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## Vladimir Nabokov and Sigmund Freud, or a Particular Problem

“I said I always preferred the literal meaning of a description to the symbol behind it. She nodded thoughtfully but did not seem convinced.”

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!*

One of Nabokov's students once related how, one day in 1957, as he was vehemently denouncing Freud, the heating pipes in his Cornell University classroom began to make a terrific clamor. Nabokov stopped still and exclaimed: “The Viennese quack is railing at me from his grave!” (Boyd 1991, 308). And cause he had to rail. Playing with the projections of a Freudian reader, Humbert relates: “sometimes I attempt to kill in my dreams. But do you know what happens? For instance I hold a gun. For instance I aim at a bland, quietly interested enemy. Oh, I press the trigger all right, but one bullet after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish muzzle. In those dreams, my only thought is to conceal the fiasco from my foe, who is slowly growing annoyed” (Nabokov 1955, 47). Later in the novel, Humbert admonishes, “we must remember that a pistol is the Freudian symbol of the Ur-father's central forelimb” (216). In this and many other moments, *Lolita* tends ever more energetically toward the Freudian grotesque. To choose a glaring instance, Humbert relates a plan for a proposed mural in The Enchanted Hunters Hotel (where he and Lolita become lovers) that would depict “a choking snake sheathing whole the flayed trunk of a shoat” (134).

In one of the more felicitous formulas cried from atop his favorite hobbyhorse, Nabokov (1998–99) denounced “the oneiromancy and mythogeny of psychoanalysis” (133). The opening paragraphs of *both* the first and second chapters of his autobiography make disparaging reference to Freud, con-

demning “the vulgar, shabby, fundamentally medieval world” of his thought (1951, 20). In the screenplay for *Lolita*, “the Freudian prison of thought” and “the Freudian nursery-school of thought” (1974, 728) are similarly evoked, and dismissed.<sup>1</sup> *Ada, or Ardor* abounds in references to the “expensive confession fests” (1969, 364) of psychoanalysis; *Strong Opinions* laments the incursions of “the Austrian crank with a shabby umbrella” (1973, 116). In the latter work, Nabokov goes so far as to claim that psychoanalysis has dangerous ethical consequences in its penchant for the disculpation of crimes.<sup>2</sup> The only positive thing Nabokov is on record as saying about Freud is his remark in a televised French interview (1975), “I admire Freud greatly as a comic writer” (*j’apprécie Freud beaucoup dans sa qualité d’auteur comique*). Nabokov’s disparaging remarks are indeed legion, and as the author of the entry “Nabokov and Freud” in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* writes, “Nabokov’s antipathy to psychoanalysis scarcely requires documentation” (Shute 1995, 413).<sup>3</sup>

But *why* should Nabokov have so disliked Freud? To be sure, the Surrealists found striking new vistas opened by Freud’s discoveries. But Paul Valéry was not a fan (Celeyrette-Pietri 1984), nor was Joyce, who said of psychoanalysis that it was “neither more nor less than blackmail” (Barnes 1922, 299).<sup>4</sup> A darker drama is to be found in the ambivalent relation of Virginia Woolf to psychoanalysis. She made merry about Freud’s doctrines throughout much of the 1920s, before changing her mind in the 1930s and finally going with her husband Leonard to meet Freud for afternoon tea in his Hampstead home eight months before his death in 1939. Upon her arrival, he presented Woolf with a narcissus. Two years later she drowned herself in Sussex.<sup>5</sup>

Nabokov’s case, however, differs markedly from that of any of these writers. In his *Freud and Nabokov*, Geoffrey Green (1988) refers with reason to Nabokov’s disdain as “the grandest and most extravagant contempt for psychoanalysis known in modern literature” (1). From his first works to his last—in Russian, English, and French—Nabokov (1937) shows himself ever ready to combat what he calls “madly frolicking Freudianism” (*le freudisme folâtre*) (81). From the 1920s to the 1970s, the emphasis remains the same: psychoanalysis is associated with

the medieval and the superstitious, with the stupidity and credulity of the simple and communal. Freud's thought is something that should be mocked and thwarted, as Nabokov endeavors to do in the forewarnings to Freudian readers he includes in the prefaces to so many of his works. It is associated, as we saw, with prison, with pre-school, with the premature and the pre-modern—it is something that limits freedom and individuality.

