess and *KDV*. As chess plays only a miniscule role in the novel — through the game of an apparently secondary character, Bladvak Vinomori (more on this character's importance later), at the Baltic resort —, I must discuss how chess is important in terms of narrative. Although *KDV* may be read without a focus on the element of chess, I contend that it cannot be ignored, and furthermore assert that this reading of the novel not only complements previous scholarship, but enhances it.

There are only two concrete instances in literary criticism where chess has been linked with *KDV*. The first is pointed out by Aleksandr Dolinin:

В одном эпизоде *Короля, дамы, валеа* шахматы, как метафора неумолимо развертывающегося, победоносного авторского замысла, 'планетариума мысли', имплицитно противопоставляются 'карточному' миропониманию героев, [...] причем шахматная партия заканчивается, как только герой сдается и малодушно решает выполнить волю Марты. Он не сомневается, что 'все будет так, как она сказала', и только в 'последний миг' романа

убеждается в своей ошибке: неожиданный и эффективный мат в финале 'партии' получает атакующая сторона.<sup>2</sup>

The second instance comes in a deconstruction of the title. L. L. Lee writes on this that, "the English title (but not so much the Russian one) brings in Nabokov's love for chess; the notation in chess for king, queen, and knight is, we should remember, *k, q, kn*. And the plot of the novel, like that of *The Defence*, his next novel, is an elaborate chess game, although here, at the end, the queen is sacrificed, thereby saving the king — or perhaps, the queen destroys herself, thereby saving the king."<sup>3</sup>

I find the notion that the English title creates a more accessible link to chess very valid. In the Russian, the reader seems more apt to link the title with Aleksandr Pushkin's "*Pikovaia dama*" (1833). In "*Pikovaia dama*" the protagonist Hermann-Germann learns the secret of three cards that will help him amass a fortune. It is not a question of coincidence then, that Nabokov has named his novel after three cards. The association with the cards is important, as Nabokov tends to build upon the foundations of Pushkin, Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, and others in his works. The connection to Pushkin is even more explicitly touched upon in the preface to the English translation, where Nabokov writes:

Finally the question of the title. Those three court cards, all hearts, I have retained, while discarding a small pair. The two new cards dealt me may justify the gamble, for I have always had an *ivory thumb* in this game.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dolinin, p. 56

<sup>3</sup> Lee, p. 40

<sup>4</sup> *King, Queen, Knave*, p. 8 (italics added) In this preface Nabokov writes about having five cards in his hand and discarding a small pair in hope of a Royal Flush. He writes that he will keep these "three court cards, all hearts," which represent the three protagonists: King, Queen, Knave/Jack. That would mean that Nabokov is hoping for a ten of hearts and an ace of hearts. I consider this talk of playing cards to relate to

The relationship between the three protagonists and playing cards is especially clear in that they are one-sided, and no more real than their doubles — the *automannequins*. In this sense the title reflects the inhuman features of Nabokov's characters, while hinting, perhaps, that this work belongs on the same shelf with the literature of Pushkin, et al. It is interesting upon reading the preface that Nabokov writes that he has “always had *an ivory thumb* in this game.” It is at this point that the question arises: To which game is Nabokov referring? Why would one play cards with an “ivory thumb”? One wouldn't. Nabokov is an expert in deceiving his readers. For him the novel is more than just a narrative detailing the action of a handful of characters — it is a game. I propose that the struggle between Martha and the narrator takes place not merely on the black and white pages of his novel, but, also, on the black and white cells of a chessboard.

In terms of chess and playing cards, I find a clear difference in delineating a connection between the protagonists and these symbols. If one is to consider these protagonists to be one-sided playing cards, it is difficult to see them as anything but Nabokov's obedient slaves. However, if one is to look at the chess motif and see these protagonists as ivory chess pieces, it is clear that they are no longer one-sided cards, but three-dimensional figurines. Unlike cards that are bent to the will of their master, chess pieces can move in a combination of patterns and serve a number of roles to bring victory to one side or another. In this sense it is possible to see these protagonists as something more than just human-like illustrations, but rather as slightly more complex figurines that can live in a world full of contradiction — like the one I explore in *KDV*.

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Pushkin's “*Pikovaia dama*,” however I deem the importance of this excerpt to be Nabokov's admission of playing with an “ivory thumb.”

Nabokov writes in *Speak, Memory* about the conflation of chess and literature and how the conflict therein is between the author and his world, rather than the characters themselves:

It is one thing to conceive the main play of a composition and another to construct it. The strain on the mind is formidable; the element of time drops out of one's consciousness altogether. [...] This or that knight is a lever adjusted and tried, and readjusted and tried again, till the problem is tuned up to the necessary level of beauty and surprise. *How often I have struggled to bind the terrible force of White's queen so as to avoid a dual solution! It should be understood that competition in chess problems is not really between White and Black but between the composer and hypothetical solver (just as in a first-rate work of fiction the real clash is not between the characters but between the author and the world), so that a great part of a problem's value is due to the number of 'tries' — delusive opening moves, false scents, specious lines of play, astutely and lovingly prepared to lead the would-be solver astray.*<sup>5</sup>

The coalescence of chess and literature is paramount in understanding Nabokov's composition. It is the subtle nature of Nabokov's ruses that keeps the reader from simply browsing through the chapters of his work. We are forced to examine every word. Moreover, from this excerpt alone I find an allusion to the structure of *KDV*. "*How often I have struggled to bind the terrible force of White's queen so as to avoid a dual solution!*" This line appeals to the problem that will be faced by the author in the various instances of the novel. It is important to state that as the author is attempting to avoid a dual solution, that I consider a small extent of freedom for Nabokov's protagonists in this novel. In the case of Martha, she is able to work around the bounds of her author's omnipotence to concoct a plan to murder her husband — even if it is thwarted in the end.

In terms of the protagonists as chess pieces, I shall focus on three elements of chess and how they ultimately provide a basis for using chess to understand the novel. These elements are movement, structure and the unflinchingly rigid parameters of chess.

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<sup>5</sup> *Speak, Memory*, p. 290 (italics added)



I posit that each character is bound by the movement of his or her corresponding chess figure, and thereby the role designated to each according piece. For instance, a knight is bound by l-shaped movements in a combination of either one move forward/backward and two moves to the left or right, or two moves forward/backward and one move to the right or left. In *KDV* I find that each character fits to his or her predetermined movements, be it diagonal, l-shaped, and so forth. In terms of structure and parameters, I propose that the narrative movement of the novel is, metaphorically speaking, based on an interchange between two opposing players. These players are the narrator and Martha-Marta. Each part of the novel (I split it into three parts) contains a plan of attack and subsequent defense by these two players. From this perspective I discuss each character's "key move" and how it contributes in the narrative movement of the novel.<sup>6</sup>

As I have posited, the two opposing players in *KDV* are Martha and the narrator. I deem Martha the narrator's opponent for her role in the active progression of the story. She attempts to break the rules and parameters of chess by attacking her own king, that is, her husband, in an attempt to free herself from the constraints of the novel. I must then assess how her struggle plays into the framework of my analysis.

The first chapter focuses on the narrator and the protagonists. I concentrate on the role of the narrator in terms of the novel being a figurative chess game. In this vein, I emphasize how the narrator works to subdue his opponent, Martha, and how he pens his

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<sup>6</sup> D. Barton Johnston writes in "The Key to Nabokov's *Gift*" that "Fedor [is] fascinat[ed] with the chess problem (as opposed to the chess game) and his likening of the 'plot' of the chess problem to the plot of his future novel [...]" In relation to this Sarah Tiffany Waite writes that "the solver of the chess problem must discover 'the uniquely possible opening move for White that will force mate on Black in a specified number of moves,' and that this critical opening is called the 'key move' or the 'key'" (56). I apply their method in this analysis in ascertaining each opponent's "key move"—that is their opening attack, or critical move in advancing toward victory over their opponent.

attack and defensive “moves.” I address the narrator’s “moves” through his use of the protagonists. The narrator uses the protagonists to draw a clearer picture of the progression of the novel, and therefore the game. It is through an analysis of the protagonists’ direct speech and their inner monologues, along with the description of their physical movements and mannerisms, that one can consider (a) that the characters are a part of an overarching chess game, and (b) that they themselves are portrayed as being figurine-like. I furthermore assert that the narrator’s opening or “key” move in the figurative chess game against Martha comes through dialogue in the novel.

As the first chapter is comprised solely of the protagonists in relation to the narrator, a question arises: Could Martha have even subverted her *auctor* in the first place? That is to say: Is Martha’s fate already predetermined? This question appears in ascertaining the extent to which the Nabokovian world of *KDV* allows the characters to act exercising free will. It is in discussing free will that I will further analyze the role of protagonists, where the final section of this chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the narrator uses the *automannequins* and Dreyer/Franz as agents of fate.

In concluding my analysis of the narrator in *KDV*, I shift my focus to the role of an apparently secondary character, Bladvak Vinomori. Bladvak Vinomori (an obvious anagram of Vladimir Nabokov) serves the role of an extradiegetic character that in effect is one of the “author’s representatives.”<sup>7</sup> His *mise en abîme* chess game promotes the narrator’s “key move” — one that has been predetermined even before Nabokov put life into his characters. Aleksandr Dolinin touches upon the notion of putting life into characters so that they, like figures, come to life at the novel’s inception and cease to

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<sup>7</sup> I borrow this term from Connolly, who uses “maker’s representative” (65).

exist once the reader reaches the back cover. In relating this idea, he quotes Sancho Panza from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*:

Пока идет игра, каждая фигура имеет свое особое назначение, а когда игра кончилась, все фигуры перемешиваются... и попадают в один мешок, подобно как все живое сходит в могилу (56).

In terms of Bladvak's chess game, it serves as a reminder that the characters lack autonomy, while cluing the reader that fate will shortly intercede. I examine Bladvak as an agent of *deus ex machina* based on not only his game-within-a-game, but also in analysis of his name in the original as opposed to the translation.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, I conclude this section with a simple intersection Venn diagram correlating a suggestive link between the author's representative (Bladvak) and the author himself. (See Appendix C)

The second part of my analysis deals with the protagonists' lack of free will, specifically Martha's. In analyzing her lack of free will I assert that her action is based on an attempt to gain authorial control. It must then be solidified by the means she uses to strive for such control. Martha, the titular queen, tries to destroy the framework of the novel. That is, she attempts to kill her husband and run off with his nephew. The notion of Martha checkmating Dreyer lends itself well to the theme of chess in *KDV*. The word checkmate, as the Oxford English Dictionary states, means: "the king is dead."<sup>9</sup> It is thus

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<sup>8</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, I shall focus primarily on the Russian version of *KDV*, only referring to the translation as necessary.

