According to Kinbote (in VN’s novel *Pale Fire*, 1962, Shade’s mad commentator who imagines that he is Charles the Beloved, the last self-exiled king of Zembla), Zembla is a corruption not of the Russian *zemlya* (earth; land), but of Semberland, a land of reflections, of “resemblers:”

A visiting German lecturer from Oxford kept exclaiming, aloud and under his breath, that the resemblance was "absolutely unheard of," and when I negligently observed that all bearded Zemblans resembled one another – and that, in fact, the name Zembla is a corruption not of the Russian *zemlya*, but of Semberland, a land of reflections, of "resemblers" – my tormentor said: "Ah, yes, but King Charles wore no beard, and yet it is his very face! I had [he added] the honor of being seated within a few yards of the royal box at a Sport Festival in Onhava which I visited with my wife, who is Swedish, in 1956. We have a photograph of him at home, and her sister knew very well the mother of one of his pages, an interesting woman. Don't you see [almost tugging at Shade's lapel' the astounding similarity of features – of the upper part of the face, and the eyes, yes, the eyes, and the nose bridge?"

"Nay, sir" [said Shade, refolding a leg and slightly rolling his armchair as wont to do when about to deliver a pronouncement] "there is no resemblance at all. I have seen the King in newsreels, and there is no resemblance. Resemblances are the shadows of differences. Different people see different similarities and similar differences." (note line 894)

In Chekhov’s play *Tri sestry* (“The Three Sisters,” 1901) Solyony (who in Act Four kills Baron Tuzenbakh in a pistol duel) imagines that he resembles Lermontov. Lermontov is the author of “The Demon” (1829-40). On Demonia (aka Antiterra, Earth’s twin planet on which VN’s novel *Ada*, 1969, is set) Chekhov’s play is known as *Four Sisters*. From Ada’s letter to Van:

Marina’s new director of artistic conscience defines Infinity as the farthest point from the camera which is still in fair focus. She has been cast as the deaf nun Varvara (who, in some ways, is the most interesting of Chekhov’s Four Sisters). She sticks to Stan’s principle of having lore and role overflow into everyday life, insists on keeping it up at the hotel restaurant, drinks tea *v prikusku* (‘biting sugar between sips’), and feigns to misunderstand every question in Varvara’s quaint way of feigning stupidity — a double imbroglio, which annoys strangers but which somehow makes me feel I’m her daughter much more distinctly than in the Ardis era. (2.1)

The deaf nun Varvara is, of course, absent from Chekhov’s play. In a letter of March 27, 1892, to Lika Mizinov Chekhov quotes Lermontov’s poem *Net, ne tebya tak pylko ya lyublyu…* (“No, it is not you I love so ardently…” 1841):

Увы, я уже старый молодой человек, любовь моя не солнце и не делает весны ни для меня, ни для той птицы, которую я люблю. Лика, не тебя так пылко я люблю! Люблю в тебе я прошлые страданья и молодость погибшую мою.

Alas, I am already an old young man, my love is not the sun and does not make spring for me or for the bird that I love. Lika, it is not you I love so ardently! I love in you past sufferings and my perished youth.

In the second line of his poem “No, it is not you I love so ardently…” Lermontov says: “the splendor of your beauty is not for me.” The splendor of Queen Disa’s beauty is not for Kinbote. It is Botkin (Shade’s, Kinbote’s and Gradus’ “real” name) who seeks in Queen Disa the features of another woman (those of Shade’s wife Sybil). In the last stanza of his poem Lermontov mentions *podruga yunykh dney* (a friend of young days) whose features he seeks in the girl to whom the poem is addressed. A friend of Lermontov’s young days was Varvara Lopukhin (m. Bakhmetev). She had the same maiden name as Eudoxia Lopukhin, the first wife of the tsar Peter I, Prince Alexey’s mother who was banished to a Convent. “The Antichrist. Peter and Alexey” (1902) is a historical novel by Merezhkovski. In *Tayna Tryokh. Egipet i Vavilon* (“The Secret of Three: Egypt and Babylon,” 1925) Merezhkovski mentions Schelling’s formula that explains the secret of God and of the world, 3 + 1 = 4:

Пифагора и Орфея объясняет Шеллинг: над тремя началами в Боге, Отцом, Сыном и Духом, возвышается сам Бог в единстве Своём, так что тайна Бога и мира выражается алгебраически: 3 + 1 = 4 (*Philosophie der* *Offenbarung*). Это и значит: в Боге Три – Четыре в мире; Троица в метафизике есть «четвёртое измерение» в метагеометрии. (“The Divine Trefoil,” XI)

According to Merezhkovski, Three in God is Four in the world; the Trinity in metaphysics is “the Fourth Dimension” in metageometry.

