A character in VN’s novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), Count Starov (Vadim’s benefactor) is a grave old-fashioned Mason:

On the gray eve of poverty, the author, then a self-exiled youth (I transcribe from an old diary), discovered an unexpected patron in the person of Count Starov, a grave old-fashioned Mason who had graced several great Embassies during a spacious span of international intercourse, and who since 1913 had resided in London. (1.2)

“Grave,” “graced” and “great” seem to hint at Griboedov, the author of *Gore ot uma* (“Woe from Wit,” 1824) who was Russian envoy in Teheran. A Mason since 1816, Griboedov founded a lodge in St. Petersburg and called it *Blago* (“Good”). It brings to mind Annette Blagovo (Vadim’s second wife) and Wladimir Blagidze, *alias* Starov (the murderer of Iris Black, Vadim’s first wife). Describing his and Iris’s visit to Count Starov’s villa, Vadim mentions a resplendent portrait by Serov of the notorious beauty, Mme. de Blagidze:

Sometime in October my benefactor, now in the last stage of majestic senility, came for his annual visit to Mentone, and, without warning, Iris and I dropped in to see him. His villa was incomparably grander than ours. He staggered to his feet to take between his wax-pale palms Iris's hand and stare at her with blue bleary eyes for at least five seconds (a little eternity, socially) in a kind of ritual silence, after which he embraced me with a slow triple cross-kiss in the awful Russian tradition.

"Your bride," he said, using, I knew, the word  in the sense of *fiancée* (and speaking an English which Iris said later was exactly like mine in Ivor's unforgettable version) "is as beautiful as your wife will be!"

I quickly told him--in  Russian--that the maire of Cannice had married us a month ago in a brisk ceremony. Nikifor Nikodimovich gave Iris another stare and finally kissed her hand, which I was glad to see she raised in the proper fashion (coached, no doubt, by Ivor who used to take every opportunity to paw his sister).

"I misunderstood the rumors," he said, "but all the same I am happy to make the acquaintance of such a charming young lady. And where, pray, in what church, will the vow be sanctified?"

"In the temple we shall build, Sir," said Iris--a trifle insolently, I thought.

Count Starov "chewed his lips," as old men are wont to do in Russian novels. Miss Vrode-Vorodin, the elderly cousin who kept house for him, made a timely entrance and led Iris to an adjacent alcove (illuminated by a resplendent portrait by Serov, 1896, of the notorious beauty, Mme. De Blagidze, in Caucasian costume) for a nice cup of tea. The Count wished to talk business with me and had only ten minutes "before his injection."

What was my wife's maiden name?

I told  him. He thought it over and shook his head. What was her mother's name?

I told him that, too. Same reaction. What about the financial aspect of the marriage? (1.10)

In 1828, a few months before his death, Griboedov married in Tiflis (the former name of Tbilisi, the city where Griboedov and his widow were buried) Princess Nina Chavchavadze.

In “Woe from Wit” Famusov calculates the pregnancy of a lady friend. It seems that Count Starov is the real father of Vadim and his three successive wives (Iris Black, Annette Blagovo and Louise Adamson). In VN’s novel *Ada* (1969) Demon Veen (Van’s and Ada’s father) quotes Famosov’s words *po raschyotu po moemu*:

‘By the way, Demon,’ interrupted Marina, ‘where and how can I obtain the kind of old roomy limousine with an old professional chauffeur that Praskovia, for instance, has had for years?’

‘Impossible, my dear, they are all in heaven or on Terra. But what would Ada like, what would my silent love like for her birthday? It’s next Saturday, *po razschyotu po moemu* (by my reckoning), isn’t it? *Une rivière de diamants?’*

*‘Protestuyu!’* cried Marina. ‘Yes, I’m speaking *seriozno.* I object to your giving her *kvaka sesva (quoi que ce soit),* Dan and I will take care of all that.’

‘Besides you’ll forget,’ said Ada laughing, and very deftly showed the tip of her tongue to Van who had been on the lookout for her conditional reaction to ‘diamonds.’ (1.38)

“Silent love” seems to hint at Molchalin, Famusov’s secretary whose name comes from *molchat’* (to be silent). Marina and G. A. Vronsky (the movie man) had dubbed Price (an old retainer at Ardis) ‘Grib’ (Mushroom):

Another Price, a typical, too typical, old retainer whom Marina (and G. A. Vronsky, during their brief romance) had dubbed, for unknown reasons, ‘Grib,’ placed an onyx ashtray at the head of the table for Demon, who liked to smoke between courses — a puff of Russian ancestry. (ibid.)

In “Woe from Wit” Chatski quotes (slightly changing it) the last line of Derzhavin’s poem *Arfa* (“The Harp,” 1798): *i dym otechestva nam sladok i priyaten* (even the smoke of fatherland is to us sweet and pleasant).