Among other things, Freud's thought is branded as determinist. In a posthumously published lecture originally given at Stanford University in 1941, in the process of trashing *Mourning Becomes Electra* Nabokov notes how in O'Neill's plays "fate [leads] the author . . . by one hand, and the late professor Freud by the other" (1984, 336). Ten years later, in *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov denounces Freud's "police state of sexual myth" (1951, 300), while after yet another decade he makes explicit in a French interview what he will never state in so many words in English: "Psychoanalysis has something very Bolshevik about it—an inner policing . . . symbols killing the individual dream, the thing itself" (1961, 27). What psychoanalysis shares with Bolshevism—and thereby with totalitarianism—is the tendency to negate the singular in favor of the general.<sup>6</sup>

Nabokov thus saw Freud as standing for many things he did not like—and, conversely, as representing what he most vehemently *disliked*: the generalizing of the rich particularities of which life is made up. While lying at the heart of Freud's principle of psychic substitution, the tendency to generalize is a phenomenon especially pronounced in works of psychoanalytic literary criticism. For this reason, Nabokov will ride his anti-Freud hobbyhorse hardest and most often starting in the 1960s when critical studies—especially psychoanalytic ones—of his own work begin to appear. This is to be clearly seen in his strenuous objections to the chapter in W. W. Rowe's *Nabokov's Deceptive World* (1971) on sexual symbols. "The fatal flaw in Mr. Rowe's treatment of recurrent words, such as 'garden' or 'water,'" Nabokov tells us, "is his regarding them as abstractions, and not realizing that the sound of a bath being filled, say, in the world of *Laughter in the Dark*, is as different from the limes rustling in the rain of *Speak, Memory* as the Garden of

Delights in *Ada* is from the lawns in *Lolita*" (1973, 36). The seeker of symbols, according to Nabokov, will inevitably conflate the dissimilar and miss the distinctiveness of the detail.

But how familiar with the particularities of Freud's thought was Nabokov? When asked in an interview about his acquaintance with psychoanalysis, Nabokov replied, "Bookish familiarity only. The ordeal is much too silly and disgusting to be contemplated even as a joke" (1973, 23). Even this degree of "bookish familiarity" is difficult to pinpoint. Nabokov's first biographer, Andrew Field, alleges that Nabokov knew Freud only through English translations (1977, 262–63). Field does not document his claim, but it seems to be based on a 1966 letter from Véra Nabokov wherein she responded in her husband's stead to Field's queries, noting that Nabokov "actually read *many* of Freud's works (in English translation)." <sup>7</sup> In the 1975 *Apostrophes* interview, however, expanding upon his ironic praise of Freud as a comedian, Nabokov specified, "he must be read . . . in the original."<sup>8</sup> In an unpublished and undated note card (in all likelihood, from the 1960s) bearing the title "Freud," Nabokov writes, "*Ever since I read him in the Twenties he seemed wrong, absurd, and vulgar to me*" (italics added).<sup>9</sup>

Despite this uncertainty, we might, nevertheless, offer a conjecture. There is a strong likelihood that, whatever other writings of Freud's he might have been familiar with, Nabokov *had* encountered the case of the Wolf-Man, published in 1918 and available in English translation by the "Twenties" when Nabokov, at the earliest, read Freud. There are a number of reasons to suggest that the text was known to Nabokov. The first is that this case history is among the most famous ever published, and Nabokov was much interested in this genre—especially, but not exclusively, while composing *Lolita*. What is more, one of the few additional clues offered by Nabokov concerning his knowledge of psychoanalysis is his repeated reviling of the idea of the "primal scene," which receives its fullest, and by far its most outlandish, exposition in the case history of the Wolf-Man. Perhaps more important still is the fact that despite Freud's cloaking of the identity of his patient, it is clear from a reading of the case study that the Wolf-Man was, like Nabokov, a Russian; like Nabokov, rendered destitute

