Describing Victor Vitry’s film version of his novel *Letters from Terra*, Van Veen (the narrator and main character in *Ada*) mentions horses who wore hats because of the hot weather:

Vitry dated Theresa’s visit to Antiterra as taking place in 1940, but 1940 by the Terranean calendar, and about 1890 by ours. The conceit allowed certain pleasing dips into the modes and manners of our past (did you remember that horses wore hats — yes, *hats —* when heat waves swept Manhattan?) and gave the impression — which physics-fiction literature had much exploited — of the capsulist traveling backward in terms of time. Philosophers asked nasty questions, but were ignored by the wishing-to-be-gulled moviegoers. (5.5)

Horses wearing hats bring to mind *Dekol’tirovannaya loshad’* (“The Horse in a Décolleté Dress,” 1927), Hodasevich’s essay on Mayakovski. In his essay Hodasevich mentions *vitrina nemetskogo magazina* (the shop window of a German shop in Moscow):

"Маяковский -- поэт рабочего класса". Вздор. Был и остался поэтом подонков, бездельников, босяков просто и "босяков духовных". Был таким перед войной, когда восхищал и "пужал" подонки интеллигенции и буржуазии, выкрикивая брань и похабщину с эстрады Политехнического музея. И когда, в начале войны, сочинял подписи к немцеедским лубкам, вроде знаменитого:

С криком: "Дейчланд юбер аллес!" -

Немцы с поля убирались.

И когда, бия себя в грудь, патриотически ораторствовал у памятника Скобелеву, перед генерал-губернаторским домом, там, где теперь памятник Октябрю и московский совдеп! И когда читал кровожадные стихи:

О панталоны венских кокоток

Вытрем наши штыки! --

эту позорную нечаянную пародию на Лермонтова:

Не смеют, что ли, командиры

Чужие изорвать мундиры

О русские штыки?

И певцом погромщиков был он, когда водил орду хулиганов героическим приступом брать немецкие магазины. И остался им, когда, после Октября, писал знаменитый марш: "Левой, левой!" (музыка А. Лурье).

Пафос погрома и мордобоя -- вот истинный пафос Маяковского. А на что обрушивается погром, ему было и есть всё равно: венская ли кокотка, витрина ли немецкого магазина в Москве, схваченный ли за горло буржуй -- только бы тот, кого надо громить.

According to Hodasevich, Mayakovski’s blood-thirsty verses “Let’s wipe our bayonets on the knickers of Viennese cocottes” is a shameful parody of the lines in Lermontov’s *Borodino*: “Daren't the commanders rip foreign uniforms on Russian bayonets?" In *Borodino* Lermontov mentions *koni, lyudi* (horses, men):

Земля тряслась - как наши груди,

Смешались в кучу кони, люди

As did our chests – earth's hollows trembled;   
The steeds, the men all disassembled.

In the old Russian alphabet the letter L (Lermontov’s initial) was called *lyudi*. In his poem *Yubileynoe* (“The Anniversary Poem,” 1924) Mayakovski points out that his name begins with an M, says that after his death he and Pushkin will stand almost beside each other and mentions Nadson and Nekrasov (the poets who in the alphabet are between Mayakovski and Pushkin):

После смерти

            нам

               стоять почти что рядом:

вы на Пе,

        а я

           на эМ.

Кто меж нами?

             с кем велите знаться?!

Чересчур

        страна моя

                  поэтами нища.

Между нами

          - вот беда -

                      позатесался Надсон

Мы попросим,

           чтоб его

                   куда-нибудь

                              на Ща!

А Некрасов

          Коля,

              сын покойного Алёши,-

он и в карты,

             он и в стих,

                         и так

                              неплох на вид.

Знаете его?

           вот он

                 мужик хороший.

Этот

    нам компания -

                  пускай стоит.

