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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328832733_Masonski_kod_w_tworczości_Wladimira_Nabokowa_Proba_interpretacji_powieści_Zaproszenie_na_egzekucję_w_kluczu_symboliki_masonskiej

MASONIC CODE IN THE WORKS OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV (ON THE EXAMPLE OF INVITATION TO A BEHEADING) NADZIEJA KORTUS

The text is the title and introductory information of an article in Russian, which discusses the Masonic code in the works of Vladimir Nabokov, focusing on the novel "Invitation to a Beheading." The author is Nadzieja Kortus, and the article was published in the journal "STUDIA ROSSICA POSNANIENSIA," volume XLI in 2016, pages 121–133. The publication is from Adam Mickiewicz University Press in Poznań. The article explores the Masonic theme in Nabokov's creative works, with a specific analysis of "Invitation to a Beheading."

I am far from intending to compare my own childhood with Nabokov's, who, through his father, knew those who were in some way connected with the State Duma or the Cadet Party. M. M. Vinaver and I. V. Hessen called him Volodey, and he literally grew up on the knees of Rodichev and Petrunkevich. Among the mentioned Berberova surnames, two should be highlighted. The figure of Ivan Ilyich Petrunkevich, a "free mason," chairman of the council of the Masonic "Union of Liberation," and a long-time friend of Nabokov's father, is reflected in the name of one of the characters in the novella "Invitation to a Beheading," the executioner Monsieur Pierre (Petr Petrovich). The surname of the next friend of the Nabokov family, Fyodor Izmailovich Rodichev, is encoded in the characterization of three characters in the work: the lawyer Roman, the prison director Rodrigo, and the jailer Rodion. It is difficult to distinguish between these characters since they often almost imperceptibly change places and positions (for example, Rodrigo and Roman enter the cell, during the action, Rodrigo is replaced by Rodion, Rodion, Roman, and Cincinnati leave the cell, and return in the original composition: Rodrigo, Roman, and Cincinnati). Being a lawyer, Rodichev was considered one of the best Russian parliamentary orators, and his temperament earned him the nickname the "first tenor" of the Cadet Party. Remarkable similarity can be observed between Rodichev and the parodic characterization of the three double characters: Roman is a lawyer (and Cincinnati's fate doesn't concern him at all), Rodrigo is a remarkable, comical orator, and Rodion is an excellent "baritone bass," performing an aria in chorus.

The unexpected death of Nabokov's father, who had no direct connection to the conspiracy, becomes, along with the theme of the afterlife, an *idée fixe* of the writer's work. Thus, three main leitmotifs, on which Nabokov's metapoetic work is

based, grow out of the facts of his biography. Firstly, the triadic model of conspiracy - trial - execution, which has its ideological basis in the conspiracy against the royal family, which the young poet-prosaist never touched, and in the conspiracy against the "free mason" Milyukov, instead of whom his father was killed. Consequently, two other leitmotifs arise: the theme of shadows-doubles and the theme of the afterlife and the initiatory path leading to it as an individual refuge from the exposed imaginary, vulgar world.

In the novel "Invitation to a Beheading," all three themes are directly related to the image of the main character, Cincinnati C. - a victim of the conspiracy of false saviors. Moreover, Masonic ideals are realized here in a distortedly parodic order and serve primarily as an expression of Nabokov's negative attitude towards Freemasonry. Following Anna Khudzinskaya-Parkosadze's opinion, we believe that the ideological construction of the novel "Invitation to a Beheading" is based on the opposition of the internal spiritual initiation of Cincinnati to external Masonic ritual and Masonic laws on the principle of separating the external spectacle from internal genuine experience. Since many Masonic symbols and motifs appearing in "Invitation to a Beheading" have already been noted by literary critics, we will focus on the main principles of the Masonic initiation ritual on which the motivational structure of the novel is based.

One of the main Masonic ideals, the "transparency" of human nature to spiritual light, acquires a double meaning.