<sup>9</sup> [Middle English *chekmat*, from Old French *eschec mat*, from Arabic *šāh māt*, the king is dead : *šāh*, king (from Persian *shāh*; see shah) + *māt*, died (from earlier *māta*, to die).] Russian, however, uses this etymology as a name for the entire game of chess, "*shakhmaty*" and just the word "*mat*" for "checkmate." This word "*mat*" means "dead" in the Persian, signifying the end of the game. The fact that in English the entire term is used to signify the end of the game is not lost on Nabokov for he plays bilingually. Thus

the only plan of attack that Martha could inevitably have to defeat her *auctor*, if one is to consider *KDV* a figurative chess game. It becomes clear that this outcome is not one that the author/narrator desires; however, Martha's attempt cannot be justified as her own rebellious act, as her *auctor* uses her plot to progress the narrative flow of the novel. As she is attempting to break the framework of the novel, she is also breaking the framework of the game of chess. She does so in an effort to exert free will, which can therefore be applied to her overarching chess game against her *auctor*. The rules of chess are broken if Martha succeeds, in that as a "chess queen" she does have the recourse to kill her own "king." As a queen, Martha has two options: attack on the king's behalf, or defend him through whatever means necessary, including self-sacrifice.

This analysis of Martha's struggle for authorial control, in which I present her motivation for trying to break free of her master as "past-reconstruction," proffers an important segue into the rest of Nabokov's oeuvre. It is in analyzing the relevance of Nabokov's early works, such as *KDV*, to his later ones, that I shall conclude my discussion of chess and authorial control.

As I have mentioned that the notion of authorial struggle is not just indicative of the strife between Martha and her *auctor*, but found throughout the majority of his oeuvre, I find it pivotal to touch upon Nabokov's own thoughts on the subject. In an interview with Alfred Appel Jr., Nabokov himself admits to allowing some autonomy for his protagonists earlier on:

A.A.: One often hears from writers talk of how a character takes hold of them and in a sense dictates the course of action. Has this ever been your experience?

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it is not important whether one is referring to his Russian or English version, as he would have understood the meaning conveyed in English nonetheless.

V.N.: I have never experienced this. What a preposterous experience! Writers who have had it must be very minor or insane. No, the design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the *perfect* dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth. Whether I reproduce it as fully and faithfully as I would wish, is another question. *Some of my old works reveal dismal blurrings and blanks.*<sup>10</sup>

In *KDV* Nabokov ultimately leaves no doubts as to who is in control. That is, Nabokov has created three unique characters, Franz Bubendorf — the knave, or knight; Martha Dreyer — the queen; and Kurt Dreyer — the king. Each of these characters is described and acts based on the role of their corresponding chess pieces. They move in a combination of patterns amongst all the cells of the board like Martha, or they are static and move slowly and only when necessary like Dreyer. Franz, the knight, (or bishop in the English version) is told how to move by his king and queen.

And thus the novel begins as the “black clock hand” is poised to make a “resilient jolt [that] will set a whole world in motion.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Conversations with Nabokov,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*. Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring, 1971), p. 210. (Italics added.) On the issue of depriving his characters of autonomy, Pifer points out that, “Nabokov’s characters, by contrast, are overtly manipulated by an author who behaves like a despot. Deprived of lifelike autonomy, subject to the strictures of artifice, can such creatures, we ask, claim any depth and dimension—any real life—of their own” (*Nabokov and the Novel*, 5)?

<sup>11</sup> “Огромная, черная стрела часов, застывшая перед своим ежеминутным жестом, сейчас вот дрогнет, и от ее тугого толчка тронется вес мир...” (*KDV*, p. 115; *King, Queen, Knave*, p. 9)

## CHAPTER 2

### NARRATIVE DIEGESIS, PROTAGONISTS AND CHESS

To quote Aleksandr Dolinin, Nabokov/Sirin “*sopriravnivaetsia k fitsdzheral’dovskomu bogu-kak-igroku, dlia kotorogo sozdannyi im mir est’ EGO igrovoe prostranstvo.*”<sup>12</sup> Dolinin had in mind Nabokov’s *Zashchita Luzhina*, but the idea is applicable to his entire oeuvre. In relating the “*igrovoe prostranstvo*” of Nabokov to *KDV* one must differentiate between the narrator, the authoritative voice of the progression of the novel; and the author’s representative, a suggestive setting of Nabokov into the text as Bladvak Vinomori. In *KDV* Nabokov makes an apparent distinction between these two modes.

Firstly, we have the narrator who subtly hints at direction, whilst giving the reader the understanding that his characters are not free to act on their own. There are various means the narrator employs to help the reader gain insight into Martha’s fate. In terms of the following discussion, there is illumination of the plot through the characters themselves. To begin there is Franz:

The narrator describes Franz’s world as he ventures from provincial Germany to the capital. When Franz arrives in Berlin he is practically blind:

Очки он положил рядом с тазом, на доску умывальника, с краю. Умывшись, он поднял таз, чтобы вылить его в ведро, и столкнул очки на пол. Одновременно он неловко шагнул в сторону, держа перед собой тяжелый,

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<sup>12</sup> Dolinin, p. 58

бушающий таз, и под каблуком зловеще хрустнуло. [...] без очков он все равно, что слепой, а нужно пуститься в опаснейший путь через незнакомый город (127).

It is because Franz is blind that he is not able to adapt to his surroundings. He eventually buys American glasses wherein his world becomes visible again (“*kraski mira voshli snova v svoi otchetlivye berega.*”).<sup>13</sup> The problem, which the narrator alludes to, is that during the short week when Franz is blind, he begins to bond with Martha. He sees her, with her “*belyi ravnobedrennyi treugol’nik lba*” (137), not unlike that of a chess queen, and he begins to admire her. It is Franz’s initial blindness that causes him to see Martha in a different light. This exemplifies a problem characteristic within Nabokov’s oeuvre, where blindness can be attributed, in a causal relationship, to his protagonists’ inability to succeed (I will later comment on Dreyer’s blindness in relation to him being a suggestive static chess king). It is because of Franz’s initial blindness that he mistakenly sees Martha as possessing positive qualities, only to later find himself searching back for the woman he had first envisioned, finding a blank. As Lee points out:

Franz tries, in working on a male mannequin with a ‘horrible face,’ to remember where he has seen that face before [...] Still later he compares her face to that of a white toad; she changes in some ten months, from the utterly inaccessible, almost invisible, goddess to the animal. But none of his perceptions and none of his memories have much relationship with actuality. The woman is neither goddess nor animal, she is, morally, nearer the toad.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> (141); Nabokov alludes to the motif of chess even more so in his English translation. He writes: “the haze dissolved. The unruly colors of the universe were confined once more to their *official compartments and cells*” (*King, Queen, Knave* p. 44, italics added). Here we find an instance of Nabokov lending a more pervasive allusion to chess than in his original Russian. This is not uncommon for Nabokov; yet, in this case it provides a clearer allusion to the notion that Franz, et al, are merely figurines existing in a world similar to that of a later character, Luzhin.

<sup>14</sup> Lee, p. 40; Lee also writes that Martha “becomes, in short, commercialized sex and is utterly false.”

It is the subtlety of Franz being blind to Martha's real nature that clues the reader to her sinister nature. Nabokov writes:

Марта в бесплотном сиянии его близорукости нисколько не была похожа на вчерашнюю даму, которая позевывала, как тигрица. Зато мадоннообразное в ее облике, примеченное им вчера в полудремоте и снова утраченное, — и теперь проявилось вполне, как будто и было ее сущностью, ее душой, которая теперь расцвела перед ним без примеси, без оболочки. Он не мог бы в точности сказать, — нравится ли ему эта туманная дама: близорукость целомудренна (131).

However, Franz's nearsightedness is not chaste, for he eventually will begin a lengthy affair with Martha. The implication here, though, is that Franz's nearsightedness at this early point in the text did not allow him to discern whether he in fact found Martha attractive. His inability to see her clearly contributes to her controlling him throughout the rest of the novel. Franz proves a weak barometer for judging a person's character on his own; yet, with the help of the narrator, the reader is able to see Martha for what she is worth.

Moving away from narrative and towards the characters' actions, their physical movements play a substantial role in dictating how the novel will unravel. The narrator provides the reader with insight on how Martha's plan will result in her demise through the actions of each of the protagonists. First we have Martha herself. She exhibits frequent coughing fits throughout the novel. This repetitive action is a clear indicator of her demise. Secondly, there is Franz. His physical movements are defined clearly and do not alter. He walks in similar patterns and often in diagonals. In this vein he is an automaton. In general, each of the protagonists is an automaton, meshing with their doppelgangers, the *automannequins* of the *izobretatel'*; however, Franz is the most



machine-like of the three — he is controlled by Martha, Dreyer and the narrator.<sup>15</sup> He is left not knowing to whom he must be obedient. Finally, we have Dreyer. He is ignorant (blind) to what goes on around him. It is his lack of movement and static nature that solidifies his role of a chess king, whilst ensuring that he will not be dynamic/perceptive enough to (a) uncover Martha's plan, and (b) save himself by any means other than *deus ex machina*. Therefore we see him as being the most unperceptive of the group, as he is generally offstage, occupying his time with *automannequins* and other endeavors.

Focusing on the physicality of the protagonists, the narrator illuminates to the reader his dénouement from the very beginning, while keeping his characters from realizing his omnipotence. To elaborate, the narrator has complete control of his free-will-lacking protagonists, and yet, he must remain unbeknownst to them, for his authorial presence would be compromised if discovered. It is in this sense that Martha is fighting for authorial control, but, in effect, fighting blindly. For if she or any of the other characters (excluding, as I suggest, Bladvak Vinomori and his wife) knew they lacked free will, the game could not be conducted.

To begin with Martha, her demise is presented during the masquerade in her home. It is during this party we see the game of chess being played figuratively by our protagonists as Franz and Martha try to locate one another in order to embrace. Instead, Martha cannot recognize Franz and accidentally meets with Dreyer. It is during the course

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Boyd compares the protagonists to the *automannequins* in that they “limp rather cumbrously and tiresomely across the novel's stage, for all their relevance to the theme of rigid automatism versus the ideal of flexibility and consciousness” (285). In this vein Franz remains the lowly automaton, whereas Martha struggles for flexibility and consciousness. This is something unattainable because as an automaton she cannot attain consciousness on her own.

of this masquerade that Martha decides she must kill her husband. I posit that this is not accidental, for the narrator's hint to the reader serves as a "key" for the blind chess game being played with the protagonists. It is here that the reader sees Martha's "key" move, and, in juxtaposition, the final move of the narrator. It is thus that both the narrator and Martha have taken time to analyze the figures on the board and plot their attacks:

Существовала будто незримая геометрическая фигура, и они были две движущихся по ней точки, и отношение между этими двумя точками можно было в любой миг прочувствовать и рассчитать, — и хотя они как будто двигались свободно, однако были строго связаны незримыми, беспощадными линиями той фигуры (203).

