In VN’s novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) Vadim Vadimovich (the narrator and main character) mentions the critic Adam Atropovich and the writer Vasiliy Sokolovski. Their names seem to hint at Adam Sokolovich, the main character in Bunin’s story *Petlistye ushi* (“Loopy Ears,” 1916). According to Adam Sokolovich, the criminals can be recognized *po usham* (by their ears):

— А как же я того выродка узнать могу, если он здоровый, как той кабан? — насмешливо спросил Левченко.

— А по ушам, например, — ответил Соколович не то всерьёз, не то насмешливо. — У выродков, у гениев, у бродяг и убийц уши петлистые, то есть похожие на петлю, — вот на ту самую, которой и давят их.

In his epigram *Ex Ungue Leonem* (1825) Pushkin says that a critic instantly recognized him by his claws and he in no time recognized the critic *po usham* (by his ears):

Недавно я стихами как-то свистнул  
И выдал их без подписи моей;  
Журнальный шут о них статейку тиснул,  
Без подписи ж пустив её, злодей.  
Но что ж? Ни мне, ни площадному шуту  
Не удалось прикрыть своих проказ:  
Он по когтям узнал меня в минуту,  
Я по ушам узнал его как раз.

Not long ago I penned in verse a “note”

And sent it into print without my name;

Some critic-clown, responding to it, wrote

A diatribe—anonymous, for shame!

No matter, though, for neither I nor he

Succeeded in our underhanded play:

He knew me by my lion's claws, you see,

While his great ass’s ears gave him away.

In 1939 VN published his poem *Poety* (“The Poets”) under the penname Vasiliy Shishkov. This poem was acclaimed by Georgiy Adamovich, a leading émigré critic who did *not* recognize Sirin (VN’s Russian nom de plume), with quite exceptional enthusiasm: “At last a great poet has been born in our midst,” etc. After the publication of VN’s story *Vasiliy Shishkov* (1939) Adamovich (VN’s faithful Zoilus) said that Sirin “was a sufficiently skillful parodist to mimic genius.” Prince Vadim Vadimovich Yablonski (whose novels look like parodies of VN’s books) mimics, as it were, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, “the writer who was and would always be incomparably greater, healthier, and cruder than your obedient servant.” (2.3)

At the beginning of one of his poems Adamovich mentions *dremlyushchaya Parka* (the slumbering Fate):

(У дремлющей Парки в руках,

Где пряжи осталось так мало...)

Нет, разум ещё не зачах,

Но сердце... но сердце устало.

Беспомощно хочет любить,

Бессмысленно хочет забыться

(...И длится тончайшая нить,

Которой не надо бы длиться).

Adamovich died in 1972. Adam Atropovich’s surname hints at Atropos, the oldest of the three Fates (Parcae) who cuts the thread of human life. In his *Ode LVI* (“From Anacreon,” 1835) Pushkin mentions *Parka* (the Fate) who counts his days and Tartar (Hades) that waits for his shade:

Поредели, побелели

Кудри, честь главы моей,

Зубы в дёснах ослабели,

И потух огонь очей.

Сладкой жизни мне немного

Провожать осталось дней:

Парка счёт ведёт им строго,

Тартар тени ждёт моей.

Не воскреснем из-под спуда,

Всяк навеки там забыт:

Вход туда для всех открыт -

Нет исхода уж оттуда.

Now my hair has thinned and grayed,

Curls that once I wore with pride;

Teeth as well have now decayed,

Sparkles in my eyes have died.

All life's sweetness has to fade,

Few the days that still remain;

Fate's account must soon be paid,

Hades beckons down the lane.

We'll not rise from out those walls,

There for good the curtain falls:

There the yawning doorway gapes—

All will enter, none escapes.

In *Ode LV* (“From Anacreon, a Fragment” 1835) Pushkin says that he at once knows happy lovers by their eyes:

Узнают коней ретивых  
По их выжженным таврам;  
Узнают парфян кичливых  
По высоким клобукам;  
Я любовников счастливых  
Узнаю по их глазам:  
В них сияет пламень томный —  
Наслаждений знак нескромный.

In Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenin* (1875-77) Stiva Oblonski (Anna’s brother) quotes (incorrectly) the first two lines of Pushkin’s poem:

‘ “Fiery steeds by” something “brands I can always recognize; Youths in love . . .” ’ declaimed Oblonski, just as he had done to Lyovin. (Part One, Chapter 17)

Iris Black (Vadim’s first wife) and lieutenant Starov (Iris’ lover and murderer) take riding lessons together. In his old age Vadim (whose surname seems to be Yablonski) wonders if his family name (that he forgot after a stroke) is Blonsky:

Yes, I definitely felt my family name began with an N and bore an odious resemblance to the surname or

pseudonym of a presumably notorious (Notorov? No) Bulgarian, or Babylonian, or, maybe, Betelgeusian writer with whom scatterbrained *émigrés* from some other galaxy constantly confused me; but whether it was something on the lines of Nebesnyy or Nabedrin or Nablidze (Nablidze? Funny) I simply could not tell. I preferred not to overtax my willpower (go away, Naborcroft) and so gave up trying--or perhaps it began with a *B* and the *n* just clung to it like some desperate parasite? (Bonidze? Blonsky?--No, that

belonged to the BINT business.) (7.3)

In Leningrad Dora (a friend of Vadim’s daughter Bel) calls Vadim “Gospodin Long” (5.2). Bunin is the author of *Gospodin iz San-Frantsisko* (“The Gentleman from San-Francisco,” 1915).

In his poem *Proserpina* (1824) Pushkin twice mentions *svody Tartara* (the vaults of Hades):

Плещут волны Флегетона,  
Своды Тартара дрожат,  
Кони бледного Плутона  
Быстро к нимфам Пелиона  
Из аида бога мчат…

In a letter of Sept. 10, 1824, to Pushkin Delvig says that “Proserpina” is not verses but pure music and that *moroz* (the frost) will spare such flowers:

Милый Пушкин, письмо твоё и «Прозерпину» я получил и тоже в день получения благодарю тебя за них. «Прозерпина» не стихи, а музыка: это пенье райской птички, которое слушая, не увидишь, как пройдёт тысяча лет. Эти двери давно мне знакомы. Сквозь них, ещё в Лицее, меня часто выталкивали из Элизея. Какая искусная щеголиха у тебя истина. Подобных цветов мороз не тронет!

The rhyme *rozy* (roses) – *morozy* (frosts) was used by Pushkin in Chapter IV (XLII: 1-3) of *Eugene Onegin* and by G. Ivanov in his poem *Mayatnika mernoe kachan’ye* (“A pendulum’s measured swing…”):

Маятника мерное качанье,  
Полночь, одиночество, молчанье.

Старые счета перебираю.  
Умереть? Да вот не умираю.

Тихо перелистываю "Розы" -  
"Кабы на цветы да не морозы"!

In the last line the author admits that frosts have not spared his “Roses” (a collection of poetry, 1931).

In his poem *Eto zvon bubentsov izdalyoka…* (“This is a distant sound of bells…”) G. Ivanov mentions *chyornaya muzyka Bloka* (Block’s black music) that falls on the shining snow:

Это звон бубенцов издалёка,

Это тройки широкий разбег,

Это чёрная музыка Блока

На сияющий падает снег.

...За пределами жизни и мира,

В пропастях ледяного эфира

Всё равно не расстанусь с тобой!

И Россия, как белая лира,

Над засыпанной снегом судьбой.

Block’s black music brings to mind Iris Black to whom Vadim dedicated his poem *Vlyublyonnost’* (“Being in Love”):

On the night of July 20, however, I composed a more oblique, more metaphysical little poem which I decided to show her at breakfast in a literal translation that took me longer to write than the original. The title, under which it appeared in an émigré daily in Paris (October 8, 1922, after several reminders on my part and one please-return request) was, and is, in the various anthologies and collections that were to reprint it in the course of the next fifty years, *Vlyublyonnost'*, which puts in a golden nutshell what English needs three words to express.

*My zabyvаem chto vlyublyonnost'*

*Ne prosto povorot litsа,*

*A pod kupаvami bezdonnost',*

*Nochnаya pаnika plovtsа.*

*Pokuda snitsya, snis', vlyublyonnost',*

*No probuzhdиniem ne much',*

*I luchshe nedogovoryonnost'*

*Chem eta shchel' i etot luch.*

*Napominаyu chto vlyublyonnost'*

*Ne yаv', chto metiny ne te,*

*Chto mozhet-byt' potustoronnost'*

*Priotvorilas' v temnote*.

