In VN’s novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) Lyuba Savich (Vadim’s typist) tells Vadim that she has an album with reviews of his books pasted in and mentions a bunch of irises that she left on the spot where the urn with the ashes of Vadim wife Iris had been interred:

Would I despise her for having an album with reviews of my books pasted in—Morozov's and Yablokov's lovely essays as well as the trash of such hacks as Boris Nyet, and Boyarski? Did I know it was she who had left that mysterious bunch of irises on the spot where the urn with my wife's ashes had been interred four years ago? (2.2)

The names Morozov and Yablokov bring to mind a line in Mandelshtam’s poem *1 yanvarya 1924* (“January 1, 1924”), *vnov’ pakhnet yablokom moroz* (again of apple smells the frost):

Ужели я предам позорному злословью —  
Вновь пахнет яблоком мороз —  
Присягу чудную четвёртому сословью  
И клятвы крупные до слёз?

The frost smells of apples again.

Could I ever betray to gossip-mongers

the great vow to the Fourth Estate

and oaths solemn enough for tears?

(tr. Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin)

In the poem’s closing lines Mandelshtam mentions a simple sonatina of typewriters, merely a shade of those powerful sonatas:

И известковый слой в крови больного сына  
Растает, и блаженный брызнет смех...  
Но пишущих машин простая сонатина —  
Лишь тень сонат могучих тех.

And in the sick son’s blood the deposit of lime

will melt, and there’ll be sudden blessèd laughter.

But the simple sonatina of typewriters

is only a faint shade of those great sonatas.

*Ten’* (“shade; shadow”), a word used by Mandelshtam in the poem’s last line, is an anagram of *N’et* (a quaint name that can be also transliterated “Nyet”). In his poem *Zasnula chern’. Ziyaet ploshchad’ arkoy…* (“The mob fell asleep. The square gapes with the arch…” 1913) Mandelshtam mentions *Arlekin* (the Harlequin) and *teni gosudarey* (the shades of sovereigns):

Заснула чернь. Зияет площадь аркой.  
Луной облита бронзовая дверь.  
Здесь Арлекин вздыхал о славе яркой,  
И Александра здесь замучил зверь.

Курантов бой и тени государей:  
Россия, ты — на камне и крови —  
Участвовать в твоей железной каре  
Хоть тяжестью меня благослови!

The mob fell asleep. The square gapes with the arch.

The bronze door is spilled by the moon.

Here the Harlequin dreamt of bright fame

And Alexander was tormented by the Beast.

The chiming clock and the shades of sovereigns:

Russia, on your stone and blood,

Bless me with your heaviness

To participate in your iron punishment.

*Teni gosudarey* and Boris Nyet bring to mind the tsar Boris Godunov. At the end of Pushkin’s tragedy *Boris Godunov* (1825) an incidental character quotes the saying *yabloko ot yabloni nedaleko padaet* (“like parents, like children;” literally: “an apple falls not far from the apple-tree”):

Один из народа

Брат да сестра! бедные дети, что пташки в клетке.

Другой

Есть о ком жалеть? Проклятое племя!

Первый

Отец был злодей, а детки невинны.

Другой

Яблоко от яблони недалеко падает.

One of the people

Brother and sister! Poor children, like birds in a cage.

Second person

Are you going to pity them? Goddamned family!

First person

Their father was a villain,

But the children are innocent.

Second person

Like parents, like children.

Vadim’s surname (never mentioned in LATH) seems to be Yablonski. It comes from *yablonya* (apple-tree). Vadim Vadimovich Yablonski is a Prince. In his poem *Tsarskoe Selo* (1912) Mandelshtam mentions *knyaz’* (the prince; it seems that by *knyaz’* Mandelshtam means *Velikiy Knyaz’*, the Grand Duke):

Свист паровоза... Едет князь.  
В стеклянном павильоне свита!..  
И, саблю волоча сердито,  
Выходит офицер, кичась, —  
Не сомневаюсь — это князь...

A whistle of the steam-engine… The prince is coming.

His people are in a glass pavilion!..