In a few lines preceding this description we find a clear indicator of the game of chess being played. Even though this game is merely figurative, it is described in such a way that it cannot be ignored. Nabokov writes:

Так шахматист, играющий вслепую, чувствует, как передвигаются один относительно другого его конь и чужой ферзь (203).

Here, the description of the knight and opposing queen lends to the scramble Franz and Martha make to find one another amongst the participants of the masquerade. However, it is also a clear indicator of a figurative chess game becoming more than simply that on the very pages of the novel.<sup>16</sup>

To return to the delineation of these characters on these geometric lines and patterns, it seems to the protagonists-figurines as if they are acting by free will. It is clear, on the contrary, that the bounds of narrative oppression and the cells of the chessboard keep movement restricted and predetermined. Or as Nabokov writes in *KDV*:

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<sup>16</sup> Note: In the English, Nabokov (in collaboration with his son, Dmitri) had changed the pieces from "kon" in the original to a "bishop": "...feels his bishop and his opponent's versatile queen move in relentless relation to each other" (121). (See: Appendix A for illustrations)

Жизнь должна идти по плану, прямо и строго, без всяких оригинальных поворотов (120).

This lack of free will harkens back to earlier descriptions of Franz's nearsightedness, in that when his vision is restored everything falls back into their proper "compartments and cells."

Furthermore, it is during this party at the Dreyers' where we see strict attention paid to the movements of the protagonist-figurines ("*Ona bystro k nemu podoshla, ogliadyvaias' na khodu*" (205)), and also are given an allusion to the fact that the game has already been predetermined up to the final move; thus the narrator's checkmate is revealed:

Я больше не могу, — забормотала Марта, меж *припадков лающего кашля*, —  
...не могу... И посмотри на себя: ты бледен, как смерть...

And she repeats:

— ...Как смерть, — сказала Марта и *закашлялась*.<sup>17</sup>

It is at this point where Martha realizes she can no longer deal with her husband and must act to change her situation. In terms of chess, this moment marks Martha's offensive against her opponent (her *auctor*), and even more specifically an offensive against her own predetermined fate. It is thereby her *auctor* who is to blame for pairing her with Dreyer. As Cervantes suggests, these characters are brought to life when taken out of the "bag" and silenced to non-existence once the game ceases. The narrator uses Martha's attacking decree to clue the reader in on the fact that her offensive cannot beat his. Her cough is, as I suggest, an allusion to her death. The casual reader, on the other hand,

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<sup>17</sup> (205) (italics added) *Note:* In the English translation, Martha does not cough after she repeats "*kak smert*" which is interesting to note, since it generally seems as if Nabokov allows the reader to see his intentions more plainly in his English translations.

might ignore this clue and not see that the narrator has implied his opponent's demise through her own dialogue. As Senderovich and Shvarts write in "The Ghost in the Novel: André Chénier in Vladimir Nabokov," "Nabokov does not make single moves — he composes complex chess problems in which the solution is achieved through a whole sequence of moves; moreover, Nabokov liked to compose such problems in which the strategy leading to the solution can be found only if the general idea of the problem is comprehended" (495). If one is to look at *KDV* as a chess problem, the narrator is hinting that he will thwart any attempt that Martha has made to checkmate him; yet the moves of Franz and Dreyer must also be taken into account. In the case of the narrator foretelling Martha's fate through her coughing fit, it is akin to the narrator telling his opponent how many moves from checkmate he (or in this case, she) is.

Furthermore, returning to the narrator's attention to the *blednost'* of these characters (Martha notes how Franz is "*bleden kak smert*"), this is used to present to the reader not only the fact that as chess figurines they must either be white or black (that is white and pale, or black in terms of garb); but, and more importantly, that they are *blednye* and *odnoobraznye*, like figurines. The inclusion of these characteristics comes from two indicators in the novel: the first, is the actual characters themselves, wherein they comment on the *blednost'* of one another through dialogue. The second indicator by which the reader sees these characters as one-dimensional figurines comes from paralleling the concept of Dreyer's *automannequins* to the characters — both are programmed, unnatural and fail to match the human beings they are modeled after.

Beginning with the aforementioned reference to Franz ("*ty bleden' kak smert*"), we see Martha formulating her plot to kill her husband through the only means she can:

dialogue. It is in this instance that we can clearly link Franz with a chess figurine, in that not only does he move in accordance to the cells of a chessboard, but also he is pale like a white chess piece. The same can be said for Martha, as Dreyer notes to himself while he watches her dress for a ball:

И был вечер, когда она собиралась на бал, и он был поражен тем, что у нее под мышками бело, как у статуи (165).

Here, one not only sees how Dreyer is affected by the whiteness/paleness of Martha, but that she is like a “statue.” Relating Martha to a statue connects to the notion that she is a figurine that does not possess free will. In a more indirect manner, it also connects this work to its literary predecessors. See in this description, an allusion to Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, where H  l  ne, much like Martha, is described as a marble statue, thus inhuman and unemotional. H  l  ne’s marble-like nature is first pointed to after Pierre duels Dolokhov in her honor:

Ее бюст, казавшийся всегда мраморным Пьеру, находился в таком близком расстоянии от его глаз, что он своими близорукими глазами невольно различал живую прелесть ее плеч и шеи, и так близко от его губ, что ему стоило немного нагнуться, чтобы прикоснуться до нее. Он слышал тепло ее тела, запах духов и скрип ее корсета при движении. Он видел не ее мраморную красоту, составлявшую одно целое с ее платьем, он видел и чувствовал всю прелесть ее тела, которое было закрыто только одеждой (238).

The *mramornost*’ of H  l  ne is mentioned by Pierre to cope with the fact that she may have had an affair with Dolokhov. This connects well with the fact that this “inhuman”<sup>18</sup> characteristic correlates with *poshlust*’. In the case of Martha, we see that she is *mramornaia* when she puts down her dog Tom for its incessant barking. Such an act relates to the figurine-like nature of Martha, for it is considered outside the bounds of

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<sup>18</sup> Martha’s lack of humanity is illustrated when she coughs during the masquerade, a “*laiushyi kashel*” which means “barking cough” (205).

human compassion to kill an innocent. Furthermore, the act justifies the narrator's design to do to her what she has done to her dog, going to such an extent to even describe her as "barking."

The second feature of *blednost'* and *odnoobraznost'* that connects the protagonists to chess pieces, are the *automannequins*. These robot-like mannequins help illustrate the overall lack of free will of the protagonists — serving as "mirrors" to their overwhelming failure to attain any level of humanity — and in this discussion I shall pay special attention to Franz, who is far closer to an automaton than his counterparts.

Franz, who plays the role of knight (and in the English translation, knight and bishop), is a very minor figure in terms of actual independent action. He moves into his apartment because of Martha, partakes in her plot because she has seduced him, and he feels guilt because of his enfeebling uncertainty as to whom he should be obeying. It is thus comical, if nothing else, that the job given to him by Dreyer is in his store amongst mannequins, trying to sell ties in a repetitive and mechanical manner ("*Franz kak avtomat vybrosil cherez stol ruku...*" (153)).

Franz, as an automaton, is clearly linked to both the *odnoobraznost'* of the characters, their relation to the *automannequins*, and lastly, to chess. Franz serves as a pawn in Martha's plan, and thereby acts as a subordinate chess piece that advances forward to help attack, position for attack, or sacrifice oneself for the greater good. Besides the subordination that is evident in Franz's inward nature, the reader can note the rigidity and repetition of his movement as a link between him and both chess and the *automannequins*. In the case of the *automannequins*, they are slow and move with little dexterity. In effect they are moving according to the bounds of their simplistically

designed joints and wires. It is in this sense that I consider their rigidity akin to the rigid patterns and movement of chess pieces. These *automannequins*, like the protagonists they are mirroring, are confined to a specific pattern or direction from which they cannot break free.

As the pawn, as a provincial who is ill adapted for urban life, Franz finds it rather difficult to navigate his surroundings. When we take note of his movement en route to the Dreyers or his home (his most habitual destinations), he is generally “staggering”<sup>19</sup> or in a very illuminating example, he moves exactly like a chess piece:

...не глядя по сторонам [он] стал *наискось* переходить улицу в том месте, где *всегда* переходил, когда возвращался восвояси.<sup>20</sup>

In the above example, Franz obeys his routine not merely because he chooses to, but because he lacks the free will to disobey the parameters set forth for him. Shklovsky writes on how actions go from habitual to automatic, that “Если мы станем разбираться в общих законах восприятия, то увидим, что, становясь привычными, действия делаются автоматическими.” Here Franz becomes more and more machinelike the more he obeys Martha and the longer he participates in her plot.

Franz, albeit obedient to Martha’s aim, servile in his very nature, does not allow himself to be completely controlled by his “queen.” In correlating this notion with the motif of chess, what we find is a cornerstone example of Franz obeying someone of

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<sup>19</sup> *King, Queen, Knave*, p. 124 (Here we have an example of Franz being described in the English version as a knight, “staggering,” whereas in the Russian version his movements resemble a bishop’s. This is strange, as in this instance the pieces are reversed from their norms).

<sup>20</sup> (213) (*italics added*); Nora Bukhs writes about Franz’s motion in a way that implies his diagonals and sideways positioning is more reflective of a waltz: “Танец – прогулка Франца по ночным улицам столицы. От нее у героя, как от вальсового кружения, возникает ощущение 'головокружительной, геометрической разноцветности'” (49).

power, but ultimately realizing that Martha is not the highest rung on the hierarchical ladder, so to speak. Of course, this correlation only proves true if one looks at their interaction as that of chess pieces; yet it must be said that regardless of one's interpretation, Martha's fault lies not only in that her objective counteracts her author's design, but that it is also conceived under the presupposition that Franz is *her* lowly "knight." This fault is a perfect example of what the narrator is trying to portray to the reader. We are given characters that, from the onset, are supposed to be mere "cardboard cutouts" — hence the title — and then we see them develop, we see action form, be it slowly and awkwardly. It is once we see how these characters interact with each other and plot against each other that we forget that they are human-like, not human. Pifer, in reference to the labeling of the characters as "cardboard figurines," writes:

Such labels only serve to obscure the provocative nature of Nabokov's methods of character depiction in this novel. Franz, for example, the young knave, is far too intensely rendered a character to be dismissed, at the outset, as a paper figure. He becomes, in Nabokov's hands, a most ironic representation of *l'homme moyen sensuel*—that recurrent subject and special pride of the nineteenth-century novelist. The stereotypical notion of the average man, whose existence we regard as primarily *sensuel* and carnal rather than psychic or spiritual, is exploded by Nabokov's radical depiction of 'physical Franz.'<sup>21</sup>

In point of fact, this creates a desolate landscape for the three protagonists, as they are only shadows and parodies of real life and art.