Nekrasov is the author of *Korobeyniki* (“The Peddlers,” 1861). The characters in Ilf and Petrov’s novel *Dvenadtsat’ stulyev* (“The Twelve Chairs,” 1928) include Varfolomey Korobeynikov, the compiler of the Mirror of Life Index. *Alfavit – zerkalo zhizni* (the Mirror of Life Index) brings to mind Flavita, as the Russian Scrabble is called on Antiterra (aka Demonia, Earth’s twin planet on which *Ada* is set). Describing Flavita, Van mentions ‘Madhatters:’

That was why she [Ada] admitted ‘Flavita.’ The name came from *alfavit,* an old Russian game of chance and skill, based on the scrambling and unscrambling of alphabetic letters. It was fashionable throughout Estoty and Canady around 1790, was revived by the ‘Madhatters’ (as the inhabitants of New Amsterdam were once called) in the beginning of the nineteenth century, made a great comeback, after a brief slump, around 1860, and now a century later seems to be again in vogue, so I am told, under the name of ‘Scrabble,’ invented by some genius quite independently from its original form or forms. (1.36)

*Alfavit* is Russian for “alphabet.” *Zerkalo* (mirror) brings to mind Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1872). The characters in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) include the Hatter who is sometimes called “the Mad Hatter.” At a Mad Tea-Party the Dormouse (a character in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*) tells a story about three little sisters who lived at the bottom of a well and drew everything that begins with an M:

'They were learning to draw,' the Dormouse went on, yawning and rubbing its eyes, for it was getting very sleepy; 'and they drew all manner of things — everything that begins with an M — '

'Why with an M?' said Alice.

'Why not?' said the March Hare.

Alice was silent.

The Dormouse had closed its eyes by this time, and was going off into a doze; but, on being pinched by the Hatter, it woke up again with a little shriek, and went on: ' — that begins with an M, such as mouse-traps, and the moon, and memory, and muchness — you know you say things are "much of a muchness" — did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?

In VN’s Russian version of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *Anya v strane chudes* (1923), the sisters drew not memory (in Russian, *pamyat’*), but *mysli* (thoughts):

- Они учились черпать и чертить, - продолжал он, зевая и протирая глаза (ему начинало хотеться спать), - черпали и чертили всякие вещи, всё, что начинается с буквы М.

- Отчего именно с М.? - спросила Аня.

- Отчего бы нет? - сказал Мартовский Заяц.

Меж тем Соня закрыл глаза и незаметно задремал; когда же Шляпник его хорошенько ущипнул, он проснулся с тоненьким визгом и скороговоркой продолжал:

- ...с буквы М., как, например, мышеловки, месяц, и мысли, и маловатости... видели ли вы когда-нибудь чертёж маловатости?

In a letter of Oct. 4-6, 1888, to Suvorin Chekhov says that he is cross with *Russkaya mysl’* (“Russian Thought,” a literary magazine, 1880-1918) and with the entire Moscow literature:

Что же касается «Русской мысли», то там сидят не литераторы, а копчёные сиги, которые столько же понимают в литературе, как свинья в апельсинах. К тому же библиографический отдел ведёт там дама. Если дикая утка, которая летит в поднебесье, может презирать свойскую, которая копается в навозе и в лужах и думает, что это хорошо, то так должны презирать художники и поэты мудрость копчёных сигов... Сердит я на «Русскую мысль» и на всю московскую литературу!

According to Chekhov, the editors of *Russkaya mysl’* are *kopchyonye sigi* (the smoked whitefish) who have as much taste for literature as a pig has for oranges. *Sigi* is plural of *sig* (whitefish). Sig Leymanski is the main character in Van’s novel *Letters from Terra*:

Poor Van! In his struggle to keep the writer of the letters from Terra strictly separate from the image of Ada, he gilt and carmined Theresa until she became a paragon of banality. This Theresa maddened with her messages a scientist on our easily maddened planet; his anagram-looking name, Sig Leymanksi, had been partly derived by Van from that of Aqua’s last doctor. When Leymanski’s obsession turned into love, and one’s sympathy got focused on his enchanting, melancholy, betrayed wife (née Antilia Glems), our author found himself confronted with the distressful task of now stamping out in Antilia, a born brunette, all traces of Ada, thus reducing yet another character to a dummy with bleached hair.