In his Commentary Kinbote quotes Queen Disa’s letter to her husband (Charles the Beloved):

When the Zemblan Revolution broke out (May 1, 1958), she wrote the King a wild letter in governess English, urging him to come and stay with her until the situation cleared up. The letter was intercepted by the Onhava police, translated into crude Zemblan by a Hindu member of the Extremist party, and then read aloud to the royal captive in a would-be ironic voice by the preposterous commandant of the palace. There happened to be in that letter one--only one, thank God--sentimental sentence: "I want you to know that no matter how much you hurt me, you cannot hurt my love," and this sentence (if we re-English it from the Zemblan) came out as: "I desire you and love when you flog me." He interrupted the commandant, calling him a buffoon and a rogue, and insulting everybody around so dreadfully that the Extremists had to decide fast whether to shoot him at once or let him have the original of the letter. (note to Lines 433-434)

In a letter of June 12, 1891, to Lika Mizinov Chekhov says that he does not regret having once chastised Lika with a whip:

Хотя Вы и приняты в высшем свете (у головастенькой Малкиель), но всё-таки Вы дурно воспитаны, и я не жалею, что однажды наказал Вас хлыстом.

Though you are received in aristocratic society, you have been badly brought up all the same, and I don’t regret having once chastised you with a switch.

Instead of signature Chekhov drew a heart pierced with an arrow. According to Mlle Larivière (Lucette’s governess in *Ada*), Ardis (the family estate of Daniel Veen, Lucette’s father) means in Greek “the point of an arrow.” (1.36)

Discussing Ada’s “dramatic career,” Van describes the film version of Chekhov’s play in which Marina (Van’s, Ada’s and Lucette’s mother) played sister Varvara and mentions Lenore Colline, the movie actress who resembles Ada Ardis (Ada’s stage name):

Van had seen the picture and had like it. An Irish girl, the infinitely graceful and melancholy Lenore Colline —

*Oh! qui me rendra ma colline*

*Et le grand chêne* and my colleen!

— harrowingly resembled Ada Ardis as photographed with her mother in *Belladonna*, a movie magazine which Greg Erminin had sent him, thinking it would delight him to see aunt and cousin, together, on a California patio just before the film was released. Varvara, the late General Sergey Prozorov’s eldest daughter, comes in Act One from her remote nunnery, Tsitsikar Convent, to Perm (also called Permwail), in the backwoods of Akimsk Bay, North Canady, to have tea with Olga, Marsha, and Irina on the latter’s name day. Much to the nun’s dismay, her three sisters dream only of one thing — leaving cool, damp, mosquito-infested but otherwise nice and peaceful ‘Permanent’ as Irina mockingly dubs it, for high life in remote and sinful Moscow, Id., the former capital of Estotiland. In the first edition of his play, which never quite manages to heave the soft sigh of a masterpiece, Tchechoff (as he spelled his name when living that year at the execrable Pension Russe, 9, rue Gounod, Nice) crammed into the two pages of a ludicrous expository scene all the information he wished to get rid of, great lumps of recollections and calendar dates — an impossible burden to place on the fragile shoulders of three unhappy Estotiwomen. Later he redistributed that information through a considerably longer scene in which the arrival of the *monashka* Varvara provides all the speeches needed to satisfy the restless curiosity of the audience. This was a neat stroke of stagecraft, but unfortunately (as so often occurs in the case of characters brought in for disingenuous purposes) the nun stayed on, and not until the third, penultimate, act was the author able to bundle her off, back to her convent. (2.9)

In a letter of Nov. 2, 1903, to Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko Chekhov calls Varya (a character in “The Cherry Orchard”) *monashka* (a nun):

Варя посерьёзнее роль, если бы её взяла Мария Петровна. Без М. П. эта роль выйдет и плосковатой, и грубой, придётся переделывать её, смягчать. Повториться М. П. не может, потому, во-первых, что она талантливый человек, и во-вторых, потому, что Варя не похожа на Соню и Наташу, это фигура в чёрном платье, монашка, глупенькая, плакса и проч. и проч.

*Lenore* (1843) is a poem by E. A. Poe, *Belladonna* (1898) is a poem by Balmont (E. A. Poe’s Russian translator). In a letter of January 1, 1902, to Balmont Chekhov says that one of these days he will start reading Edgar Poe:

Из Ваших книг у меня имеются: 1) «Под северным небом»; 2) Шелли, вып<уск> 2-й и 7-й (Ченчи); 3) «В безбрежности»; 4) «Тишина»; 5) Кальдерон, т. 1; 6) «Таинственные рассказы»; 7) По Эдгар, т. 1.

За книгу всей душой благодарю. Я теперь не работаю, а только читаю, и завтра-послезавтра примусь за Эдг. По.

Chekhov mentions Calderon, the author of “Life is a Dream” (1635), a play translated into Russian by Balmont. *Son* (“A Dream,” 1841) is a prophetic poem by Lermontov. Like Lermontov’s poem, *Ada* is a triple dream (dream within a dream within a dream).