In 1869 Demon had a sword duel in Nice with Baron d’Onsky (Marina’s lover). D’Onsky’s name and nickname Skonky (anagram of *konskiy*, “of a horse”) seem to hint at *donskoy zherebets* (a Don stallion) mentioned by Pushkin in *Eugene Onegin* (Two: V: 4):

Сначала все к нему езжали;  
Но так как с заднего крыльца  
Обыкновенно подавали  
Ему донского жеребца,  
Лишь только вдоль большой дороги  
Заслышат их домашни дроги, —  
Поступком оскорбясь таким,  
Все дружбу прекратили с ним.  
«Сосед наш неуч; сумасбродит;  
Он фармазон; он пьёт одно  
Стаканом красное вино;  
Он дамам к ручке не подходит;  
Все *да* да *нет*; не скажет *да-с*  
Иль *нет-с»*. Таков был общий глас.

At first they all would call on him,

but since to the back porch

habitually a Don stallion

for him was brought

as soon as one made out along the highway

the sound of their domestic runabouts —

outraged by such behavior,

they all ceased to be friends with him.

“Our neighbor is a boor; acts like a crackbrain;

he's a Freemason; he

drinks only red wine, by the tumbler;

he won't go up to kiss a lady's hand;

'tis all ‘yes,’ ‘no’ — he'll not say ‘yes, sir,’

or ‘no, sir.’ ” This was the general voice.

Unlike Onegin, Count Starov would go up to kiss a lady’s hand. In his note to the stanza’s line 10 VN points out that “eighteenth-century liberal thought had sought refuge in Masonic organizations. A provincial squire would regard a Freemason as a revolutionary. Masonic lodges were forbidden in Russia in the spring of 1822” (EO Commentary, vol. II, p. 226). In “The Genesis of EO” (EO Commentary, vol. I, p. 61) VN mentions the fact that Pushkin was a Mason since May 4, 1821. Pushkin was a member of the Kishinev lodge ‘Ovid.’ Pushkin’s poem *K Ovidiyu* (“To Ovid,” 1821) begins as follows:

Овидий, я живу близ тихих берегов…

Ovid, I live near the silent shores…

In his poem *Vnov’ ya posetil…* (“I revisited again…” 1835) Pushkin mentions *inye berega, inye volny* (other shores, other waves). In *Drugie berega* (“Other Shores,” 1954), the Russian version of his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1951), VN describes the veranda of their Vyra country house and mentions *prozrachnaya arlekinada* (the transparent harlequinade):

Постояннейшим же источником очарования в часы чтения на вырской веранде были эти цветные стёкла, эта прозрачная арлекинада! Сад и опушка парка, пропущенные сквозь их волшебную призму, исполнялись какой-то тишины и отрешенности. Посмотришь сквозь синий прямоугольник -- и песок становится пеплом, траурные деревья плавали в тропическом небе. Сквозь зелёный параллелепипед зелень ёлок была зеленее лип. В жёлтом ромбе тени были как крепкий чай, а солнце как жидкий. В красном треугольнике тёмно-рубиновая листва густела над  розовым  мелом аллеи. Когда же после всех этих роскошеств обратишься, бывало, к одному из немногих квадратиков обыкновенного пресного стекла, с одиноким комаром или хромой карамарой в углу, это было так, будто берёшь глоток воды, когда не хочется пить, и трезво белела скамья под знакомой хвоей; но из всех оконец, в него-то мои герои-изгнанники мучительно жаждали посмотреть.

But the most constant source of enchantment during those readings came from the harlequin pattern of colored panes inset in a whitewashed framework on either side of the veranda. The garden when viewed through these magic glasses grew strangely still and aloof. If one looked through blue glass, the sand turned to cinders while inky trees swam in a tropical sky. The yellow created an amber world infused with an extra strong brew of sunshine. The red made the foliage drip ruby dark upon a coral-tinted footpath. The green soaked greenery in a greener green. And when, after such richness, one turned to a small square of normal, savorless glass, with its lone mosquito or lame daddy longlegs, it was like taking a draft of water when one is not thirsty, and one saw a matter-of-fact white bench under familiar trees. But of all the windows this is the pane through which in later years parched nostalgia longed to peer. (Chapter Five, 5)

At the end of the chapter VN mentions *lzheklassicheskiy bred* (pseudo-classical rubbish):

Нам с  братом, увы, были даны как раз обратные откровения: то, чего не могли видеть взрослые, наблюдавшие лишь облаченную в непроницаемые доспехи, дневную Mademoiselle, видели мы, всезнающие дети, когда, бывало, тому или другому из нас приснится дурной сон, и разбуженная звериным воплем, она появлялась из соседней комнаты, босая, простоволосая, подняв перед собою свечу, миганьем своим обращавшую в чешую золотые блестки  на  ее кроваво-красном капоте, который не прикрывал её чудовищных колыханий; в эту минуту она казалась сущим воплощением Иезавели из "Athalie", дурацкой трагедии Расина, куски которой мы, конечно, должны были знать наизусть вместе со всяким другим лжеклассическим бредом.