"Lovely," said Iris. "Sounds like an incantation. What does it mean?"

"I have it here on the back. It goes like this. We forget--or rather tend to forget--that being in love (*vlyublyonnost*') does not depend on the facial angle of the loved one, but is a bottomless spot under the nenuphars, a swimmer's panic in the night (here the iambic tetrameter happens to be rendered--last line of the first stanza, *nochnаya pаnika plovtsа*). Next stanza: While the dreaming is good--in the sense of ‘while the going is good'--do keep appearing to us in our dreams, *vlyublyonnost'*, but do not torment us by waking us up or telling too much: reticence is better than that chink and that moonbeam. Now comes the last stanza of this philosophical love poem."

"This what?"

"Philosophical love poem. *Napominаyu, I remind you, that vlyublyonnost'* is not wide-awake reality, that the markings are not the same (a moon-striped ceiling, *polosatyy ot luny potolok*, is, for instance, not the same kind of reality as a ceiling by day), and that, maybe, the hereafter stands slightly ajar in the dark. Voilà." (1.5)

*Vlyublyonnost’* (1905) is also a poem by Blok:

Королевна жила на высокой горе,

И над башней дымились прозрачные сны облаков.

Тёмный рыцарь в тяжелой кольчуге шептал о любви на заре,

В те часы, когда Рейн выступал из своих берегов.

Над зелеными рвами текла, розовея, весна.

Непомерность ждала в синевах отдалённой черты.

И влюблённость звала - не дала отойти от окна,

Не смотреть в роковые черты, оторваться от светлой мечты.

"Подними эту розу", - шепнула - и ветер донёс

Тишину улетающих лат, бездыханный ответ.

"В синем утреннем небе найдешь Купину расцветающих роз", -

Он шепнул, и сверкнул, и взлетел, и она полетела вослед.

И за облаком плыло и пело мерцание тьмы,

И влюблённость в погоне забыла, забыла свой щит.

И она, окрылясь, полетела из отчей тюрьмы -

На воздушном пути королевна полёт свой стремит.

Уж в стремнинах туман, и рога созывают стада,

И заветная мгла протянула плащи и скрестила мечи,

И вечернюю грусть тишиной отражает вода,

И над лесом погасли лучи.

Не смолкает вдали властелинов борьба,

Распри дедов над ширью земель.

Но различна Судьба: здесь - мечтанье раба,

Там - воздушной Влюбленности хмель.

И в воздушный покров улетела на зов

Навсегда... О, Влюблённость! Ты строже Судьбы!

Повелительней древних законов отцов!

Слаще звука военной трубы!

In her memoirs “Alexander Blok. A Biographical Sketch” (1930) Maria Beketov (the poet’s aunt) mentions Basilevski, a composer who set to music Blok’s drama *Roza i krest* (“The Rose and the Cross,” 1912):

В конце мая Александр Александрович узнал, что "Роза и Крест" пропущена цензурой без всяких ограничений. Около этого времени он сообщал матери, что написал краткие сведения о "Розе и Кресте" для композитора Базилевского, который написал музыку на его драму и собирался исполнять её в Москве. Сведения нужны были для концертной программы. Тут же Александр Александрович прибавляет: "Базилевский пишет, что Свободный театр думает о постановке "Розы и Креста". (Chapter 11)

The characters of LATH include the poets Morozov and Basilevski:

Ivan Shipogradov, eminent novelist and recent Nobel Prize winner, would also be present, radiating talent and charm, and--after a few jiggers of vodka--delighting his intimates with the kind of Russian bawdy tale that depends for its artistry on the rustic gusto and fond respect with which it treats our most private organs. A far less engaging figure was I. A. Shipogradov's old rival, a fragile little man in a sloppy suit, Vasiliy Sokolovski (oddly nicknamed "Jeremy" by I.A.), who since the dawn of the century had been devoting volume after volume to the mystical and social history of a Ukrainian clan that had started as a humble family of three in the sixteenth century but by volume six (1920) had become a whole village, replete with folklore and myth. It was good to see old Morozov's rough-hewn clever face with its shock of dingy hair and bright frosty eyes; and for a special reason I closely observed podgy dour Basilevski--not because he had just had or was about to have a row with his young mistress, a feline beauty who wrote doggerel verse and vulgarly flirted with me, but because I hoped he had already seen the fun I had made of him in the last issue of a literary review in which we both collaborated. Although his English was inadequate for the interpretation of, say, Keats (whom he defined as "a pre-Wildean aesthete in the beginning of the Industrial Era") Basilevski was fond of attempting just that. In discussing recently the "not altogether