And, angrily dragging his sword,

An officer comes out, pluming himself,

I have no doubts – this is the prince…

According to Vadim, he spent most of the winter and spring of 1918 in the Imperial Sanatorium at Tsarskoe Selo:

I was eighteen when the Bolshevist revolution struck--a strong and anomalous verb, I concede, used here solely for the sake of narrative rhythm. The recurrence of my childhood's disarray kept me in the Imperial Sanatorium at Tsarskoe for most of the next winter and spring. In July, 1918, I found myself recuperating in the castle of a Polish landowner, a distant relation of mine, Mstislav Charnetski (1880-1919?). One autumn evening poor Mstislav's young mistress showed me a fairy-tale path winding through a great forest where a last aurochs had been speared by a first Charnetski under John III (Sobieski). I followed that path with a knapsack on my back and--why not confess--a tremor of remorse and anxiety in my young heart. Was I right in abandoning my cousin in the blackest hour of Russia's black history?  Did I know how to exist alone in strange lands? Was the diploma I had received after being examined by a special committee (presided by  Mstislav's father, a venerable and corrupt mathematician)  in  all the subjects of  an ideal lyceum, which I had never attended  bodily, sufficient for Cambridge without some infernal entrance test? I trudged all night, through a labyrinth of moonlight, imagining the rustlings of extinct animals. Dawn at last miniated my ancient map. I thought I had crossed the frontier when a bare-headed Red Army soldier with a Mongol face who was picking whortleberries near the trail challenged me: "And whither," he asked picking up his cap from a stump, "may you be rolling (*kotishsya*), little apple (*yablochko*)? *Pokazyvay-ka dokumentiki* (Let me see your papers)."

I groped in my pockets, fished out what I needed, and shot him dead, as he lunged at me; then he fell on his face, as if sunstruck on the parade ground, at the feet of his king. None of the serried tree trunks looked his way, and I fled, still clutching Dagmara's lovely little revolver. Only half an hour later, when I reached at last another part of the forest in a more or less conventional republic, only then did my calves cease to quake. (1.2)

Vadim’s flight from Russia is a parody of a scene in Pushkin’s “Boris Godunov” when Grishka Otrepiev (the Impostor) crosses the Lithuanian border. There is Blok in *yabloko* (apple). In his poem *Skify* (“The Scythians,” 1918) Alexander Blok mentions “the Mongolian savage horde:”

Идите все, идите на Урал!  
Мы очищаем место бою  
Стальных машин, где дышит интеграл,  
С монгольской дикою ордою!

Advance, advance to Ural’s crest,  
We offer you a battleground so neat  
Where your machines of steel in serried ranks abreast  
With the Mongolian savage horde will meet.

Lyuba Savich has the same first name as Blok’s wife Lyubov’ Dmitrievna. In Blok’s poem *Zhenshchina* (“A Woman,” 1914) the poet at a cemetery meets a woman who wants to leave her flowers at the grave of the poet’s little child:

И вдруг, с мучительным усильем,

Чуть слышно произносит он:

"О, не пугайтесь. Здесь в могиле

Ребёнок мой похоронён".

Я извинилась, выражая

Печаль наклоном головы;

А он, цветы передавая,

Сказал: "Букет забыли вы". -

"Цветы я в память встречи с вами

Ребёнку вашему отдам..."

Он, холодно пожав плечами,

Сказал: "Они нужнее вам".

In his “Italian Verses” (1909) Blok compares Florence to *dymnyi iris* (smoky iris). Iris Black’s surname and her brother’s name, Ivor, bring to mind the beginning of Blok’s poem *Dvenadtsat’* (“The Twelve,” 1918):

Чёрный вечер. Белый снег.

Black evening. White Snow.

According to Vadim, his father (who resided on the idyllic outskirts of history) was a scion of a princely family devoted to a gallery of a dozen Tsars. (2.5) Unless it is the devil’s (or Nabokov’s) dozen, a dozen is a grouping of twelve.