After beaming to Sig a dozen communications from her planet, Theresa flies over to him, and he, in his laboratory, has to place her on a slide under a powerful microscope in order to make out the tiny, though otherwise perfect, shape of his minikin sweetheart, a graceful microorganism extending transparent appendages toward his huge humid eye. Alas, the testibulus (test tube — never to be confused with *testiculus,* orchid), with Theresa swimming inside like a micromermaid, is ‘accidentally’ thrown away by Professor Leyman’s (he had trimmed his name by that time) assistant, Flora, initially an ivory-pale, dark-haired funest beauty, whom the author transformed just in time into a third bromidic dummy with a dun bun.

(Antilia later regained her husband, and Flora was weeded out. Ada’s addendum.) (2.2)

The characters in Dostoevski’s novel *Bednye lyudi* (“Poor Folk,” 1846), written in an epistolary form, include Theresa, an old servant woman who brings Makar Devushkin’s letters to Varenka Dobrosyolov and Varenka’s letters to Makar. The Antiterran L disaster in the *beau milieu* of the 19th century seems to correspond to the mock execution of Dostoevski and the Petrashevskians on Jan. 3, 1850, in our world. Dostoevski is the author of *Brat’ya Karamazovy* (“Brothers Karamazov,” 1880). In Ilf and Petrov’s novel *Zolotoy telyonok* (“The Golden Calf,” 1931) Koreyko (a secret Soviet millionaire) receives a telegram from brothers Karamazov: *Gruzite apel’siny bochkakh* (“Load oranges barrels”).

*Apel’siny* (oranges) in Chekhov’s letter to Suvorin and in a telegram received by Koreyko bring to mind Ronald Oranger (old Van’s secretary). The name Ronald Oranger seems to hint at Donald Duck, a friend of Mickey Mouse (cf. Lucky Louse magazines mentioned by Van) who has a yellow-orange bill, legs, and feet. In his letter to Suvorin Chekhov says that artists and poets should despise the wisdom of smoked whitefish, just as a wild duck that flies high in the sky despises a domesticated one that rummages in manure and thinks that it is good. “The Wild Duck” (1884) is a play by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. According to Theresa (in Vitry’s film version of Van’s novel), on Terra Norway is an outstanding country:

In 1905, Norway with a mighty heave and a long dorsal ripple unfastened herself from Sweden, her unwieldy co-giantess, while in a similar act of separation the French parliament, with parenthetical outbursts of *vive émotion,* voted a divorce between State and Church. Then, in 1911, Norwegian troops led by Amundsen reached the South Pole and simultaneously the Italians stormed into Turkey. In 1914 Germany invaded Belgium and the Americans tore up Panama. In 1918 they and the French defeated Germany while she was busily defeating Russia (who had defeated her own Tartars some time earlier). In Norway there was Siegrid Mitchel, in America Margaret Undset, and in France, Sidonie Colette. In 1926 Abdel-Krim surrendered, after yet another photogenic war, and the Golden Horde again subjugated Rus. In 1933, Athaulf Hindler (also known as Mittler — from ‘to mittle,’ mutilate) came to power in Germany, and a conflict on an even more spectacular scale than the 1914–1918 war was under way, when Vitry ran out of old documentaries and Theresa, played by his wife, left Terra in a cosmic capsule after having covered the Olympic Games held in Berlin (the Norwegians took most of the prizes, but the Americans won the fencing event, an outstanding achievement, and beat the Germans in the final football match by three goals to one). (2.2)

A Norwegian novelist, Siegrid Undset was a favorite writer of Marina Tsvetaev (“the wife of a double agent and poet of genius,” as VN calls her in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, 1951). In Chapter Fourteen of SM VN describes his years in Berlin (1922-37) and in Paris (1937-40) and, among other writers whom he met in exile, mentions Hodasevich:

