First of all, in my previous post (“999 lines in *Pale Fire*; 1001 notes in *Eugene Onegin*”) I forgot to say that there are *nine* circles in Dante’s *Inferno*. *Krug* (“The Circle,” 1936) is a story by VN. Its main character, Innokentiy, is a namesake of Innokentiy Annenski, a poet who published *Kniga otrazheniy* (“Book of Reflections,” 1906), a collection of essays, under the penname Nik. T-o (“Mr. Nobody”). Annenski’s posthumous book of poetry *Kiparisovyi larets* (“The Cypress Chest,” 1910) consists of *Trilistniki* (Trefoils), small cycles of three poems each. One of Annenski’s sonnets is entitled *Son i net* (“Dream and No”). The main theme in Annenski’s poetry is death (according to Hodasevich, death was Annenski’s muse). Shade is prevented by death (personified by Gradus) from writing down the two last lines of his poem.

According to Kinbote, in a conversation with him Shade (the poet in VN’s novel *Pale Fire*, 1962) mentioned those joint authors of genius Ilf and Petrov:

Speaking of the Head of the bloated Russian Department, Prof. Pnin, a regular martinet in regard to his underlings (happily, Prof. Botkin, who taught in another department, was not subordinated to that grotesque "perfectionist"): "How odd that Russian intellectuals should lack all sense of humor when they have such marvelous humorists as Gogol, Dostoevski, Chekhov, Zoshchenko, and those joint authors of genius Ilf and Petrov." (note to Line 172)

In their brief introduction (“From the Authors”) to *Zolotoy telyonok* (“The Golden Calf,” 1931) Ilf and Petrov compare themselves to the Goncourt brothers:

— Как мы пишем вдвоём? Да так и пишем вдвоём. Как братья Гонкуры. Эдмонд бегает по редакциям, а Жюль стережет рукопись, чтобы не украли знакомые.

How do we write together? We write together just as the Goncourt brothers did. Edmond is away visiting editorial offices and Jules watches over the manuscript lest it be stolen by friends.

In their introduction Ilf and Petrov mention a dull six-volume novel entitled *A parazity nikogda!* (“And the Parasites are Never!”):

— Сатира не может быть смешной, — сказал строгий товарищ и, подхватив под руку какого-то кустаря баптиста, которого он принял за стопроцентного пролетария, повёл его к себе на квартиру.

Повёл описывать скучными словами, повёл вставлять в шеститомный роман под названием: «А паразиты никогда!»

According to Kinbote, Sybil Shade (the poet’s wife) used to call him “the monstrous parasite of a genius:”

From the very first I tried to behave with the utmost courtesy toward my friend's wife, and from the very first she disliked and distrusted me. I was to learn later that when alluding to me in public she used to call me "an elephantine tick; a king-sized botfly; a macaco worm; the monstrous parasite of a genius." I pardon her--her and everybody. (note to Line 247)

In his poem “On Translating *Eugene Onegin*” (1955) VN says that the parasites on whom Pushkin was so hard are pardoned, if he has Pushkin’s pardon:

What is translation? On a platter  
A poet's pale and glaring head,  
A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter,  
And profanation of the dead.  
The parasites you were so hard on  
Are pardoned if I have your pardon,  
O, Pushkin, for my stratagem:  
I traveled down your secret stem,  
And reached the root, and fed upon it;  
Then, in a language newly learned,  
I grew another stalk and turned  
Your stanza patterned on a sonnet,  
Into my honest roadside prose--  
All thorn, but cousin to your rose.

In his Commentary Kinbote mentions Professor Pardon:

"I would rather say," remarked Mr. Pardon--American History--"that she looks like Judge Goldsworth" ("One of us," interposed Shade inclining his head), "especially when he is real mad at the whole world after a good dinner."

"I heard," hastily began Netochka, "that the Goldsworths are having a wonderful time--"

"What a pity I cannot prove my point," muttered the tenacious German visitor. "If only there was a picture here. Couldn't there be somewhere--"

"Sure," said young Emerald and left his seat.

Professor Pardon now spoke to me: "I was under the impression that you were born in Russia, and that your name was a kind of anagram of Botkin or Botkine?"

Kinbote: "You are confusing me with some refugee from Nova Zembla [sarcastically stressing the "Nova"].

"Didn't you tell me, Charles, that kinbote means regicide in your language?" asked my dear Shade.

"Yes, a king's destroyer," I said (longing to explain that a king who sinks his identity in the mirror of exile is in a sense just that).

Shade [addressing the German visitor]: "Professor Kinbote is the author of a remarkable book on surnames. I believe [to me] there exists an English translation?"

"Oxford, 1956," I replied.

"You do know Russian, though?" said Pardon. "I think I heard you, the other day, talking to--what's his name--oh, my goodness" [laboriously composing his lips].

Shade: "Sir, we all find it difficult to attack that name" [laughing].

Professor Hurley: "Think of the French word for 'tire': punoo."

Shade: "Why, sir, I am afraid you have only punctured the difficulty" [laughing uproariously].

"Flatman," quipped I. "Yes," I went on, turning to Pardon, "I certainly do speak Russian. You see, it was the fashionable language par excellence, much more so than French, among the nobles of Zembla at least, and at its court. Today, of course, all this has changed. It is now the lower classes who are forcibly taught to speak Russian."

"Aren't we, too trying to teach Russian in our schools?" said Pink. (note to Line 894)

In their book *Odnoetazhnaya Amerika* (“Single-Storied America” also known as “Little Golden America,” 1937) Ilf and Petrov described their American road trip. In VN’s novel *Lolita* (1955) Humbert Humbert (the narrator and main character) describes his American road trip with Dolores Haze. Like Ostap Bender (the main character in “The Twelve Chairs,” 1928, and its sequel novel, “The Golden Calf”), Humbert Humbert (who writes his book in prison) often appeals to ladies and gentlemen of the jury.