The editor of *Patria* calls Vadim’s wife “Irida Osipovna:”

The editor of *Patria*, the *émigré* monthly in which *Pawn Takes Queen* had begun to be serialized, invited "Irida Osipovna" and me to a literary samovar. (1.11)

Iris’ Russian patronymic seems to hint at Osip Mandelshtam. In one of his humorous poems Mandelshtam turns inside out the Latin saying *ubi bene, ibi patria*:

Ubi bene, ibi patria, —  
Но имея другом Бена  
Лившица, скажу обратное:  
Ubi patria, ibi bene.

*Ubi bene, ibi patria*, —  
But, having Ben

Livshitz for friend, I’ll say vice versa:

*Ubi patria, ibi bene*.  
  
One of Vadim’s translators, Mr. Kulich, signs his letters Ben:

I received the typed translations of *The Red Topper* (sic) and *Camera Lucida* virtually at the same time, in the autumn of 1937. They proved to be even more ignoble than I expected. Miss Haworth, an Englishwoman, had spent three

happy years in Moscow where her father had been Ambassador; Mr. Kulich was an elderly Russian-born New Yorker who signed his letters Ben. (2.10)

*Kulich* means “Easter cake.” According to Vadim, Ivor Black consulted him during the Easter Term of his last Cambridge year:

Some time during the Easter Term of my last Cambridge year (1922) I happened to be consulted, "as a Russian," on certain niceties of make-up in an English version of Gogol's *Inspector* which the Glowworm Group, directed by Ivor Black, a fine amateur actor, intended to stage. He and I had the same tutor at Trinity, and he drove me to distraction with his tedious miming of the old man's mincing ways--a performance he kept up throughout most of our lunch at the Pitt. The brief business part turned out to be even less pleasant. Ivor Black wanted Gogol's Town Mayor to wear a dressing gown because "wasn't it merely the old rascal's nightmare and didn't *Revizor*, its Russian title, actually come from the French for ‘dream,' *rêve*?" I said I thought it a ghastly idea. (1.1)

VN’s poem on his father’s death is entitled *Paskha* (“Easter,” 1922):

Я вижу облако сияющее, крышу

блестящую вдали, как зеркало... Я слышу,

как дышит тень и каплет свет...

Так как же нет тебя? Ты умер, а сегодня

сияет влажный мир, грядет весна Господня,

растёт, зовёт... Тебя же нет.

Но если все ручьи о чуде вновь запели,

но если перезвон и золото капели -

не ослепительная ложь,

а трепетный призыв, сладчайшее "воскресни",

великое "цвети",- тогда ты в этой песне,

ты в этом блеске, ты живёшь!..

I see a radiant cloud, I see a rooftop glisten

like a mirror, far away… I listen

to breathing shade, light’s stillicide…

You’re absent—why? You’re dead, and on a day

the humid world is bluish. God’s sacred spring is on her way,

swelling, calling… And you’ve died.

And yet, if every stream anew the wonder sings,

and yet, if every falling golden thaw-drop rings—

if these are not bedazzling lies,

but quivering, dulcet convocations: “Rise again” —

a mighty “Blossom!,” then you are in this refrain,

you’re in this splendor, you’re alive!...

(transl. by DN)

VN’s father was assassinated on March 28, 1922, during the lecture of his friend and colleague P. N. Milyukov. In his epigram (1892) on Milyukov Apollon Maykov (the author of “The Harlequin,” 1854) points out that in his new treatise Milyukov compared the tsar Peter I to Khlestakov (the main character in “The Inspector”):

Профессор Милюков, в своём трактате новом  
Великого Петра сравнивший с Хлестаковым,  
всё просит, чтоб его не смешивать с другим  
давно известным Милюковым. -  
Напрасный страх! Никто вас не смешает с ним...  
Но - может, как с Петром, вы шутите и с нами?  
Ведь старый Милюков - все знают - он  
и образован и умён -  
Какое же тут сходство с вами!

Professor Milyukov, who in his new treatise

Compared Peter the Great to Khlestakov,

Keeps asking not to confuse him with another

Well-known Milyukov.

A vain fear! Nobody will confuse you with him…

But, perhaps, as with Peter, you are joking with us?

For old Milyukov – as everyone knows – he is

educated and intelligent.