by the Revolution; like Nabokov, living in precarious European exile; and while slightly older than Nabokov, certainly of his set—wealthy, cosmopolitan, cultivated, multilingual, living part of the year in the country and part of the year in the city.<sup>10</sup> All of this makes it plausible that Nabokov would have caught wind of the story in one or another *émigré* circle if he hadn't already been familiar with Freud's text upon, or shortly following, its appearance. Finally, among the sad and impressive arsenal of symptoms from which the Wolf-Man suffered is, at a certain moment of his childhood neurosis, a *Schmetterlingsphobie* ("butterfly phobia")—something that could hardly have failed to excite the interest of a passionate butterfly-hunter and a professional lepidopterist, and whose feelings on the subject were thus so very much the inverse.

The question that still remains to be answered, however, is *why* Nabokov felt such energetic hostility towards Freud. Nabokov might well have considered psychoanalysis a comically or sadly misguided undertaking without being impelled to initiate measures to counteract its influence. Did he resolve to combat this pernicious phenomenon simply for the public good (something with which he did not usually concern himself overmuch)? Or did psychoanalysis perhaps present a special danger for art?

It seems safe to assume that one of the reasons many artists have been less than eager to embrace psychoanalysis, and have even been motivated to oppose it, is that it doesn't depict them in a very favorable light. The psychoanalytic view of art removes the site of creativity from the conscious mind of the creator to his or her unconscious drives and depths; and for Nabokov, concerned as he was with controlling the work under his hand, this could not have been a pleasing idea.

As we have seen, Nabokov intensely disliked art—and interpretations of art—that he saw as *mythologizing*. Inasmuch as psychoanalysis has recourse to universals and archetypes, Nabokov would have found himself estranged by Freud's "oneiromancy and mythogeny."<sup>11</sup> To a certain extent, this is a simple matter of the disparity of the two thinkers' interests. For Freud, mythology was a key for unlocking the mysteries of the psyche for the reason that he saw myths as encrypted signs and frozen forms of human drives, desires, and developments. For

Nabokov, however, such approaches failed to pay close enough attention to the *particularity* of the work of art. Like allegory and symbolism, they granted conceptual license to interpret everything in terms of something else—and this he could not stand.

There are other reasons for Nabokov's vibrant hostility. Like many other artists, he associated childhood with creation, and Freud upset the vision of Edenic youth that Nabokov ardently cherished. That the innocent child of previous centuries should be replaced by one torn by conflicts of the most violent sort did not sit well with him. One finds in his works no children like the little James who, at the opening of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, wishes for "an axe . . . or a poker, any weapon that would have gashed a hold in his father's breast and killed him, there and then" (1937, 4).<sup>12</sup> Yet while each of these motivations contributed, in all likelihood, to his resistance and resentment, what most infuriates him is the idea of a system of psychic substitutions. Nabokov regards Freud's vision of the world as not only sexually perverted and socially deranged, but as denying the particular detail its rich, brimming life.

When examined within the context of Nabokov's universe of aesthetic values, his remarks on Freud appear perfectly consistent with the entirety of his thinking on art. Readers have understandably tended to slip on the glib glaze of his prose, chosen sides with or against Nabokov, and within five pages, generally forgotten the whole unpleasant incident.<sup>13</sup> Such taking sides has not, however, led to clarity on the question and has tended to occlude the fact that what Nabokov so strenuously objects to is the violence done to the particularity of perceptual life—and the particularity of his own literary works—by the *generalizing system* that, for him, is psychoanalysis. Like Michel Foucault, Nabokov would reproach less the failure of psychoanalysis to be or become a science (*pace* Karl Popper's critique of the unverifiability of its hypotheses) than the very pretensions of psychoanalysis *to be a science*, its aspiration to function in the realm of the human sciences as would a natural science—as a totalizing, unifying discourse.

Is Nabokov's criticism unjust? In Freud's writing—above all in his case histories—fantastic attention is paid to the most minute and seemingly derisory details of his patients' lives.

And yet, he evinces an indefatigable drive to interpret these details in light of overarching schemas that would be common to, depending on the circumstance, the better part of metropolitan Vienna or all humanity.