Vladislav Hodasevich used to complain, in the twenties and thirties, that young émigré poets had borrowed their art form from him while following the leading cliques in modish *angoisse* and soul-reshaping. I developed a great liking for this bitter man, wrought of irony and metallic-like genius, whose poetry was as complex a marvel as that of Tyutchev or Blok. He was, physically, of a sickly aspect, with contemptuous nostrils and beetling brows, and when I conjure him up in my mind he never rises from the hard chair on which he sits, his thin legs crossed, his eyes glittering with malevolence and wit, his long fingers screwing into a holder the half of a *Caporal Vert* cigarette. There are few things in modern world poetry comparable to the poems of his *Heavy Lyre*, but unfortunately for his fame the perfect frankness he indulged in when voicing his dislikes made him some terrible enemies among the most powerful critical coteries. Not all the mystagogues were Dostoevskian Alyoshas; there were also a few Smerdyakovs in the group, and Hodasevich’s poetry was played down with the thoroughness of a revengeful racket. (2)

In his poem *Silentium!* (1830) Tyutchev says: *mysl’ izrechyonnaya est’ lozh’* (a thought once uttered is untrue). In *Ada* Silentium is Greg Erminin’s motorcycle. At the family dinner Van tells Demon that he vainly tried to find a Silentium with a side car:

The roast hazel-hen (or rather its New World representative, locally called ‘mountain grouse’) was accompanied by preserved lingonberries (locally called ‘mountain cranberries’). An especially succulent morsel of one of those brown little fowls yielded a globule of birdshot between Demon’s red tongue and strong canine: *‘La fève de Diane,’* he remarked, placing it carefully on the edge of his plate. ‘How is the car situation, Van?’

‘Vague. I ordered a Roseley like yours but it won’t be delivered before Christmas. I tried to find a Silentium with a side car and could not, because of the war, though what connection exists between wars and motorcycles is a mystery. But we manage, Ada and I, we manage, we ride, we bike, we even jikker.’ (1.38)

Alexander Blok is the author of *Neznakomka* (“Incognita,” 1906), a poem directly alluded to in *Ada* (3.3), *Dvenadtsat’* (“The Twelve,” 1918) and *Nochnaya Fialka* (“The Night Violet,” 1906), a poem subtitled “a Dream.” *Nox* being Latin for “night,” Blok’s “Night Violet” brings to mind Violet Knox, Van’s typist who marries Ronald Oranger:

Violet Knox [now Mrs Ronald Oranger. Ed.], born in 1940, came to live with us in 1957. She was (and still is — ten years later) an enchanting English blonde with doll eyes, a velvet carnation and a tweed-cupped little rump [.....]; but such designs, alas, could no longer flesh my fancy. She has been responsible for typing out this memoir — the solace of what are, no doubt, my last ten years of existence. A good daughter, an even better sister, and half-sister, she had supported for ten years her mother’s children from two marriages, besides laying aside [something]. I paid her [generously] per month, well realizing the need to ensure unembarrassed silence on the part of a puzzled and dutiful maiden. Ada called her *‘Fialochka’* and allowed herself the luxury of admiring ‘little Violet’ ‘s cameo neck, pink nostrils, and fair pony-tail. Sometimes, at dinner, lingering over the liqueurs, my Ada would consider my typist (a great lover of Koo-Ahn-Trow) with a dreamy gaze, and then, quick-quick, peck at her flushed cheek. The situation might have been considerably more complicated had it arisen twenty years earlier. (5.4).

Alyosha Karamazov and Smerdyakov (mentioned by VN in *Speak, Memory*) are characters in “Brothers Karamazov.” The Golden Horde that again subjugated Rus (on Terra as imagined by Vitry) brings to mind the lines in VN’s poem *O pravitelyakh* (“On Rulers,” 1944):

Умирает со скуки историк:

за Мамаем всё тот же Мамай.

В самом деле, нельзя же нам с горя

поступить, как чиновный Китай,

кучу лишних веков присчитавший

к истории скромной своей,

от этого, впрочем, не ставшей

ни лучше, ни веселей.

The historian dies of sheer boredom:  
On the heels of Mamay comes another Mamay.

Does our plight really force us to do  
what did bureaucratic Cathay  
that with heaps of superfluous centuries  
augmented her limited history  
(which, however, hardly became  
either better or merrier)?