In his memoirs *Gody izgnaniya* (“Years of Exile”), the chapter dedicated to Sirin (VN’s Russian nom de plume), I. V. Gessen (a close friend and colleague of VN’s father) suggests that every work of genius has really two authors and mentions the Goncourt brothers:

Рискуя показаться навязчивым, я всё же не мог преодолеть желания хоть в щёлочку заглянуть в «почти нечеловеческую тайну», которая всегда трепетно волновала, и, нет-нет, закидывал Сирину вопросы о процессе творчества. Впервые такой вопрос я поставил Стравинскому за завтраком у нас после репетиции концерта в Берлине. Резко и сурово отрицал он «тайну», настаивая, что дело вовсе не во вдохновении. Композиционный замысел — математическая задача, которая требует обычного умственного напряжения для решения её. Напротив, ответы Сирина доставляли радостное удовлетворение, укрепляя всё прочнее слагавшееся о нем суждение как о явлении гения. Я имею в виду определение Шеллинга, которое кажется мне глубоко обдуманным и правильным: гениальный человек тот, который творит с необходимостью природы. А ответ Сирина был приблизительно таков: когда вдруг является идея романа, я сразу держу его в голове во всех частностях и подробностях. Нельзя было не вспомнить, что, как рассказывается в биографиях Моцарта, этот «гуляка праздный» точно так же утверждал, что когда возникла идея симфонии, она сразу звучала в голове полностью, со всеми отдельными деталями. На первый взгляд такое утверждение стоит в противоречии с кропотливой работой над рукописями, отличавшей Пушкина, Толстого, да, кажется, и всех «избранников», которым «Господь передает свое старинное и благостное право творить миры и в созданную плоть вдыхать мгновенно дух неповторимый». Сирин переписывает свои произведения по несколько раз, внося все новые поправки или изменения и лишь после этого, под его диктовку, отстукивается окончательный текст. Мне сдаётся, что здесь отнюдь нельзя усмотреть противоречия, напротив — такая кропотливая работа ещё резче подчеркивает необычайную роль и значение божественного дара: вдохновение мимолетно, проекцию на бумаге приходится осуществлять, когда оно уже улетучилось, и настойчивые помарки и поправки свидетельствуют о тяжёлых усилиях вскарабкаться по ступеням на ту высоту, на которую вознесли волшебно его крылья. Может быть, можно даже сказать, что трудность проекции прямо пропорциональна силе и стремительности взлёта. Поэтому, если теперь профессора поэтики всё чаще повторяют, что творчество есть не столько или не только вдохновение, но и ремесло, — это верно лишь в том смысле, что творчество состоит из двух совершенно различных неслагаемых моментов, и, право же, мало оригинального было бы в присвоении каждому гениальному произведению авторства двух лиц (вроде братьев Гонкур) или уж во всяком случае обозначения его двумя ипостасями одного лица. Разве сальериевская характеристика или «Поэт» Пушкина не дают для этого достаточно объективных оснований?

There are two authors in *Pale Fire*: the poet Shade and his mad commentator Kinbote (who imagines that he is Charles the Beloved, the last self-exiled king of Zembla). The third main character in VN’s novel is the killer Gradus. Russian for “degree,” *gradus* means in Latin “step” and brings to mind *stupeni* (the steps) mentioned by Gessen in the above-quoted excerpt. Besides the Goncourt brothers, Gessen mentions Stravinski (the composer), Pushkin, Tolstoy, Mozart and Salieri. In Pushkin’s little tragedy “Mozart and Salieri” (1830) Mozart uses the phrase *nikto b* (none would). *Nikto b* is Botkin (Shade’s, Kinbote’s and Gradus’ “real” name) in reverse. A friend of Leo Tolstoy, the poet Afanasiy Fet was married to Maria Botkin. One of Fet’s most famous poems is *Alter Ego* (1878).

At least a part of *Pale Fire* Professor Botkin (who went mad and became Shade, Kinbote and Gradus after the tragic death of his daughter Nadezhda) writes in a madhouse. The characters of “The Golden Calf” include Berlaga, the book-keeper who simulates madness insisting that he is Viceroy of India and who gets hospitalized (Chapter 16: “*Jahrbuch für Psychoanalytik*”). The name Berlaga differs only in one letter from *berloga* (den, dig, lair) and brings to mind Berlin, the city where VN’s father was assassinated in March of 1922 and where VN married Vera Slonim in April of 1925. In the madhouse Berlaga asks the doctors to give him back his *slon* (elephant). On the other hand, *slon* means in Russian “bishop” (chessman). In “The Twelve Chairs” Ostap Bender plays simultaneous chess in Vasyuki (Chapter 34: “The Interplanetary Chess Tournament”). The characters of VN’s novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) include Clare Bishop (Sebastian’s girlfriend) and Alexis Pan (the futurist poet whom young Sebastian accompanies in his journey to the East). In his poem *Pen Pan* (“Master of Foams,” 1915) Velimir Khlebnikov (a futurist poet) mentions *ischezayushchiy nechet* (the vanishing odd). Khlebnikov is the author of *Tam, gde zhili sviristeli*… (“There where the waxwings lived…” 1908). At the beginning (and, presumably, at the end) of his poem Shade calls himself “the shadow of the waxwing.”

Berlaga + Sirin = Berlin + sigara (cigar)

Alexey Sklyarenko