As Nabokov's charge is made in the name of art, let us take as an example Freud's analysis of the uneasy peace Leonardo da Vinci struck up with his desires. In this imaginary case history, to which Freud was to refer ten years later, in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, as "the only beautiful thing I have ever written" (Freud and Andreas-Salomé 1966, 90), Freud's analysis centers on a memory Leonardo relates from earliest childhood in which a bird—according to Freud, a *vulture*—landed upon the edge of his cradle and parted his lips with its tail feathers. In German, as in Italian, the word for "tail"—*Schwanz* and *coda*, respectively—is used to refer to the male sexual organ. Freud finds it highly improbable that the memory in question is veridical and declares it instead (on scant but plausible evidence) to be Leonardo's fantasy, and then reveals another fantasy lurking behind it—that of fellatio. In an effort to contravene his readers' skepticism, Freud (1910) writes that, "like any psychic creation, like a dream, a vision, or a hallucination, such a fantasy must have a meaning" (86; translation modified). This remark perfectly captures Freud's vision of the particular detail. On the one hand, we find a curiosity and a vigilance, an intense and intelligent suspicion, and a sense that *everything* in the world merits inspection and reflection. On the other, since every dream or act must have a meaning other than itself, the details are translated into the terms of general schemas that cannot do the justice to those particulars cherished by Nabokov.

Three years after Freud's study, Oskar Pfister published an article with the mesmerizing title, "Cryptolalia, Cryptographia, and the Unconscious Visual Puzzle in Normal Individuals," wherein he claimed to have discovered in Leonardo's painting *Virgin and Child with St. Anne and a Lamb* the hidden form of a vulture in the folds of Mary's dress, which became discernible when one turned the painting on its side. In a footnote added in 1919, Freud wrote of Pfister's study: "a remarkable discovery has been made," to wit, that "in the picture that represents the artist's mother, *the vulture, the symbol of motherhood*, is perfectly



clearly visible” (1910, 115; italics in original). There is every reason, alas, for this “symbol of motherhood” *not* to be “clearly visible.”

This is because Freud, in his most ambitious attempt at understanding the mind of an artist in light of his revolutionary theories, fell prey to an error of detail. He bases much of his analysis on the bird in question being a vulture: “The key to all of Leonardo’s accomplishments and misfortunes lies hidden in the childhood fantasy about the vulture [*Geier*]” (1910, 136). The bird in question is, however, not a vulture but a kite (*nibbio* in Italian). Although Freud quotes from da Vinci’s notebooks, *Codex Atlanticus*, in the original Italian, he unaccountably relied on a German translation of a Russian novel (Dmitri Mereschkovski’s *Leonardo da Vinci: A Biographical Novel*), which integrates the *Codex* into its plot. This error greatly weakens Freud’s argument as kites are significantly smaller, look much different, and, most importantly, are *not* the bird the Egyptians used in their hieroglyph for “mother,” *not* the bird believed in European folklore of the Middle Ages to be exclusively of female sex, *not* the bird inseminated by the wind, and thus *not* the bird cited by the Church Fathers in association with the Virgin Birth. Although Freud’s error was brought to light as early as 1923, neither he nor those close to him ever publicly acknowledged it.

It is, moreover, not the only error of its kind. In a respectful essay full of praise for Freud’s acumen in other domains, Meyer Schapiro (1956, 150–53) points out that the passage with the cradle-visiting kite is to be found on the reverse of a page in Leonardo’s notebooks concerned with the flight of birds. Numerous birds are mentioned and drawn, but more than any other is the kite, which Leonardo thought best permitted observation of the mechanics of flight. This would explain why Leonardo’s imagination was occupied with the kite. As to why he might have remembered, or fantasized about, the bird’s visit, Schapiro notes the tradition in classical biography of animals calling upon gifted men in their cribs. Cicero imparts the legend of bees settling on Plato’s lips and thereby anticipating the future sweetness of his speech. Pausanias relates that bees swarmed upon the lips of Pindar. In other legends, ants filled the mouth of the baby Midas with



grains of wheat as he slept, and a nightingale was said to have alighted on the mouth of the lyric-poet-to-be, Stesichorus.