In dealing with the actual and artifice, I shall borrow Pifer's application of *KDV* to Shklovsky's "*Iskusstvo kak priem*." She writes:

The 'difficult' nature of Nabokov's highly wrought artifices, the demands they make on the reader's perceptions, obviously fulfill Shklovsky's requirements for art. [...] Artifice, rather than oppose life, is deployed by Nabokov to renew the reader's perception of reality—by estranging the perception from habitual formulations. As the act of perception becomes, in Nabokov's fiction, the focal

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<sup>21</sup> Pifer, p. 18



point for examining reality, the general world, whose existence we automatically assume, tends to fade into the relatively unreal. From this vantage point, we can see how misleading it is to exempt Nabokov's characters from reality because they are deprived of apparent autonomy or of a seemingly objective social environment.<sup>22</sup>

In examining artifice and reality in *KDV*, Pifer argues that one cannot write off these characters as being “unreal” because of the existence they lead or the world they live in. This is telling of Nabokov's world, in that he provides the reader myriad hoops to leap through in trying to rationalize the behavior and actions of his characters. There is no *a priori* reason for one to conclude that the autonomy of these characters is not justified. The lack of actuality in the world that envelops these characters indeed does not exclude them from reality, but that is the point of this process. Nabokov's/the narrator's aim is to project the *odnoobraznost'* of these three titular protagonists on the reader under the veil of a cloudy and unnatural world. It is through this clouding that Nabokov succeeds in “defamiliarizing” what would be 1920s Berlin and three Germans living in it. However, in terms of the lack of character development and overall failure of these characters to grow and act using free will, Nabokov/the narrator proves through diegesis that these characters are in fact “galley slaves.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus it is diegesis that forms the narrator's “key move.” That is to say that the narrator uses the protagonists' internal monologues and dialogues along with the narrative to further his aims. The reader is bombarded by descriptions of the sleepy and hazy world from the onset. To begin, the protagonists meet for the very first time in the train to Berlin. They meet in a happenstance way as Franz decides to move to a different

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<sup>22</sup> Pifer, pp. 25-6

<sup>23</sup> I use Pifer's term here. See: “On Human Freedom and Inhuman Art: Nabokov”

train car to escape the mediocrity of third-class, and ends up joining the Dreyers in their coupé. It is in this coupé that these characters fall asleep en route to Berlin. Once they arrive in Berlin, it is a hazy and quiet place. This haziness gives one the impression that it is quite possible that the remainder of the narrative is nothing more than a dream. The narrator espouses this notion from the very first sentence of chapter two:

Смутный золотистый свет, воздушная отельная перина... Опять— пробуждение, но, может быть, пробуждение еще не окончательное? Так бывает: очнешься и видишь, скажем, будто сидишь в нарядном купе второго класса, вместе с неизвестной изящной четой,—а на самом деле это—пробуждение мнимое, это только следующий слой сна, словно поднимаешься со слоя на слой и все не можешь достигнуть поверхности, вынырнуть в явь (126).

This concept doesn't disappear as their time in Berlin lengthens. On the very first day in Berlin Franz breaks his glasses and must have them replaced. As I noted earlier, it is through his haze of nearsightedness that he falls for Martha and the primary action of the novel is initiated, focusing on this cataclysmic event. Thus, I denote this to be the narrator's "key" or "opening move." Here, the narrator not only brings life to his characters, but also clouds their existence and the reality of the world that they live in through the employ of phantasmagoria. The narrator casts this doubt so clearly (as in the aforementioned quote) that he denies any plausibility to both Martha's plot and her mere existence.

Furthermore, the focus on Franz's blindness does not dissipate from the narrative in its later stages. The causal relationship between Franz's obedience to Martha and his nearsightedness is only further solidified, as is the correlation between the possibility of the protagonists' world being illusory and their lack of autonomy. The most prominent example of the narrator non-explicitly forewarning his characters of their lack of free will

comes just before the action shifts to the Baltic. Franz reluctantly packs up his apartment (the one that Martha procured for him in the first place) and bids farewell to his landlord, Enricht.<sup>24</sup> It is at this moment before Franz leaves his apartment (as he is preparing to move in with a soon-to-be widow) that he takes notice of the fact that his landlord's wife was a straw broom, and in fact had never even existed. The exchange is such:

Посреди комнаты, к нему спиной, на обычном своем месте сидела старушка, лица которой он не видал никогда. 'Я уезжаю, я хотел проститься,' — сказал он, подойдя к креслу. Вдруг он замер и, *как смерть, побледнел*. Накакой старушки не было: просто — седой паричок, надетый на палку, вязанный платок.

Enricht enters and utters one biting sentence:

'Вы уже не существуете,' — сказал он сухо и указал веером на дверь. Франц молча вышел (254).

One can obviously read Enricht's statement as relating to Franz's departure; but it is much more telling of a Nabokovian treatment of his characters to see the mirror between the falseness of Enricht's wife and that of Franz himself. This only further emphasizes, in what I propose, that if Franz participates in Martha's plot until its finish, then her fate might very well be his as well — for he “stopped in his tracks, and grew pale like death” upon seeing the abomination before his eyes. That Franz “grow[s] pale like death” means that if he goes along with Martha's plot to the end, his *auctor* will surely kill him off. In this vein, the narrator is alerting the reader through Franz's actions and thoughts (and yet again highlighting the *blednost'* of Franz) to realize that Martha's “key” will only end in her forcibly being removed from the game.

Dreyer serves as the last point for discussion. He, the titular king, is, like Franz, generally blind to his surroundings. As Erika, a former lover, speaks to him, she says:

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<sup>24</sup> The name “Enricht” appears only in the English version.

Я так и вижу, что ты делаешь со своей женой. Любишь и не замечаешь. Целуешь и не замечаешь. [...] Ты *сажаешь человека на полочку* и думаешь, что он будет так сидеть вечно, а он сваливается, — а ты и не замечаешь, — думаешь, что все продолжает сидеть, — и в ус себе не дуешь...” (222, italics added).

This is important to note in understanding not only the “blindness” of Dreyer, but also his static nature as king — only moved in dire circumstance and moving one space at a time.<sup>25</sup>

Another instance of Dreyer’s “blindness” to his surroundings takes the form of a subconscious forcing of his ears and eyes shut so that he cannot see Franz and Martha touch. During this moment Dreyer exclaims that he:

Закрыв глаза и уши, скажите мне, когда эта мерзость кончится (186).

During this musical, Dreyer frightens his wife into quicker action to rid herself of him, for she realizes how close she was to being caught. It is, however, important to note that Dreyer’s “blindness” keeps him from realizing that the affair is taking place and stopping Martha’s plot.

Overall, Dreyer’s “blindness” serves to promote the progression of the novel, and thereby the game between the narrator and Martha. It is, as I suggest, not accidental that Dreyer is standoffish to the world around him, for if he were capable of seeing and understanding art he would have been able to thwart Martha from the beginning.<sup>26</sup> However, in terms of chess, the king is a stationary piece that moves only if necessary.

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<sup>25</sup> The second part of Erika’s diatribe proves very interesting considering that this too is Albinus-Kretzschmar’s (from *Kamera obskura*) flaw. In the end Kretzschmar’s fate is not unlike that of what Erika picks up upon—he too winds up a doll on a shelf, so to speak. Thus Nabokov concludes *Kamera obskura*: “Он сидел на полу, опустив голову, и потом вяло наклонился вперед и криво упал на бок” (204).

<sup>26</sup> In Martha’s words: “Ты ровно ничего не понимаешь в искусстве” (*KDV*, 186).

We therefore see Dreyer in these terms, as someone who is too inert to notice his wife touching Franz at the theatre, and realize that Franz's "girlfriend" hiding behind the door was in fact his wife. Until the *dénouement* Dreyer is almost never on stage; he is either working with the Inventor/*izobretatel'* on the *automannequins*, or simply not heard from. It is Dreyer's absence from the stage that recalls the imagery of a chessboard, where the king is being plotted against by the player's opponent, but is not actively thought of in terms of action unless in danger of being "killed." That is why it is fitting (and obvious) that during the actualization of Martha's plot we see Dreyer in action.

It is towards the end of the novel where we find Dreyer's subconscious alluding to the fact that there is imminent danger. This is even more emphasized in the English translation where Dreyer "gaily warn[s] White that Black's knight was planning to attack White's king and queen with a forked check."<sup>27</sup> Here, unlike in the theatre, Dreyer's subconscious is alerting him to the danger that is posed to him if "Franz" the "knight" could come between him and his queen. This is another example of one of the protagonists foretelling a possible end to the work. In the first case it was Martha who foretold her own fate by repeating the word *smert'* between bouts of coughing. Here, it is Dreyer foretelling that the ultimate position will be a forked check, meaning that either the king or queen will perish. In the case of a forked check, the player must forgo his/her queen, because the only other possibility is surrender.

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<sup>27</sup> *King, Queen, Knave*, p. 199; a "forked check" means that a player is in check by his opponent's knight and must sacrifice the queen (in this case) since the only recourse is to move the king out of the way, since you cannot directly block a knight's attack as it can hop over other pieces on the board. (See Appendix B)

There is one element to consider in this forewarning by Dreyer: as the narrator has already informed the reader that Martha's strategy will not result in a victory, there is then no reason for Dreyer to be aware of his surroundings. Dolinin notes:

В *Короле, даме, валете* Набоков многократно подчеркивает, что Драйер полагается на случай, не боясь *проигрыша*, — он 'случайный коммерсант', у него свои деньги, — и потому в конечном счете ему везет, хотя он и остается в счастливом неведении относительно собственного выигрыша: судьба спасает его не только от гибели, но и от знания оскорбительной для него правды.<sup>28</sup>

The notion of fate saving Dreyer from death and the truth that his wife had been plotting against him works well in concluding the role of the narrator in *KDV*. For instance, if it was not for the *deus ex machina* of both Martha's fated pneumonia and Dreyer's exit from the stage to sell his *automannequins*, the novel would result in allowing *poshlost'* (or as Nabokov would transliterate, *poshlust*) to triumph. This means that the only possible outcome is for fate to send Dreyer away and Martha to her grave. If fate is the term that shall be employed to determine the role of the narrator in leading and directing the action of the novel, then it must be concluded that these characters are in fact at the mercy of their creator.

In terms of "*Iskusstvo kak priem*," autonomy cannot be accepted wholly based on the fact that the world the characters live in seems unreal. The illusory world only proves, moreover, that the protagonists have the façade of free will. Thus, in chapter three when Dreyer's car crashes, it is his chauffeur who dies in his stead. For if Dreyer were to die in the wreck as well, the game would be decided in favor of Martha — an unexpected checkmate. Thus, fate, or rather the narrator as an agent of fate keeps Martha from circumventing his omnipotence.