What similarity can there be with you!

Vadim Vadimovich’s compatriots (Oksman, Oleg Orlov) keep confusing him with another writer (the real author of LATH, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov). VN’s first novel (that corresponds to Vadim’s *Tamara*) has the same title as Maykov’s first narrative poem: *Mashen’ka* (“Mary”). *Tamara* (1841) is a poem by Lermontov and a character in Lermontov’s poem “The Demon” (1829-40). Maykov is the author of *Na* *smert’ Lermontova* (“On Lermontov’s Death,” 1841). Maykov’s poem in octaves *Knyazhna* (“The Princess,” 1878) brings to mind *Knyazhna Mary*, a novella in Lermontov’s *Geroy nashego vremeni* (“A Hero of Our Time,” 1840). *Grusha* being Russian for “pear” and “pear-tree,” the name Yablokov brings to mind Grushnitski, a character in “Princess Mary.” Vadim’s daughter Bel reminds one of Bela, the title character of the first novella in “A Hero of Our Time.” The names Savich and Vulich (of the main character in *Fatalist*, the last novella in “A Hero of Our Time”) have a Balkan origin.

According to Vadim, “the I of the book cannot die in the book:”

There exists an old rule--so old and trite that I blush to mention it. Let me twist it into a jingle--to stylize the staleness:

The I of the book

Cannot die in the book. (7.1)

In Maykov’s *Knyazhna* the Princess and her daughter, a nihilist who leaves home (as Vadim’s daughter does), resemble each other like *bol’shoe* *Ya* (the big I) and *malen’koe* *ya* (the small i):

Засим - характер. Помните сравненье,

Ведь ваше, - та была ещё дитя, -

Друг против друга станут в изумленье,

Уж больше слов как бы не находя, -

Ну так похожи, как изображенье

Большого "Я" и маленького "я"!

В обеих та ж непогрешимость, вера

В себя и то ж произношенье *эра*... (3)

In Maykov’s poem the big I dies, while the little i remains alive and is going to marry. In LATH Vadim (“the big I”) returns from Leningrad, meets “You” (as Vadim calls Bel’s former schoolmate who is ready to become his fourth wife) and never finds out what really happened to his daughter (she probably perished in Russia).

In Maykov’s poem the Princess and her daughter have the same *proiznoshenye era* (pronunciation of *R*). Genitive of *er* (R), *era* is the homonym of *era* (“era”) and rhymes with *vera* (faith). In the last chapter of his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1951) VN calls his wife Vera “You.”

Describing his fellow writers, Vadim mentions *Geroy nashey ery* ("Hero of Our Era"), a popular social satire by Suknovalov:

I followed my energetic host [Osip Lvovich Oksman] to the upper floor. The lending library spread like a gigantic spider, bulged like a monstrous tumor, oppressed the brain like the expanding world of delirium. In a bright oasis amidst the dim shelves I noticed a group of people sitting around an oval table. The colors were vivid and sharp but at the same time remote-looking as in a magic-lantern scene. A good deal of red wine and golden brandy accompanied the animated discussion. I recognized the critic Basilevski, his sycophants Hristov and Boyarski, my friend Morozov, the novelists Shipogradov and Sokolovski, the honest nonentity Suknovalov, author of the popular social satire *Geroy nashey ery* ("Hero of Our Era") and two young poets, Lazarev (collection *Serenity*) and Fartuk (collection *Silence*). Some of the heads turned toward us, and the benevolent bear Morozov even struggled to his feet, grinning--but my host said they were having a business meeting and should be left alone. (2.4)

Basilevski was a composer who set to music Blok’s drama *Roza i krest* (“The Rose and the Cross,” 1913). The two last words in Blok’s poem “The Twelve” are *Isus Hristos* (Jesus Christ). The last word in Maykov’s *Knyazhna* is *Hristov* (Christ’s):

Счастлив, тысячекрат счастлив народ,

В чьём духе есть те ж глубины святые,

Невозмутимые и в дни невзгод,

Где всякие страдания земные

Врачуются, где разум обретёт

И нищий духом на дела благие,

Затем что там от искони веков

Царит всецело чистый дух Христов.