In VN’s novel *Podvig* (“Glory,” 1932) Martin Edelweiss (the novel’s main character) once confused Plutarch with Petrarch, and once called Calderon a Scottish poet:

Читал он чрезвычайно много, но больше перечитывал, а в литературных разговорах бывали с ним несчастные случаи: он раз спутал, например, Плутарха с Петраркой и раз назвал Кальдерона шотландским поэтом. (chapter XVI)

Describing Aqua’s struggle with insanity, Van mentions Scoto-Scandinavia and Palermontovia (on Antiterra, parts of the British Commonwealth):

Actually, Aqua was less pretty, and far more dotty, than Marina. During her fourteen years of miserable marriage she spent a broken series of steadily increasing sojourns in sanatoriums. A small map of the European part of the British Commonwealth — say, from Scoto-Scandinavia to the Riviera, Altar and Palermontovia — as well as most of the U.S.A., from Estoty and Canady to Argentina, might be quite thickly prickled with enameled red-cross-flag pins, marking, in her War of the Worlds, Aqua’s bivouacs. (1.3)

Palermontovia blends Palermo (the city in and the capital of Sicily) with Lermontov (the poet who was killed in a duel with Martynov). According to Kinbote, New Wye (the University town where the Shades live) is on the latitude of Palermo:

February and March in Zembla (the two last of the four "white-nosed months," as we call them) used to be pretty rough, too, but even a peasant's room there presented a solid of uniform warmth--not a reticulation of deadly drafts. It is true that, as usually happens to newcomers, I was told I had chosen the worst winter in years--and this at the latitude of Palermo. (Foreword)

Like Zoorland (in “Glory,” a totalitarian country invented by Martin and Sonya), Zembla is a distant northern land.

In the same chapter of “Glory” Archibald Moon (Martin’s Professor of Russian literature in Cambridge) mentions Babylon:

Профессором русской словесности и истории был в ту пору небезызвестный Арчибальд Мун. В России он прожил довольно долго, всюду побывал, всех знал, всё перевидел. Теперь, черноволосый, бледный, в пенсне на тонком носу, он бесшумно проезжал на велосипеде с высоким рулем, сидя совсем прямо, а за обедом, в знаменитой столовой с дубовыми столами и огромными цветными окнами, вертел головой, как птица, и быстро, быстро крошил длинными пальцами хлеб. Говорили, единственное, что он в мире любит, это - Россия. Многие не понимали, почему он там не остался. На вопросы такого рода Мун неизменно отвечал: "Справьтесь у Робертсона" (это был востоковед) "почему он не остался в Вавилоне". Возражали вполне резонно, что Вавилона уже нет. Мун кивал, тихо и хитро улыбаясь. Он усматривал в октябрьском перевороте некий отчётливый конец. (XVI)

When asked why had not he remained in Russia, Archibald Moon replied: “Ask Robertson (the orientalist) why he did not stay in Babylon.” According to Martin, Moon saw in the Bolshevist insurrection a certain clear-cut finality. “Final” being an anagram of Alfin, one is reminded of Alfin the Vague (the cognomen given by Amphitheatrcus to the father of Charles the Beloved):

Alfin the Vague (1873-1918; regnal dates 1900-1918, but 1900-1919 in most biographical dictionaries, a fumble due to the coincident calendar change from Old Style to New) was given his cognomen by Amphitheatricus, a not unkindly writer of fugitive poetry in the liberal gazettes (who was also responsible for dubbing my capital Uranograd!). (note to Line 71)

According to Darwin (a friend of Martin), Archibald Moon is addicted to urningism. Like Uranograd, “urningism” (homosexuality) comes from Aphrodite Urania. In “The Secret of Three: Egypt and Babylon” Merezhkovski mentions Aphrodite Urania:

Как глубоко наше скопчество, видно из того, что в нём согласны все индивидуалисты и социалисты, буржуа и пролетарии, верующие в Бога и безбожники. Как нам понять, что такое божественный Эрос, когда вместо Афродиты Урании – у нас «Елена Прекрасная», а вместо Елевзинского храма – публичный дом? (“One, Two and Three,” XIX)

According to Merezhkovski, we cannot understand what the Divine Eros is because we have *La belle Hélène* instead of Aphrodite Urania and a brothel instead of the temple Eleusinion. *Bozhestvennyi Eros* (the Divine Eros) and a brothel mentioned by Merezhkovski bring to mind Eric Veen, the author of an essay entitled “Villa Venus: an Organized Dream” (2.3). In memory of Eric (who was killed by a hurricane in Switzerland) his grandfather David van Veen (a wealthy architect of Flemish extraction) built one hundred floramors (palatial brothels) “all over both hemispheres of our callipygian globe” (as Eric called Antiterra). Eric Veen is one of the three dreamers in *Ada* (two other dreamers are Van Veen and VN himself).

The first part of Merezhkovski’s novel “The Antichrist. Peter and Alexey” is entitled *Peterburgskaya Venera* (“The St. Petersburg Venus”). In his novel *Smert’ bogov. Yulian Otstupnik* (“The Death of the Gods: Julian the Apostate,” 1895) Merezhkovski mentions Aphrodite Callipyga:

Посередине двора, в светлых брызгах фонтана, виднелась Афродита Каллипига; влажный мрамор серебрился, как живое тело. Монахи, проходя мимо неё, отвёртывались и старались не видеть; но она была среди них, лукавая и нежная. (Part Two, chapter VI)

Alexey Sklyarenko