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<sup>28</sup> Dolinin, p. 56

### CHAPTER 3

#### BLADVAK VINOMORI AS THE AUTHOR INCARNATE

To focus on Bladvak Vinomori as the author incarnate, I begin with his name. The name Bladvak Vinomori is found solely in the English translation. Dolinin writes on the importance of this switch from the original to the translation:

Перерабатывая *Короля, даму, валеа* для американского издания, Набоков заменил фамилию на анаграмму своего имени: Бладвак Виномори (= Владимир Набоков) и тем самым прямо связал с образом автора. В оригинале эта связь введена намного тоньше: избранная фамилия отсылает одновременно и к реальному роду Пороховщиковых, родне Набокова, и семантически, к литературным 'родственникам' текста – к Пушкину (через метонимическое соотнесение 'Прохоров / похороны' в «Станционном смотрителе») и к Достоевскому (напомню, что внезапно появляющийся в финале *Преступления и наказания* поручик Порох играет роль 'агента судьбы')...<sup>29</sup>

We see that in the translation, Nabokov does not trust an American readership to connect the name “*Porokhovshchikov*” with Pushkin, Dostoevsky, or the allusion to the Russian word “*pokhorony*” — “*funeral*.” This makes sense, as he is writing for an audience that would neither grasp the literary allusions nor the semantic meaning of the surname given to the mysterious man with the strange last name.

This name is first mentioned when Dreyer reads it slowly and carefully aloud:

— По-ро-кхов-штши-коф, — вслух прочел Драйер и рассмеялся (258).

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<sup>29</sup> Dolinin, p. 54; In the above text, Dolinin mistakenly states that Prokhorov is from “*Stantsionnyi smotritel*” and not from “*Grobovshchik*.”

As Dreyer is reading the surname aloud in slow chunks, it brings to mind two associations. The first, which Dolinin touched upon is “*pokhorony*” or a “*burial / funeral*.” This word calls to mind the fact that it is on this very day that Martha and Franz are set to cast Dreyer into the water and leave him to drown. If one looks back to the discussion of the narrator and the masquerade, this mention of fate is clearly a reminder of the one already hinted to the reader. Secondly, and returning to the notion of fate — it is this very subject that touches the second word that comes to mind when Dreyer reads aloud this name. That word is “*prorok*” or “*prophet*.” Although this might only be secondary in respect to other readings of the surname, I argue that it cannot be ignored. Bladvak Vinomori (as I will refer to him solely henceforth) comes right at the dénouement — right before the *deus ex machina* that seals the narrator’s autocracy over the protagonists. Hitherto I have mentioned the author’s presence in *KDV* only through the employ of the narrator. It is at this point, however, that another representative of the author takes the forefront. Where the narrator has seemingly controlled Martha’s fate in terms of her actions and speech, Bladvak acts a direct agent of fate. He is a corporeal representation of Martha’s *auctor*; his existence is on a plane between the omnipotent author and his *odnoobraznye* protagonists. He thereby acts as a “prophet,” signaling the outcome of the finale, not unlike a messenger from God, or in this case the author.<sup>30</sup>

Nabokov states that whilst writing *KDV* he was leading “a mole like existence... sweating, sweating over my novel until my head spins...” that, “it’s so boring without

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<sup>30</sup> Connolly remarks on the role of “Fate” and includes in his discussion of Toker (who sees the Inventor/*izobretatel’* as the agent of fate that calls Dreyer away from the boat and thereby death) that she sees Enricht “serv[ing] as an agent of a higher force, one that assists Franz and Martha in their conspiracy against Dreyer. Thus, both the Inventor and Enricht stand in an intermediary position between the controlling consciousness of the authentic *auctor* and the programmed behavior of the central characters” (68).



Russians in the book, I wanted to compensate by introducing an entomologist but killed him in time in the muse's womb. Boredom, of course, is hardly the right word — *in fact it is bliss to be in a medium I create and order myself...*<sup>31</sup> It is in this moment of introspection that Nabokov alludes to existing in “a medium I create and order myself.” Nabokov, the author, is admitting to the fact that he exists within *KDV*, as what I conclude to be Bladvak Vinomori.

Connolly points out that Franz's reaction to Bladvak Vinomori is “bitter envy toward the foreigner,” and thus it “may reveal the resentment felt by a literary character who senses the presence of his maker (or his maker's representative) and who accurately perceives its implications for his own autonomy.”<sup>32</sup> It seems fitting then that at this very point in the novel Franz realizes his lack of autonomy and subordination to his creator's representative. Even if there is envy and despair in his realization, he no longer feels the need to be controlled by Martha, as she is neither as omnipotent as her maker nor his representative. In relation to a connection between the author and his representative, Connolly remarks that, “the presence of the author is most apparent at the end of the novel, when he steps into the text through the surrogacy of the exotic foreigner with the butterfly net.”<sup>33</sup> It is the presence of the representative of these protagonists' maker that helps to differentiate the real from unreal.

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<sup>31</sup> Boyd, p. 277 (*italics added*)

<sup>32</sup> Connolly, p. 65; “И Франц так позавидовал этой чете, что сразу его тоска еще пуще разрослась. Музыка остановилась. Они прошли мимо него. Они громко говорили. Они говорили *на совершенно непонятном языке*” (267, *italics added*).

<sup>33</sup> Connolly, p. 73; He furthermore remarks on the English translation, that “Throughout the English version of the novel, though, the author demonstrates his control over his

To conclude my analysis of Bladvak Vinomori as the author incarnate, I submit a simple intersection Venn diagram, which can be found in Appendix B. As an intersecting set is valid as long as there is at least one overlapping element, I use this mathematical representation to give credence to the claim that Bladvak is a representative of Nabokov. As it is drawn in Appendix B, the independent sets  $\{A\}$  and  $\{B\}$  intersect forming  $A \cap B$ . This means that each representative element of  $\{A\}$  and  $\{B\}$  intersect when both  $\{A\}$  and  $\{B\}$  contain the same elements. The intersecting elements used from both the original and translation as opposed to Nabokov's life are chess, "foreignness," and Lepidoptera. As these overlapping elements for both Nabokov and Bladvak mathematically, and therefore explicitly unify them, I posit that Bladvak is an insertion of the author into the text. However, to be clear, Bladvak is only a medium through which Nabokov presents himself, not the actual author. He instead serves, as I have previously mentioned, as the author's messenger, or representative. It is only fitting then, that Bladvak's game acts as both fate and as a game-within-a-game for the overarching one between, as Nabokov would put it, the

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material through the image of the movie theater being constructed on the street where Franz lived in Berlin. When finished, the cinema is to feature the premiere of a film entitled *King, Queen, Knave*, a film based on a play of the same name by a writer named Goldemar (another mask for Nabokov?). The play, the film, the movie house, and Nabokov's novel are all linked together in a series of overlapping fictional constructs."

## CHAPTER 4

### MARTHA'S STRUGGLE FOR AUTHORIAL CONTROL

As I have already discussed the role of the narrator and author incarnate in the development of the motif of chess in *KDV*, it is essential to speak on behalf of Martha and her motives. The role of Martha is one not so uncommon from her counterparts in Nabokov's oeuvre. She exemplifies, when qualifying Nabokov's writing, the emphasis on reinvention and experimentation. These elements of Nabokov's prose appear most elaborately in *KDV* in the form of the Inventor/*izobretatel'* and his *automannequins*. The Inventor's experiments, which enter into the realm of playing god, directly correlate to Nabokov's own god-like experimentation — that is, in the creation of his protagonists. The notion that the *izobretatel'* and thereby Dreyer could succeed in creating life directly correlates to the lack of humanity of the characters. What we have are human-like protagonists creating human-like dolls, which are in effect rigid and poorly-designed. Light is made of the poor design of the *automannequins* when the female mannequin — which corresponds to Martha — has a problem with the rib ("We ran into some trouble, a rib failed to function properly. After all, I need more time than God did, Mr. Director. But I'm sure you'll love the way her hips work" (transl., 215).). Like God creating man in his image, we find these characters creating the *automannequins* in their own image —

that being a mechanical, obedient, and non-flexible one.<sup>34</sup> Martha's relationship, however, to Nabokov's experimentation and reinvention occurs in the concept of past-reconstruction. Martha's goal in the better part of the two hundred pages of *KDV* is simple — she wants to kill her husband and elope with his nephew. What I consider to be her impetus for this is not just that she feels her husband is no longer interested in her, but rather that once Franz enters the picture Martha realizes she herself has aged. It is because of this that I find the underlying reason for Martha's affair with Franz and her ultimate reason for killing Dreyer to be in an attempt to recreate her past. If Martha could separate herself from Dreyer and instead live with Franz, she could thereby freeze time and live a life of youthfulness that has already been long replaced by repetition and boredom.<sup>35</sup> It is in this sense that we see Martha as a cutout of the prototypical nineteenth-century literary figure. Yet, Nabokov includes in his translation a direct contradiction to her lineage, an indication of her falseness: "She was no Emma, and no Anna."<sup>36</sup>

I find the concept of "freezing time" to be a direct allusion to Goethe's *Faust* which is, in effect, a forbidden act, and therefore can be seen causally as a factor in Martha's demise. Nabokov mentions "freezing time" in *Speak, Memory* as a means to

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Boyd points out that the protagonists, in relation to the *automannequins*, "limp rather cumbrously and tiresomely across the novel's stage, for all their relevance to the theme of rigid automatism versus the ideal of flexibility and consciousness" (285).

<sup>35</sup> Boyd writes, that "just as Martha is pursuing her goal of a lifeless conformity awakes an unforeseen intensity of passion in herself, becoming more animated than she has ever been, while at the same time turning herself into something subhuman in her rapacity" (281).

<sup>36</sup> *King, Queen, Knave*, p. 88

escape the temporality of existence.<sup>37</sup> It is in this vein that I contend Martha is trying to achieve immortality through finding a younger lover to compare herself to. Martha's act is, also, a progression of Nabokov's earlier work, *Mashen'ka* (*Mary*), wherein the protagonist, Ganin, realizes that he cannot (a) freeze time and live in the past, and (b) that if he were to attempt to return to the past that it would not be how he remembered it.<sup>38</sup>

Brian Boyd notes, that as Nabokov begins to experiment, he "shifts away from angels and apostles, from dragons and medieval dreams, to observing the here and now," wherein on the measure of *KDV*, Boyd continues by stating that "[it] marks the first time Nabokov constructs a story that appears to invert the values embodied so directly in *Mary*. Ganin reflected Nabokov's own powerful orientation toward the past. Now in *King, Queen, Knave* the characters barely have any memories and fix their gaze toward the future."<sup>39</sup> Of course, as I have already noted on Martha's desires, it is her preoccupation with how she used to live and how youthful Franz is — and thereby how youthful Franz makes her — that directs her gaze towards both the past and future, in that for her they are one.