Fartuk’s collection *Silence* brings to mind the last stanza of Blok’s poem *Druz’yam* (“To my Friends,” 1908) with its epigraph from Maykov (“be silent, the accursed strings”):

Зарыться бы в свежем бурьяне,  
Забыться бы сном навсегда!  
Молчите, проклятые книги!  
Я вас не писал никогда!

If I could bury myself in fresh weeds,

If I could fall asleep forever!

Be silent, the accursed books!

I never have written you!

The Princess’ nickname in Maykov’s poem, *Chaste Dian*e, brings to mind Diana Vane, a character in Iris’ interminable detective tale:

One afternoon, in March or early April, 1930, she peeped into my room and, being admitted, handed me the duplicate of a typewritten sheet, numbered 444. It was, she said, a tentative episode in her interminable tale, which would soon display more deletions than insertions. She was stuck, she said. Diana Vane, an incidental but on the whole nice girl, sojourning in Paris, happened to meet, at a riding school, a strange Frenchman, of Corsican, or perhaps Algerian, origin, passionate, brutal, unbalanced. He mistook Diana--and kept on mistaking her despite her amused remonstrations--for his former sweetheart, also an English girl, whom he had last seen ages ago. We had here, said the author, a sort of hallucination, an obsessive fancy, which Diana, a delightful flirt with a keen sense of humor, allowed Jules to entertain during some twenty riding lessons; but then his attentions grew more realistic, and she stopped seeing him. There had been nothing between them, and yet he simply could not be dissuaded from confusing her with the girl he once had possessed or thought he had, for that girl, too, might well have been only the afterimage of a still earlier romance or remembered delirium. It was a very bizarre situation.

Now this page was supposed to be a last ominous letter written by that Frenchman in a foreigner's English to Diana. I was to read it as if it were a real letter and suggest, as an experienced writer, what might be the next development or disaster.

*Beloved!*

*I am not capable to represent to myself that you really desire to tear up any connection with me. God sees, I love you more than life--more than two lives, your and my, together taken. Are you not ill? Or maybe you have found another? Another lover, yes? Another victim of your attraction? No, no, this thought is too horrible, too humiliating for us both. My supplication is modest and just. Give only one more interview to me! One interview! I am prepared to meet with you it does not matter where--on the street, in some cafe, in the Forest of Boulogne--but I must see you, must speak with you and open to you many mysteries before I will die. Oh, this is no threat! I swear that i  our interview will lead to a positive result, if, otherwise speaking, you will permit me to hope, only to hope, then, oh then, I will consent to wait a little. But you must reply to me without retardment, my cruel, stupid, adored little girl!*

*Your Jules*

"There's one thing," I said, carefully folding the sheet and pocketing it for later study, "one thing the little girl should know. This is not a romantic Corsican writing a *crime passionnel* letter; it is a Russian blackmailer knowing just enough English to translate into it the stalest Russian locutions. What puzzles me is how did you, with your three or four words of Russian--*kak pozhivaete* and *do svidaniya*--how did you, the author, manage to think up those subtle turns, and imitate the mistakes in English that only a Russian would make? Impersonation, I know, runs in the family, but still--" (1.12)

Vadim’s daughter Bel is a *knyazhna* whose full name is Princess Isabella Vadimovna Yablonski. In his poem *Prizvanie* (“Vocation,” 1841) Maykov mentions *mudraya* *Isabella* (wise Isabella), the Queen of Castile in whose name Columbus planted down in the lands that he discovered a Spanish standard:

Что ж думал он, пловец высокий,  
Когда на землю он взирал,  
Молился и рукою смелой,  
Во имя мудрой Изабеллы,  
Кортесов знамя водружал?

In Maykov’s narrative poem *Ispoved’ korolevy* (“Confession of the Queen,” 1861) the main character is Isabella of Castile. The title of Maykov’s poem brings to mind Vadim’s *Pawn Takes Queen* (a novel that corresponds to VN’s *King, Queen, Knave* and *The Luzhin Defense*).

Alexey Sklyarenko