VN’s footnotes: Line 29/*Mamay*. A particularly evil Tartar prince of the fourteenth century.

Line 35. One recalls Stalin’s hilarious pronouncement: “Life has grown better, life has grown merrier!”

At the end of “On Rulers” VN mentions his late namesake:

Покойный мой тёзка,

писавший стихи и в полоску,

и в клетку, на самом восходе

всесоюзно-мещанского класса,

кабы дожил до полдня,

нынче бы рифмы натягивал

на "монументален",

на "переперчил"

и так далее.

If my late namesake,  
who used to write verse, in rank  
and in file, at the very dawn  
of the Soviet Small-Bourgeois order,  
had lived till its noon  
he would be now finding taut rhymes  
such as “praline”  
or “air chill,”  
and others of the same kind.

VN’s footnotes: Line 52/*my late namesake*. An allusion to the Christian name and patronymic of Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovski (1893–1930), minor Soviet poet, endowed with a certain brilliance and bite, but fatally corrupted by the regime he faithfully served.

Lines 58–59/“praline” … “air chill.” In the original, *monumentalen*, meaning “[he is] monumental” rhymes pretty closely with Stalin; and *pereperchil*, meaning “[he] put in too much pepper,” offers an ingenuous correspondence with the name of the British politician in a slovenly Russian pronunciation (“chair-chill”).

Describing the family dinner in Ardis the Second, Van mentions Richard Leonard Churchill’s novel about a certain Crimean Khan, “A Great Good Man:”

Van remembered that his tutor’s great friend, the learned but prudish Semyon Afanasievich Vengerov, then a young associate professor but already a celebrated Pushkinist (1855-1954), used to say that the only vulgar passage in his author’s work was the cannibal joy of young gourmets tearing ‘plump and live’ oysters out of their ‘cloisters’ in an unfinished canto of *Eugene Onegin.* But then ‘everyone has his own taste,’ as the British writer Richard Leonard Churchill mistranslates a trite French phrase *(chacun à son gout)* twice in the course of his novel about a certain Crimean Khan once popular with reporters and politicians, ‘A Great Good Man’ — according, of course, to the cattish and prejudiced Guillaume Monparnasse about whose new celebrity Ada, while dipping the reversed corolla of one hand in a bowl, was now telling Demon, who was performing the same rite in the same graceful fashion. (1.38)

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): Great good man: a phrase that Winston Churchill, the British politician, enthusiastically applied to Stalin.

Churchill definitely *peresolil* (“put in too much salt,” as we say of a person who grossly exaggerated something). *Peresolil* (“Overdoing it,” 1885) is a story by Chekhov. As to *pereperchil* (put in too much pepper), it brings to mind “Pig and Pepper,” a chapter in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.* “A Clever Piggy” is an article in the Russian-language newspaper *Golos (Logos)* that the male nurse Dorofey reads during Van’s visit to Rack (who is dying in Ward Five of the Kalugano hospital):

Van drew in his useless weapon. Controlling himself, he thumped it against the footboard of his wheelchair. Dorofey glanced up from his paper,then went back to the article that engrossed him — 'A Clever Piggy (from the memoirs of an animal trainer),' or else 'The Crimean War: Tartar Guerillas Help Chinese Troops.' A diminutive nurse simultaneously stepped out from behind the farther screen and disappeared again. (1.42)

Actually, *golos* means “voice.” A concierge at Van’s hotel compares Dorothy Vinelander’s voice to a brass trumpet:

Lucien, something of a wit, soon learned to recognize Dorothy’s contralto: *‘La voix cuivrée a téléphoné,’ ‘La Trompette n’était pas contente ce matin,’* et cetera. (3.8)

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): *la voix* etc.: the brassy voice telephoned… the trumpet did not sound pleased this morning.

In “The Twelve Chairs” Ilf and Petrov compare the voice of Vorobyaninov’s mother-in-law, Mme Petukhov, to that of Richard the Lionheart:

Голос у неё был такой силы и густоты, что ему позавидовал бы Ричард Львиное Сердце, от крика которого, как известно, приседали кони.