It is this Faustian trap that beckons the destruction of Martha and many of those who come after her. Their predecessor, Ganin, however, was able to see the falseness of being frozen in time.<sup>40</sup> One can note the similarity between Martha/Ganin and their

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<sup>37</sup> Alexandrov, p. 66

<sup>38</sup> "И кроме этого образа, другой Машеньки нет, и быть не может" (*Mashen'ka*, 112). Furthermore, Viktor Erofeev writes in his introduction to the four-volume *Sobranie sochineniy*, that "*Машенька* — первая попытка Набокова вернуть потерянный рай" (*Tom pervyi*, p. 16).

<sup>39</sup> Boyd, p. 279

<sup>40</sup> Ganin sees how Podtyagin, who attempts to flee Berlin to Paris, loses his passport, realizes he is doomed, becomes ill thereupon, and will surely die in their *pension*.

creator, Nabokov. Just as Berlin is a crossroads for these protagonists (for Ganin it is in terms of reconnecting with lost love and for Martha it is in terms of escape), it is also for Nabokov who left Russia during the Revolution. Nabokov does not adapt to Berlin and has a choice between facing the rise of fascism or fleeing to America. He shows the reader in *KDV* and in subsequent novels what happens for those who choose not to adapt, or even those who choose to return to their past. Martha dies, as she cannot regain her youth; Luzhin from the eponymous *Zashchita Luzhina-The Defense* leaps from his window in an attempt to return to his *wunderkind* fame; Martin-Martyn (*Podvig-Glory*) returns to the Soviet Union where he will likely perish. Whereas, there are those who do survive, those who do adapt: Ganin in *Mashen'ka*, Darwin in *Podvig*<sup>41</sup>, and ultimately Nabokov as an American writer.

Furthermore, in connecting Martha's aim to "freeze time" with the overall flow of the novel, it is important to state that if she could defeat her *auctor* then she could achieve immortality, so to speak. As it has already been determined that she does not and cannot succeed, time is left in the hands of her maker. On the level of *fabula* in *KDV*, the coupling of the chronology of the novel (that is, the progression of time forced by the author) and chess are tantamount. The author pushes the action of the novel into play, as if clicking down on the timer beside the chessboard. Thereafter we find the protagonists meeting for the first time on a train to Berlin. The train motif brings about the concept of time and the movement of life.<sup>42</sup> However, we find that when we get to Berlin that the

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<sup>41</sup> See: Irene Masing-Delic's, "Survival of the Superfluous: Doubling and Mimicry in Nabokov's *Podvig-Glory*"

<sup>42</sup> "Первая часть дороги, – первая глава путешествия – всегда подробна и медлительна. Средние часы – дремотны, последние – скоры" (*KDV*, p. 124).

train has stopped there, and time ceases to move forward. Alexandrov comments on Nabokov's connection between chess and time:

For Nabokov in *Speak, Memory* immersion in chess, like the experience of cosmic synchronization and writing poetry, stops time. Recalling a period of intense work on composing a chess problem, he describes his watch as 'a brooklet in time in comparison to [the] frozen lake on the chessboard.' Since temporality is an unavoidable dimension of physical existence, the achievement of timelessness implies transcendence. Chess thus emerges as an additional means of escape from the prison of temporally bound earthly life that Nabokov introduces in the early pages of his autobiography.<sup>43</sup>

The concept that time in *KDV* begins with the initial movement of the clock hand, and is thereby stopped when we are stuck in Berlin, brings to mind the chess motif — already explored in terms of the characters themselves — and here in terms of Martha's struggle for authorial control.

If one is to look at the progression of the novel in terms of stages, there are three.<sup>44</sup> The first stage consists of the author's initial chess move. He puts his figurines on the board and gives them life. The pieces/characters mingle together on the board/stage, thus ending his opening, or "key move." Then we have a shift from dynamic to static. The second stage of the novel takes place in Berlin. Here we find Martha's "key move." It is here that Martha's attack is put into motion (even if it is subverted by her *auctor's* positioning). Martha announces her plan to put her opponent in checkmate. It is during this masquerade that Martha picks her "key move" — that is a positioning of herself (the queen) and Franz (knight/bishop) to *illegally* mate her husband Dreyer (the king). It is also during this masquerade, as has been discussed in the chapter "Narrative Diegesis, Protagonists and Chess," that the narrator plans his "key move," meaning that

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<sup>43</sup> Alexandrov, p. 66

<sup>44</sup> See: Appendix C for diagram.

he foresees Martha's plan and sets in motion his defense and counterattack in order to stop her. Martha does have a variable amount of freedom, in that she is allowed to break the rules of chess to attack her own king. Although Nabokov would consider that his characters lack total autonomy, it is not out of the realm of possibility that she is given some freedom before her *auctor* finishes his attack (refer to the Appel interview in the introduction). Once Martha has thoroughly planned her attack during this second stage — that is, she has figured out by what means she will kill her husband — the stage shifts to what I deem to be the final part. This shift, which follows Nabokov's paradigm as set in the beginning of the novel (“Первая часть дороги, – первая глава путешествия – всегда подробна и медлительна. Средние часы – дремотны, последние – скоры”), culminates in the movement to the Baltic hotel, where we find the *coup de grâce* after Bladvak Vinomori reminds us that Martha will face destiny, not Dreyer.

As these three stages of the novel are important in ascertaining how much control Martha has over her destiny, it is clear that every time she attempts to move forward and defeat her *auctor*, he has already foreseen her attempts and taken measures to counteract them.

What is pivotal to note in terms of the narrator's defense and counterattack against Martha, is that she acts under the impression that there is no power higher than her. I argue that even if Martha knew that Dreyer would leave the resort or that she would come down with pneumonia, she would not retreat from her attack. It is because she does not notice the presence of her “maker's representative” that she cannot possibly fathom the repercussions of her actions. It is paramount to her failure that Franz is capable of sensing the presence of his creator's representative, in that his doubts as to



whether he should partake in her plan become more pronounced. Martha does not realize that Franz is not solely in her control, but also under the control of Dreyer, Bladvak and his maker. L. L. Lee notes how Martha tries to “mold and shape” Franz into her pawn, which mimics the Inventor’s work on the *automannequins*:

And the meeting with Martha is equally absurd. He can barely see her and certainly does not recognize her. She does, however, connect him with the young provincial who had ridden with her and Dreyer in the train. But her surprise is mild; the wonderful coincidences of this world and of Nabokov’s have little meaning for her since she has *no capacity for wonder*. What she does recognize is what she will be able to do with Franz—the *new role* she will give him: he is ‘warm, healthy young wax that one can manipulate and mold till its shape suits your pleasure.’<sup>45</sup>

In her struggle for control she takes what is around her and tries to bend it to her own will. It is Martha’s “blindness” to the presence of her author and his representative that keeps her from realizing that she does not even have control over Franz, the most malleable of the protagonists. In actuality, Martha exists only as a mirror of humanity, wherein she, like Dreyer and the Inventor, thinks she can be an artist (we see this when she tells Dreyer that he knows nothing of art) and that she can be an individual and not just a member of her collective king, queen, and knave. In relation to Martha’s lack of individuality and consciousness, Boyd writes:

Martha is Nabokov’s first in-depth attempt to define *poshlost’* (philistine vulgarity), the enemy of consciousness, the denial of individual vitality: a desire to conform to the values of one’s group, to see the world as others see it rather than to animate it with one’s own perceptions.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Lee, p. 42; Connolly notes on this writing that, “After they do become lovers, she persistently bends his will to her own, first teaching him to dance and to achieve ‘an automaton’s somnambulant languor’ and later to become an obedient perfect accomplice in her schemes to murder Dreyer” (59).

<sup>46</sup> Boyd, p. 281

If Martha is a Nabokovian attempt to define *poshlost'* then I deem this a successful experiment. The reader finds a character who thinks she is an individual and an artist, and what is realized in the end is that she is neither and never could be such.<sup>47</sup> Thus as Martha tries to struggle against her author for control, she is fated to lose (in this case die) for she could neither (a) control her destiny, nor (b) be seen as an individual or artist — i.e., one capable of overcoming falseness and *poshlost'*. Dolinin writes of her demise in relation to the literary allusion for which *KDV* is most often connected:

Особо важное место среди подтекстов *Короля, дамы, вале́та* занимает 'Пиковая дама', к которой прямо отсылают уже три карты в заглавии романа. Как и у Пушкина, судьба в финале жестоко подшучивает над стремящейся к обогащению героиней, неожиданно отправляя ее на тот свет и тем самым реализуя буквальное значение убийственной для Германа реплики Чекалинского: 'Дама ваша убита' (52).

This allusion also brings to the forefront the focus of the next chapter, which is comprised of Nabokov's proclivity for reinvention and experimentation, primarily focusing on how he takes motifs and problems from an early work, such as *KDV*, and applies it to the rest of his oeuvre.

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<sup>47</sup> Khodasevich writes in "Vozrozhdenie" that "Peculiar to Sirin is the realization, or perhaps only a deeply felt conviction, that the world of literary creativity, the true world of the artist, conjured through the action of images and devices out of apparent simulacra of the real world, consists in fact of a completely different material – so different that the passage from one world into the other, in whichever direction it is accomplished, is akin to death" (Page, 62).

## CHAPTER 5

### NABOKOV AND REINVENTION

To conclude this analysis, I find that it is of central importance to connect this work to its successors. As I have already touched upon *Mashen'ka* and discussed Nabokov's proclivity for reinvention and reworking on the basis of past-reconstruction in *KDV*, it is necessary to speak on behalf of other works that employ this characteristic. The most important novel in Nabokov's Berlin period, that fits this parameter and includes a reworking of the motif of chess, is *Zashchita Luzhina* (*ZL*, 1930).

In connecting *KDV* with its direct successor, *ZL*, Nabokov brings chess to the forefront. Where in *KDV* my goal has been to assert the relationship between the novel and chess, *ZL* focuses on a chess player who cannot cope with the real world. As Luzhin, the eponymous protagonist, steps further and further away from the real world he begins to enact his existence through the pieces on his chessboard. He, like Martha, tries to return to his past for fear that adulthood will strip him of his chess prowess as a *wunderkind*.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately he leaps from a window in order to escape from a world that

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<sup>48</sup> In the words of his trainer, Valentinov: "блещи, пока блещется" (*ZL*, p. 51). Boyd writes that, "powerless within life, [Luzhin] attains through his genius for chess an eerie, unfathomable might and grace that seem to allow him far beyond the world we know. He seems 'a man of a different dimension': two clumsy dimensions rather than the crowded three of normal human life, and yet with access to a fourth that transcends our own" (321).

he does not relate to, into one that is more like his chess game (Nabokov calls this world *potustoronnost'* or the “otherworld”).