Eric Maclagan (1923), the Renaissance scholar who was the first to point out Freud's error of translation, noted another weak link in his argumentative chain. Freud emphasizes the parsimonious fashion with which Leonardo recorded in his diary the expenses for his mother's funeral. Yet the burial in actuality was not for Leonardo's mother, but his servant. Another pivotal point in Freud's reconstruction—that the illegitimate Leonardo was adopted by his father only three years after the latter's marriage—is contradicted in a French study of Leonardo's life that Freud himself owned and in which he made notations (see Spector 1972, 58; Gay 1988, 273). To turn from personal to public history, Freud set great weight upon Leonardo's manner of depicting Anne, Mary, and the Christ Child. The reasons for this choice of subject are, however, not as mysterious as Freud suggests. Schapiro (1956, 160) observes that in 1494, shortly before Leonardo began work on the sketches for the painting, the cult of St. Anne received new attention through a work by a German abbot, *Tractatus de Laudibus Sanctissimae Annae*, and in that same year Pope Alexander VI issued an indulgence for those who recited a prayer to Anne and Mary while bowing before an image of the two women and the Christ Child. Such prayers were to be rewarded with the relief of 10,000 years of punishment in Purgatory for mortal sins, and 20,000 for venial sins. That Leonardo undertook a painting of Anne, Mary and the Christ Child at this time is thus less plausibly to be explained by psychic turmoil and the experience of having had two mothers than it is by the market and the promised ten to twenty thousand years of remission.<sup>14</sup>

What should ultimately interest us here is less the number of Freud's errors than their *cause*. More than anything else, they seem to be due to his having reached his conclusions about Leonardo's character *before* coming across the memory upon which he based his analysis. In an October 1909 letter to Jung, several months before he began research for the essay, Freud wrote: "the mystery of Leonardo da Vinci's character has suddenly become clear to me. This would then be the first step into the biographical. The biographical material is, however,

so slight that I despair of being able to make my convictions clear to others” (McGuire 1974, 255).<sup>15</sup> As he had already arrived at his theory, the details later amassed remained ever secondary.

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While working at Harvard’s Museum of Comparative Zoology in the 1940s, Nabokov, instead of relying on a generic description of band formation on butterflies’ wings, developed a new classificatory technique involving the counting of their stripes, and in some cases their scales (Field 1977, 270). He later spent six hours a day for months at a time peering through a microscope to examine, treat, and remove the genitalia of thousands of members of the “blue” family of butterflies. At the height of his fame, in 1968 and 1969, Nabokov took the time to correspond with a certain V. O. Virkau concerning the various names in German and English of a “fragrant bog orchid,” as well as whether or not it was to be found in sphagnum bogs in northern Russia.<sup>16</sup>

In his introductory remarks to his *Lectures on Literature*, “Good Readers and Good Writers,” Nabokov announces that “in reading, one should notice and fondle details” (1980, 1). As one of his students at Cornell related, “‘Caress the details,’ Nabokov would utter, rolling the r, his voice the rough caress of a cat’s tongue, ‘the divine details!’” (Wetzsteon 1970, 245). And indeed everything about Nabokov’s pedagogical approach reflected this passion for the details of the work of art. Each of his lectures lauds the acute perceptions and technical virtuosity of Kafka and Dickens, Flaubert and Proust, Austen and Stevenson, Tolstoy, Gogol, and others. “In high art and pure science,” he insisted, “detail is everything” (1973, 168).

It is neither possible nor necessary to judge—as so many of Nabokov’s critics and defenders have endeavored to do—whether Nabokov’s resistance to Freud was determined or overdetermined by factors or feelings of which he was not aware. What Nabokov very consciously sought to counteract were approaches to art that, in their aspiration to uncover the general, neglected the particular. And this he found in Freud.

For Nabokov, the essence of art dwells in the details of a work, and any system that encouraged the study of such details as a means to any other end than art itself was, understandably, anathema. This, more than anything else, motivated his resistance to psychoanalysis and its founder.