displeasing preciosity" of my own stuff, he had imprudently quoted a popular line from Keats, rendering it as:

*Vsegda nas raduet krasivaya veshchitsa*

which in retranslation gives:

     "A pretty bauble always gladdens us."

Our conversation, however, turned out to be much too brief to disclose whether or not he had appreciated my amusing lesson. He asked me what I thought of the new book he was telling Morozov (a monolinguist) about--namely Maurois' "impressive work on Byron," and upon my answering that I had found it to be impressive trash, my austere critic muttered, "I don't think you have read it," and went on educating the serene old poet. (2.1)

Basilevski is a satire on G. Ivanov, Ivan Shipogradov and Vasiliy Sokolovski are recognizable portraits of Ivan Bunin (the Nobel Prize winner of 1933) and Dmitri Merezhkovski. In his poem *Ceylon* (1916) Bunin compares Ceylon to Eden and mentions *shipy akatsiy* (the thorns of acacias):

Всё дико и прекрасно, как в Эдеме:

Торчат шипы акаций, защищая

Узорную нежнейшую листву,

Цветами рдеют кактусы, сереют

Стволы в густых лианах... Как огонь

Пылают чаши лилии ползучей,

Тьмы мотыльков трепещут... На поляне

Лежит громада бурая: удав...

Вот медленно клубится, уползает...

At the end of LATH Vadim mentions “Ceylon and Jamaica, the sibling islands:”

"That's all very well," I said, as I groped for the levers of my wheelchair, and you helped me to roll back to my room. "And I'm grateful, I'm touched, I'm cured! Your explanation, however, is merely an exquisite quibble--and you know it; but never mind, the notion of trying to twirl time is a *trouvaille*; it resembles (kissing the hand resting on my sleeve) the neat formula a physicist finds to keep people happy until (yawning, crawling back into bed) until the next chap snatches the chalk. I had been promised some rum with my tea--Ceylon and Jamaica, the sibling islands (mumbling comfortably, dropping off, mumble dying away)--" (7.4)

According to Vadim, he slipped out of paralysis *vdol' naklonnogo luchа* (along a slanting ray):

*Tak, vdol' naklonnogo luchа*

*Ya vyshel iz paralichа.*

Along a slanting ray, like this,

I slipped out of paralysis.

--if "paralysis" is not too strong a word for the condition that mimicked it (with some obscure help from the patient): a rather quaint but not too serious psychological disorder--or at least so it seemed in lighthearted retrospect. (7.3)

In his poem *Vlyublyonnost’* Vadim says that *nedogovoryonnost'* (reticence) is better than *eta shchel’ i etot luch* (that chink and that moonbeam). Vadim (who begins the last part of LATH quoting the old rule “the I of the book cannot die in the book”) hastens to finish the book before the thread of his life is cut by the Fate.

The surname Shipogradov also brings to mind *gradina na podokonnike* (a hailstone on a window sill) mentioned by VN at the end of his obituary essay *On Hodasevich* (1939):

Что ж, ещё немного сместилась жизнь, ещё одна привычка нарушена -- своя привычка чужого бытия. Утешения нет, если поощрять чувство утраты личным воспоминанием о кратком, хрупком, тающем, как градина на подоконнике, человеческом образе.

Well, so it goes, yet another plane of life has been slightly displaced, yet another habit — the habit (one's own) of (another person's) existence — has been broken. There is no consolation, if one starts to encourage the sense of loss by one's private recollections of a brief, brittle, human image that melts like a hailstone on a window sill.

The characters of LATH include the poet Audace whose name seems to hint at Hodasevich.

Alexey Sklyarenko