Without considering the fact that chess is not apparent in terms of the plot of *KDV*, the fact that the novel directly succeeding it is focused primarily upon the subject begs the question: To what extent could there be a connection between the theme of chess and these two works? When answering this question it is clear that there are overlapping concepts in these novels that tie into the game of chess, the most pertinent of which are the *mise en abîme* chess games. Both *KDV* and *ZL* contain chess games that can be extrapolated to the overarching structure of each respective work. Concerning the coalescence of chess into the structure of *KDV* Dolinin points out, that:

Шахматы – не только профессия и всепоглощающая страсть полубезумного, полугениального героя, в конце концов выбрасывающегося из окна, и не только главная тема текста, но и – как карты в 'Пиковой даме' – его основополагающая семиотическая модель, по аналогии с которой строится весь романный мир.<sup>49</sup>

In the case of both *KDV* and *ZL*, the aforementioned semiotic model lends itself well to the fact that these games-within-a-game, along with the motif of chess itself, become enmeshed in the entire narrative structure. Specifically in *KDV*, the game-within-a-game serves as a mirror for the conflict in the novel while acting as an agent of fate. In *ZL* the game of chess directly correlates to Luzhin's struggle with adulthood and his father's affair with his aunt.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Dolinin, p. 56

<sup>50</sup> “[Лужин] почему-то необыкновенно ясно запомнил это утро, этот завтрак, как запоминаешь день, предшествующий далекому пути. [...] Пока [отец] говорил, тетя попала ему крошкой прямо в рот. Мать молчала, — и вдруг, после второго блюда, встала и, стараясь скрыть дрожащее лицо, повторяя шепотом, что 'это ничего, ничего, сейчас пройдет,' — поспешно вышла. [...] Лужин никогда не

Furthermore Martha and Luzhin are physically constrained by the rigid structure of the game of chess. Martha cannot destroy her husband, nor can she survive a forked check, as she would be sacrificed. (See Appendix B) In Luzhin's case he cannot sacrifice his queen and win against Turati (Luzhin sacrifices his queen in an attempt to go back and undo the damage of his aunt's affair with his father). Also, in *KDV* Martha attempts to go back in time to recreate her youthfulness, while unbeknownst to her fate is keeping her progression locked forward, rather than backward. The same is applicable to Luzhin who cannot return to his past and correct his father's infidelity, thus he opts to leave this plane of existence for another.

Luzhin's decision to leap out of "existence" into "*potustoronnost*" is a defiant rejection of fate turning him into a has-been, so to speak. This rings a familiar bell with *KDV*. The urge to leap from a window to change one's fate is noted by Dolinin in connection with the finale of *KDV*:

Когда Франца перед самым отъездом из Берлина к месту намеченного преступления охватывает ужас и он думает, *не лучше ли выброситься из окна, чем стать убийцей*.<sup>51</sup>

As Franz has just seen his maker's representative and realized that Martha is not as omnipotent as she once seemed, he ponders whether it would be better to leap from the window than become a murderer. Here Franz does not need to jump from the window to change his fate, for it is Martha's fate that poses the most concern. In terms of the concept of past-reconstruction, Nabokov uses both works to show the reader that the past

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узнал, что именно случилось, но, проходя с тетей по коридору, слышал из спальни матери тихое всхлипывание и увещевающий голос отца, который громко повторял слово 'фантазия'" (*ZL*, p. 22).

<sup>51</sup> Dolinin, p. 56

is something unattainable. However, Nabokov also reworks this theme in *ZL*. Instead of having a protagonist who dies trying to return to her past, we have Luzhin who realizes that his past no longer lies on the same plane of existence as the present. In this sense he leaps from the window to move from the dimension of human perception and existence, to a fourth dimension.

As Luzhin is posturing to leave the present and return to a past where he can remain a *wunderkind* and his family is still happily together, it is on the chessboard where he temporarily exists. Where the protagonists are given choices to live in a world unsuited for them or perish trying to break these constraints, we find both Luzhin and his father taking the latter route. As the two Luzhins play chess early in the novel, the younger's strategy forces his father to choose between death and losing his queen.<sup>52</sup> Take note that the forked check (meaning the opponent must choose between mate and losing another piece — in both cases the queen) is present in both novels, and a decision that would generally end in the loss of a queen. (See Appendix B) Yet, as we notice, Luzhin Sr. chooses to forfeit the game rather than lose his “queen” or, as I suggest, mistress/the aunt. As Luzhin's existence becomes more pronounced on the chessboard, his presence in the real world becomes more ethereal. It is thus Luzhin's affront against

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<sup>52</sup> “И через несколько минут сын сказал: 'Если так то мат, а если так то пропадает ваш ферзь,' — и [Лужин старший], смутившись, взял ход обратно и задумался по-настоящему, наклоняя голову то влево, то вправо, медленно протягивая пальцы к ферзю и быстро отдирая их, как будто обжигаясь, а сын тем временен, спокойно, с несвойственной ему аккуратностью, убирал взятые фигуры в ящик. Наконец Лужин старший сделал ход, и сразу начался разгром его позиций, и тогда он неестественно рассмеялся и опрокинул своего короля” (*ZL*, pp. 34-5).

fate forcing him to leave his solitary existence on the chessboard that culminates in his decision to try and make a permanent leap into the “otherworld.”<sup>53</sup>

It is in this vein that I see Luzhin's plight as a continuation of Martha's. In the latter's context, Franz's entrance into her world creates the impetus for her attempt in past-reconstruction. It is because of Franz that Martha realizes she has aged and must rid herself of Dreyer to achieve a state of youthfulness. Franz becomes, as Dreyer sees in Bladvak's game-within-a-game, the knight that fork checks the king and queen. In the case of this forked check, which forces the king to choose surrender or the loss of his queen, the game takes a natural turn — the king sacrifices his queen. In the case of Luzhin, we have a different situation. In Luzhin's game-within-a-game he tries to force his father to give up his “queen” (mistress). It is this twist that causes the conflict in the novel: Luzhin Sr. chooses to abandon the game rather than give up his “queen.” It is Luzhin Senior's unwillingness to sacrifice his extramarital affair for the sanctity of his family that causes Luzhin to try and replay this scenario throughout the novel as he sacrifices his queen in chess games in an attempt to undo his father's move.

As Luzhin ultimately decides to venture into *potustoronnost'* and abandon a world to which he no longer belonged, it shows that neither of these attempts to recreate the past proved successful. It can be concluded that *ZL* is a reworking of *KDV* in that Nabokov extrapolates the motifs of chess, fate and past-reconstruction from one work to

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<sup>53</sup> Khodasevich writes in “Vozrozhdenie,” that “it is shown that a permanent residence in the creative world, if the artist is a man of talent and not of genius, will, as it were, suck out his human blood, turning him into an automaton which is not adapted to reality and which perishes with contact from it” (Page, p. 63). It is clear then, that Luzhin faces a life of automation if he does not escape into the “otherworld/*potustoronnost'*” which, for him, is certain death, meaning that if he does not take a leap of faith, if you will, to the “otherworld,” then he is dead nonetheless.

another. Where Ganin remains in the present in *Mashen'ka*, we have a series of works that show the dangers of returning to the past. In terms of chess, however, it is clear that *KDV* is the first major work where Nabokov uses chess not only as a motif, but also as the underlying framework for the structure of the novel. What is in the essence of Nabokov's craft is that one can completely miss the game of chess on the level of structure and poetics entirely. In the case of *KDV*, as in Nabokov's oeuvre, one must be adept at reading carefully and thoroughly, otherwise the thematic and structural movement from one work to another would go largely unnoticed.



## APPENDIX A

### “SHAKHMATNYI KON”

Круглогривый, тяжелый, суконцем подбитый,  
шахматный конь в коробке уснул,--  
а давно ли, давно ли в пивной знаменитой  
стоял живой человеческий гул?  
Гул живописцев, ребят бородатых,  
и крики поэтов, и стон скрипачей...  
Лампа сияла, а пол под ней  
был весь в очень ровных квадратах.

Он сидел с друзьями в любимом углу,  
по привычке слегка пригнувшись к столу,  
и друзья вспоминали турниры былые,  
говорили о тонком его мастерстве...  
Бархатный стук в голове:  
это ходят фигуры резные.

Старый маэстро пивцо попивал,  
слушал друзей, сигару жевал,  
кивал головой седовато-кудластой,  
и ворот осыпан был перхотью частой,-  
скорлупками шахматных мыслей.

И друзья вспоминали, как, матом грозя,  
Кизерицкому в Вене он отдал ферзя.  
Кругом над столами нависли  
табачные тучи, а плиточный пол  
был в темных и светлых квадратах.  
Друзья вспоминали, какой изобрел  
он дерзостный гамбит когда-то.

Старый маэстро пивцо попивал,  
слушал друзей, сигару жевал  
и думал с улыбкою хмурой:  
"Кто-то, а кто -- я понять не могу,  
переставляет в мозгу,  
как тяжелую мебель, фигуры,

и пешка одна со вчерашнего дня  
черною куклой идет на меня".

Старый маэстро сидел согнувшись,  
пепел ронял на пикейный жилет,--  
и нападал, пузырями раздувшись,  
неудержимый шахматный бред.  
Пили друзья за здоровье маэстро,  
вспоминали, как с этой сигарой в зубах  
управлял он вслепую огромным оркестром  
незримых фигур на незримых досках.

Вдруг черный король, подкрепив проходную  
пешку свою, подошел вплотную.

Тогда он встал, отстранил друзей  
и смеющихся, и оробелых.  
Лампа сияла, а пол под ней  
был в квадратах черных и белых.

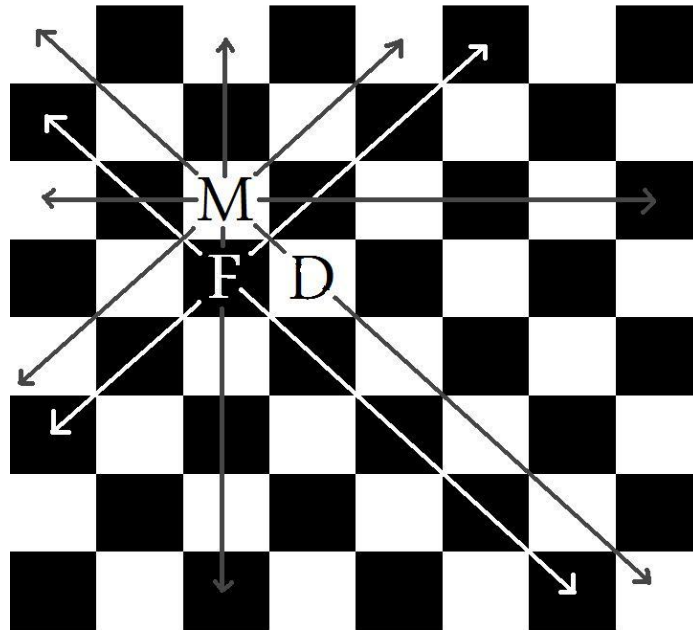
На лице его старом, растерянном, добром  
деревянный отблеск лежал.  
Он сгорбился, шею надул, прижал  
напряженные локти к ребрам  
и прыгать пошел по квадратам большим,  
через один, то влево, то вправо,--  
и это была не пустая забава,  
и недолго смеялись над ним.