Such discoveries as my awed brother and I did make merely increased the difficulties of that task; and the grown-ups who during the day beheld a densely clothed Mademoiselle never saw what we children saw when, roused from her sleep by one of us shrieking himself out of a bad dream, disheveled, candle in hand, a gleam of gilt lace on the blood-red dressing gown that could not quite wrap her quaking mass, the ghastly Jézabel of Racine’s absurd play stomped barefooted into our bedroom. (ibid.)

*Arlekinada* (harlequinade) = *arlekin* (harlequin) + Ada. In a little poem that she added under her photograph in the graduation album Ada mentions veranda:

It’s a gruesome girl!’ she cried after the melodious adieux. ‘Her name is Vanda Broom, and I learned only recently what I never suspected at school — she’s a regular *tribadka —* poor Grace Erminin tells me Vanda used to make constant passes at her and at — at another girl. ‘There’s her picture here,’ continued Cordula with a quick change of tone, producing a daintily bound and prettily printed graduation album of Spring, 1887, which Van had seen at Ardis, but in which he had not noticed the somber beetle-browed unhappy face of that particular girl, and now it did not matter any more, and Cordula quickly popped the book back into a drawer; but he remembered very well that among the various more or less coy contributions it contained a clever pastiche by Ada Veen mimicking Tolstoy’s paragraph rhythm and chapter closings; he saw clearly in mind her prim photo under which she had added one of her characteristic jingles:

In the old manor, I’ve parodied

Every **v**er**anda** and **room**,

And jacarandas at Arrowhead

In supernatural **b**loom. (1.43)

The last chapter (1.43) of *Ada*’s Part One ends as follows:

When in early September Van Veen left Manhattan for Lute, he was pregnant.

The Antiterran name of Paris, Lute hints at Lutèce (the city’s ancient name). In his epistle “To Vasiliy Pushkin on his Stay in Kostroma” (1805) Count Khvostov mentions *chudesnaya Lyutetsa* (wondrous Lutèce) and *Sekvana* (Sequana, the goddess of the river Seine). There is Van in *Sekvana*, a name that brings to mind *kvaka sesva (quoi que ce soit* in Marina’s mispronunciation), and in Vanda Broom, a lesbian whose name is secretly present in Ada’s poem.

VN’s *Ada* corresponds to Vadim’s novel *Ardis* (1970). According to Vadim, the society nickname of his father (who died in a pistol duel) was Demon. As a boy, Vadim flirted with Ada Bredow, a girl who was portrayed by Serov:

I am reduced--a sad confession!--to something I have also used before, and even in this book--the well-known method of degrading one species of art by appealing to another. I am thinking of Serov's *Five-petaled Lilac*, oil, which depicts a tawny-haired girl of twelve or so sitting at a sun-flecked table and manipulating a raceme of lilac in search of that lucky token. The girl is no other than Ada Bredow, a first cousin of mine whom I flirted with disgracefully that very summer, the sun of which ocellates the garden table and her bare arms. (4.3)

It was Ada’s grandmother, Baroness Bredow, born Tolstoy, who summoned Vadim to look at the harlequins:

I saw my parents infrequently. They divorced and remarried and redivorced at such a rapid rate that had the custodians of my fortune been less alert, I might have been auctioned out finally to a pair of strangers of Swedish or Scottish descent, with sad bags under hungry eyes. An extraordinary grand-aunt, Baroness Bredow, born Tolstoy, amply replaced closer blood. As a child of seven or eight, already harboring the secrets of a confirmed madman, I seemed even to her (who also was far from normal) unduly sulky and indolent; actually, of course, I kept daydreaming in a most outrageous fashion.

"Stop moping!" she would cry: "Look at the harlequins!

"What harlequins? Where?"

"Oh, everywhere. All around you. Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. So are situations and sums. Put two things together--jokes, images--and you get a triple harlequin. Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!"

I did. By Jove, I did. I invented my grand-aunt in honor of my first daydreams, and now, down the marble steps of memory's front porch, here she slowly comes, sideways, sideways, the poor lame lady, touching each step edge with the rubber tip of her black cane. (1.2)

In my previous post (“Baroness Bredow, Nikifor Nikodimovich Starov & Ada Bredow in LATH; Mr Brod or Bred in *Ada*”) I forgot to mention Aldanov’s novel *Bred* (“Delirium,” 1955). Its hero, a professional spy, in a delirium visits Moscow and meets in Kremlin Stalin (Colonel St Alin, a scoundrel, is a second in Demon’s duel with d’Onsky, 1.2). Also, in his “Memoirs” (1953) Felix Yusupov (a descendant of Mohammad’s son-in-law Ali) mentions his famous portrait by Serov (according to Yusupov, Serov was the greatest artist whom he ever met).

Alexey Sklyarenko