There is a final irony in Nabokov's attacks on Freud as prophet and promulgator of the general. In vilifying Freud, Nabokov followed only the most general lines of attack. He never criticized Freud for such things as misunderstanding or misapplying the insights of those who came before him, and his strictures are, in truth, never *particular* and always *general*. And so if Freud were indeed to choose someday to rail at Nabokov from beyond the grave, he might find no better grounds for doing so than that his antagonist too fell prey to the ever-present and ever-powerful seductions of the general.

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### Notes

1. Kubrick removed all such references from his script. If shot as written, Nabokov's screenplay would have lasted, by Kubrick's estimate, seven hours. Although Nabokov is listed as its author, of the nearly two hours that remain very little is taken directly from his screenplay. For an informative look at the preparation and shooting of the film, see Corliss (1995).
2. Freud never endeavored to pardon or explain away *real* crimes, and, apart from rare exceptions such as his "Expert Opinion in the Halsmann Case" (1931), he avoided discussing actual criminals or any possible relations between psychoanalysis and criminology. But the rise of criminology coincides with, and is to an extent influenced by, the rise of psychoanalysis. As Freud developed a theory of the conflict between individual desire and collective prohibition, the step from the disculpation of violent *fantasies* to the disculpation of violent *acts* was, for many, not great. What is more, Freud explains neuroses—and even, on occasion, psychoses—as stemming from childhood traumas. As Freud's thought came to permeate the fabric of Western social life, lawyers and social workers were able to invoke such arguments in appeals for clemency. Humbert's attributing the origin of his woes to his unfulfilled love for, and traumatic loss of, Annabel mocks this tendency.
3. This antipathy is, however, already documented by Page Stegner in the first book-length study of Nabokov's work: "In one sense *Lolita* might be considered an extensive parody of Freudian myths and Freudian explanations for psychological aberration" (1966, 103). In a 1976 essay, Claude Mouchard noted that "the challenge to the 'Freudians' in Nabokov's works, and especially in his prefaces, is almost an obligatory rite of passage" (131). Jeffrey Berman (1985) is perhaps right to claim that "Nabokov has created a new art form, psychiatry baiting" (211) though he is hardly correct that this invective is "mirthless"

- (213). The most recent effort to situate Nabokov in relation to Freud is that of John M. Ingham, who, following Berman, endeavors to “show how Nabokov (or his protagonist) constructs the fantasy of erasing the primal scene by ‘misreading’ the Western cultural heritage in general and Freud in particular” (2002, 28).
4. Humbert Humbert steals this joke in *Lolita* when he refers to the “dream-extortionists” (Nabokov 1955, 34).
  5. In “Freudian Fiction” (1920), Woolf writes with gentle contemptuousness: “A patient who has never heard a canary sing without falling down in a fit can now walk through an avenue of cages without a twinge of emotion since he has faced the fact that his mother kissed him in the cradle. The triumphs of science are beautifully positive” (153). This light-hearted dismissal acquires a certain weight, however, when one notes that during a psychotic episode during her teenage years Woolf claimed to have heard birds singing to her in Greek. By *Three Guineas* (1937), one can find Freudian terms in her work, and as she probed more deeply into her relationship with her father in 1939 and 1940, she read Freud with increased intensity.
  6. In “Freud’s Position in the History of Modern Culture” (1929), Thomas Mann argues that far from representing an obscurantist tendency that prepares the soil for totalitarianism, psychoanalysis opposes irrationalism and combats the veneration of the obscure and the unconscious. For Mann, Freud’s work may use the mythical, but it does so precisely to preempt its uncritical appropriation by Fascism. Nabokov took every opportunity to insult Mann, often including him in lists of writers whom he deemed “mediocrities” (alongside Gide, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, and Rilke). It is difficult to know what role extraliterary factors such as Mann’s bourgeois persona, his (latent) homosexuality, or his pro-Bolshevism played in Nabokov’s dislike, but it is likely that Mann’s view of Freud did not improve Nabokov’s image of him.
  7. This unpublished letter, dated January 31, 1966, from Montreux, is in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library; the emphasis is Véra Nabokov’s.
  8. Although Nabokov repeatedly claimed ignorance of German, not only did he live in Berlin for eighteen years but even as a youth he knew German well enough to translate certain of Heine’s poems (made famous by Schubert’s and Schumann’s arrangements) into Russian, and he later translated the opening of Goethe’s *Faust* into Russian.
  9. Undated folder, “Notes on Various Subjects,” from the Nabokov Archive, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
  10. The identity of Freud’s former patient, who remained resolutely uncured, became known to the general public when he submitted to interviews (Obholzer 1980) and wrote a memoir of his analysis (Gardiner 1971).
  11. Borges, a more gracious reader, also viewed psychoanalysis as a mythology, but with a different emphasis: “we speak of the ‘subliminal self,’ of the ‘subconscious.’ Of course, these words are rather uncouth when we compare them to the muses or to the Holy Ghost. Still, we have to put up with the mythology of our time. For the words mean essentially the same thing” (2000, 10).
  12. Another motivation might be that psychoanalysis trespasses on Nabokov’s treasured principles of discretion and decorum. In the description of young Martin in *Glory* (1932), a novel that (as Nabokov himself was later to acknowledge) a comparison with *Speak, Memory* shows to contain autobiographical experiences, we read: “From early childhood his mother had taught him that to discuss in public a profound emotional experience—which, in the open air, immediately evanesces and fades, and, oddly, becomes similar to an analogous experience of one’s interlocutor—was not only vulgar, but a sin against sentiment” (12). Psychoanalytic treatment is not a “public” discussion, but for Nabokov it seems to have been tantamount to such.
  13. It might be noted that all of the influential first-generation professional critics of Nabokov “side” with him. The very first, Page Stegner (1966), writes that “it