И потом, в молчании чистой палаты,  
куда черный король его увел,  
на шестьдесят четыре квадрата  
необъяснимо делился пол.  
И эдак, и так -- до последнего часа --  
в бредовых комбинациях, ночью и днем,  
прыгал маэстро, старик седовласый,  
белым конем.

V.V. Nabokov <1927>

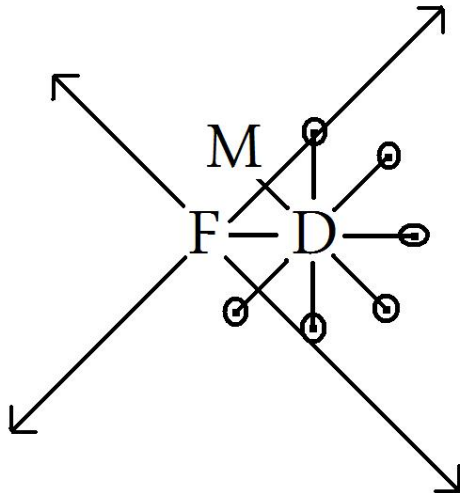
**APPENDIX B**  
**CHESSE DIAGRAMMS**

(i) Martha and Franz at the masquerade:



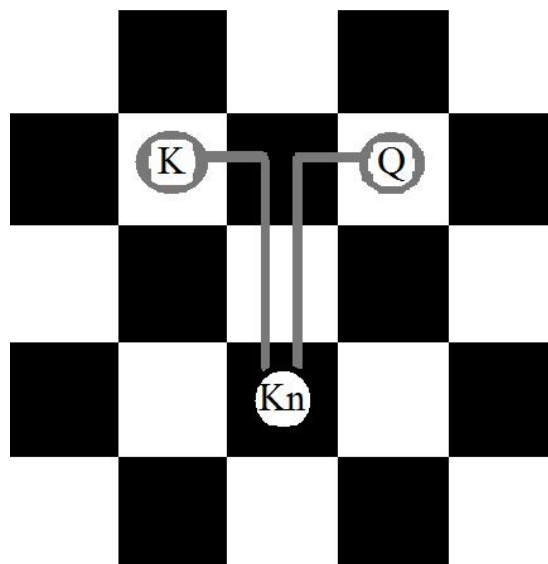
Franz (bishop) and Martha (queen) both move parallel one another on the x- and y-axes; however, unlike Franz, Martha (like a 3-D object in comparison to a 2-D object) can move on what would then be a z-axis, which Franz can neither traverse, nor interpret. It is through this axis that Martha can approach Franz whereas lack of comprehension (as he has been forced along two diagonal paths) acts to prohibit him from approaching her.

(ii) Dreyer's movements at the masquerade. Note the below description's compatibility with the possible movements of a chess king.



“Марта исчезла в тумане, и Драйер, кружась перед ним медленным золотистым колесом с человеческими руками вместо спиц, стал говорить о магазине, о службе” (137).

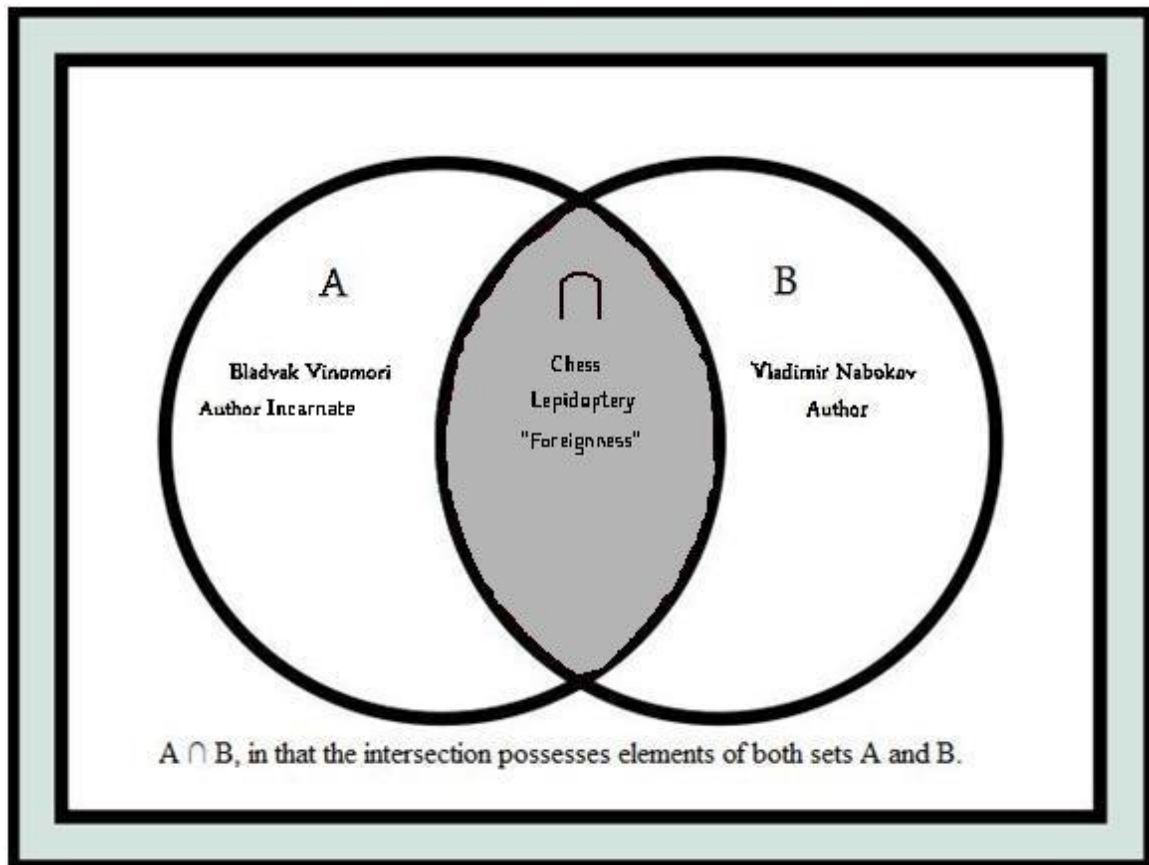
(iii) A depiction of a typical forked check, where the king is forced to sacrifice his queen.



## APPENDIX C

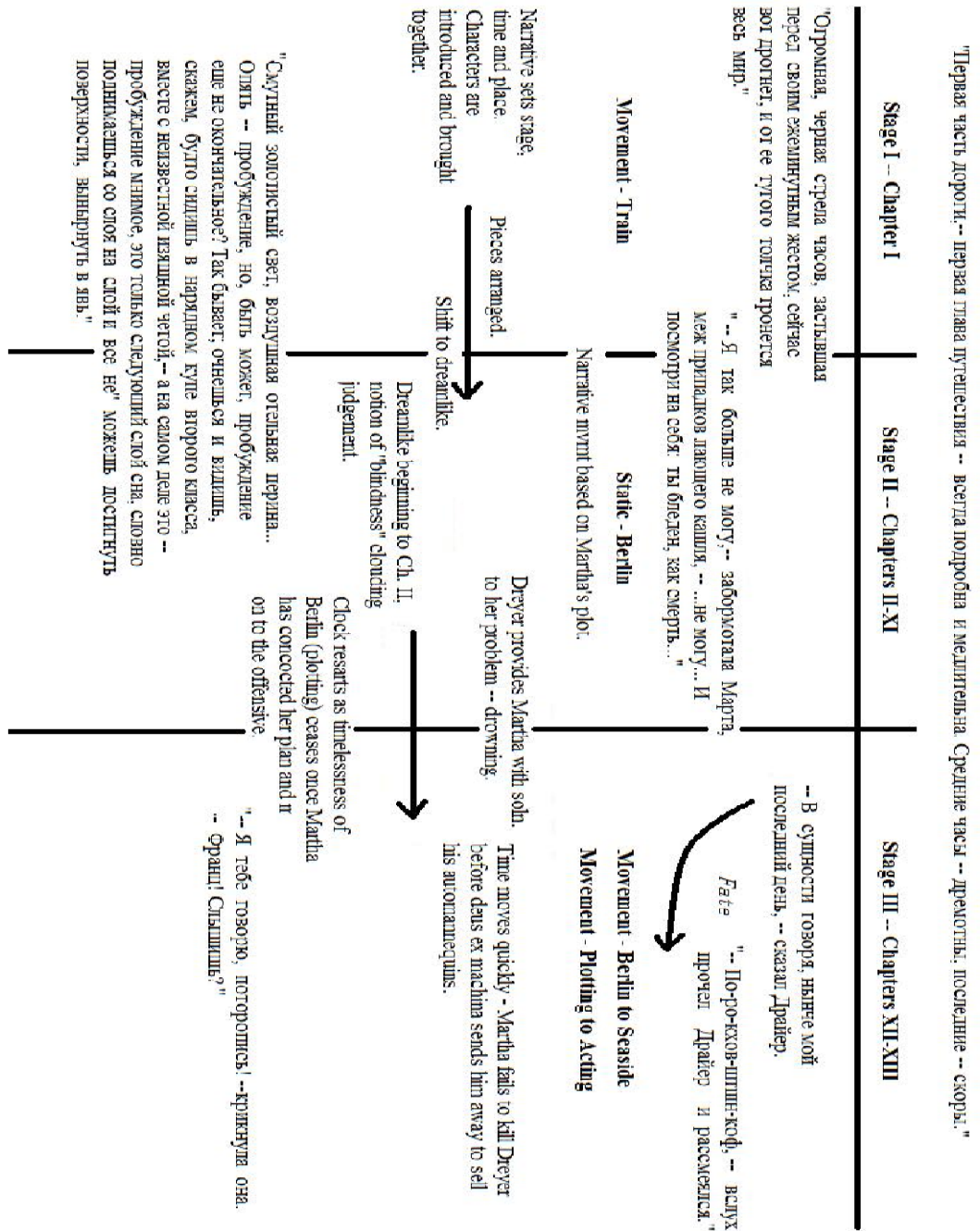
### SIMPLE INTERSECTION VENN DIAGRAM

Included are only the intersections of Bladvak and Nabokov.



## APPENDIX D

### DIAGRAM OF THE NOVEL SPLIT INTO 3 STAGES



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