Her voice was so strong and fruity that it might well have been envied by Richard the Lionheart, at whose shout, as is well known, horses used to kneel. (chapter I “Bezenchuk and The Nymphs”)

Richard Leonard Churchill (the author of a novel about a certain Crimean Khan) blends Richard the Lionheart with Winston Churchill.

Dorothy Vinelander reads to her ill brother (Ada’s husband) old issues of the *Golos Feniksa*:

Much to Van’s amusement (the tasteless display of which his mistress neither condoned nor condemned), Andrey was laid up with a cold for most of the week. Dorothy, a born nurser, considerably surpassed Ada (who, never being ill herself, could not stand the sight of an ailing stranger) in readiness of sickbed attendance, such as reading to the sweating and suffocating patient old issues of the *Golos Feniksa;* but on Friday the hotel doctor bundled him off to the nearby American Hospital, where even his sister was not allowed to Visit him ‘because of the constant necessity of routine tests’ — or rather because the poor fellow wished to confront disaster in manly solitude.

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): Russ., *The Phoenix Voice*, Russian language newspaper in Arizona.

Phoenix in Russian spelling, *Feniks* brings to mind VN’s Russian nom de plume, Sirin (Phoenix and Sirin are fairy tale birds; in her memoirs *Italics are Mine* Nina Berberova compares VN to Phoenix). In Chapter Fourteen of *Speak, Memory* VN says that the author that interested him most was Sirin:

But the author that interested me most was naturally Sirin. He belonged to my generation. Among the young writers produced in exile he was the loneliest and most arrogant one. Beginning with the appearance of his first novel in 1925 and throughout the next fifteen years, until he vanished as strangely as he had come, his work kept provoking an acute and rather morbid interest on the part of critics. Just as Marxist publicists of the eighties in old Russia would have denounced his lack of concern with the economic structure of society, so the mystagogues of émigré letters deplored his lack of religious insight and of moral preoccupation. Everything about him was bound to offend Russian conventions and especially that Russian sense of decorum which, for example, an American offends so dangerously today, when in the presence of Soviet military men of distinction he happens to lounge with both hands in his trouser pockets. Conversely, Sirin’s admirers made much, perhaps too much, of his unusual style, brilliant precision, functional imagery and that sort of thing. Russian readers who had been raised on the sturdy straightforwardness of Russian realism and had called the bluff of decadent cheats, were impressed by the mirrorlike angles of his clear but weirdly misleading sentences and by the fact that the real life of his books flowed in his figures of speech, which one critic has compared to “windows giving upon a contiguous world … a rolling corollary, the shadow of a train of thought.” Across the dark sky of exile, Sirin passed, to use a simile of a more conservative nature, like a meteor, and disappeared, leaving nothing much else behind him than a vague sense of uneasiness. (2)

In his review of Van’s *Letters from Terra* the poet Max Mispel discerned the influence of Ben Sirine, an obscene ancient Arab:

The only other compliment was paid to poor Voltemand in a little Manhattan magazine *(The Village Eyebrow)* by the poet Max Mispel (another botanical name — ‘medlar’ in English), member of the German Department at Goluba University. Herr Mispel, who liked to air his authors, discerned in *Letters from Terra* the influence of Osberg (Spanish writer of pretentious fairy tales and mystico-allegoric anecdotes, highly esteemed by short-shift thesialists) as well as that of an obscene ancient Arab, expounder of anagrammatic dreams, Ben Sirine, thus transliterated by Captain de Roux, according to Burton in his adaptation of Nefzawi’s treatise on the best method of mating with obese or hunchbacked females (*The Perfumed Garden,* Panther edition, p. 187, a copy given to ninety-three-year-old Baron Van Veen by his ribald physician Professor Lagosse). His critique ended as follows: ‘If Mr Voltemand (or Voltimand or Mandalatov) is a psychiatrist, as I think he might be, then I pity his patients, while admiring his talent.’ (2.2)

The names Max Mispel and Mandalatov begin with an M. In the alphabet M precedes N, Nabokov’s initial.

Alexey Sklyarenko