- is really the popular version of the psychopathologist's interpretation of the conscious and subconscious world, made into a religious cult by confused and unhappy pseudo-intellectuals, that Nabokov deplores" (36). Andrew Field (1977) demonstrates a personal antipathy for psychoanalysis and its "slavish" following (264), a line continued by Alfred Appel, Jr., in his *Annotated Lolita*. Perhaps the most extreme is Boyd, who goes to some lengths to insult Freud as well as Lacan (1990, 91, 260; 1991, 435). That all these positions were the rule rather than the exception is attested by Green, "Nabokovians . . . since they tended to follow the master's lead in all things literary, certainly until his death in 1977, did not exempt psychoanalysis from the list of contemptibles" (1988, 2). Green is justified in adding: "What needs to be faced is the extent to which Nabokov's readers are reluctant to depart from the mode of reading he prescribed for them and to what degree this may be a perceived filial obligation" (4).
14. As concerns the positioning of the figures, Schapiro (1956, 163) cites as precedents a Dürer completed before 1500 and a Cranach from 1509, in both of which Anne and Mary sit on the same bench and Anne's face seems younger than Mary's. This seeming oddity need not have surprised Freud, as it was conventional to represent age and authority by the size and level of the figures. Cruel in his philological kindness, Schapiro finally notes that the smile of the Mona Lisa, which for Freud evokes Leonardo's mother, is similar to many smiles in Verrocchio, with whom Leonardo studied and lived from an early age and who was a friend of Leonardo's father (165).
  15. In an exemplary account of how Freud broke all the rules he himself set for the writing of a psychobiography, Alan C. Elms (1994) has outlined both Freud's professional and personal reasons for undertaking this study. The former include his desire to counter what he saw as the irresponsible precedents of Isidor Sadger and his competitiveness with Karl Abraham's work on the Swiss painter Giovanni Segantini, while among the latter Elms classes Freud's frustration at his wife's having put an effective end to their sex life many years earlier, homoerotic feelings for Wilhelm Fliess as well as for Jung and Ferenczi, and his having perhaps met a woman in 1909 or 1910 "who reminded him of his mother's ambivalent sensuality during his childhood, as he says was the case with Leonardo and Mona Lisa" (48). In a later chapter, Elms describes how Nabokov's invocations against psychoanalytic interpretations have shaped the reception of his own work and advances the thesis that "Nabokov didn't hate Freud because their basic concepts of human nature were so radically opposed; he hated Freud because they were so much alike" (169).
  16. Unpublished letters, Nabokov collection, Kroch Library, Cornell University.

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