On the one hand, the "transparency" inherent in Cincinnati's true spiritual nature, and on the other hand, it is reinterpreted by Nabokov, as Cincinnati is accused of "opaqueness." In the characterization of the main character, this Masonic idea is juxtaposed with the natural internal experience of the initiate: Cincinnati, in his true nature, remains "transparent" in the highest sense (i.e., he allows spiritual light to pass through his being) and, therefore, for the surrounding illusory world of false city ghosts, he is "impenetrable" (i.e., his thoughts and behavior are unpredictable). The image of the main character also realizes the Kabbalistic legend of the first man, Adam Kadmon, who can return to the Kingdom of Light through initiation, i.e., acquiring secret knowledge. During the Masonic ritual, based on three teachings: Hermeticism, alchemy, and the Old Testament (including Kabbalah), the initiate played the role of Master Hiram, the chosen one to whom Adam Kadmon, according to legend, transmitted knowledge and who has since preserved the memory of the beauties of Eden. Cincinnati finds himself thrown into this incomprehensible world, into chaos, which he leaves in the finale, returning to where he came from, i.e., to "creatures like him." The image of Eden arises in Nabokov's text in Cincinnati's memories in the form of the Tamarind

Gardens, bearing signs of otherworldliness. The hero yearns for them, dreaming of returning "there" — to an ideal, paradisiacal space.

According to the legend, the murder of Hiram was committed by the unfaithful workers because the skillful builder did not want to reveal to them the secret "word" — the password of the masters. This motif is also present both in a parodic and direct manner. The former is realized during the verdict when Cincinnati is whispered that they will "put a red cylinder on him — a phrase crafted by the law, a false statement." On the other hand, his inner double, the true Cincinnati, seeks words for self-expression and only finally crosses out the word "death."

One of the lodge's duties is to prepare the candidate for initiation, with the Senior Master bearing the responsibility for the future apprentice. In the novel, the main character's place of residence and the work of his overseers are located in a fortress tower built on a massive rock, far from the city. The **role of the Senior Master is played by the executioner, Monsieur Pierre**, who is in charge of the other characters: Director Rodrigues acts as the Orator, lawyer Roman as the Secretary, and prison warden Rodion as the Guardian of the Temple. The parodic image of Monsieur Pierre as a Masonic master is complemented by his clearly elevated status compared to the assistants and **his falsely bright appearance, contrasted with Cincinnati's true bright image**. The executioner treats Cincinnati as a child and emphasizes the responsibility placed on him for the successful preparation of his "ward" for execution [PF, p. 177]. Moreover, in Monsieur Pierre's whimsical efforts to befriend the condemned, the **Masonic ideal of brotherhood is ridiculed** ("To achieve such friendship — that was my first task, and apparently I resolved it successfully" [PF, p. 158], "[...] as precious for the success of the common cause as the atmosphere of **warm comradeship**" [PF, p. 168]).

During the first stage of the Masonic **initiation ritual**, the future adept, accompanied by two assistant brothers, finds themselves in the **Hall of Lost Steps**, where, standing at the entrance to the lodge, they request to be accepted into the Masons, after which one of the brothers knocks on the door three times. It is worth noting that the Masonic request for acceptance into the apprenticeship is realized in the story in reverse order, as Cincinnati is placed in the tower against his will. At the very beginning, the **hero is led up the stairs**, and his sensations correspond to the initial experiences of a candidate in Masonry:

"He was calm; however, they supported him during the journey through the long corridors because he misplaced his feet like a child who has just learned to walk or as if he were sinking somewhere [...]. The prison warden Rodion spent a long time unlocking the door to the cell — the **wrong key** — the same old fuss. The door finally gave way" [PF, p. 7].

An important part of the Masonic ritual is the adept's stay in the Chamber of Reflection, where they face the greatest mystery — death. There, the initiate not only dies to the past but also takes the first step toward a new life, receiving purification. Left alone in the Chamber, the adept has the opportunity to concentrate on the profound hidden meaning of the objects within it.

The Masonic code in the works of Vladimir Nabokov... 131 The second trial associated with the symbol of the wind, Cincinnati undergoes during his astral journey when "the breeze did everything to refresh the fugitive's naked neck" [PF, p. 15]. The next trial, accompanied by the motif of water and the moon, is dedicated to the entire fifth section of the novel. In its culmination, Cincinnati takes a bath, after which he feels "good" and "clean" [PF, p. 61]. The last stage is realized at the moment of Cincinnati's death when he finally frees himself from any constraints of the theatrical world. It is the fire inside him that testifies to the completion of his last stage of initiation. This trial is preceded by the hero's confession: I am not simple... I am the one who lives among you... Not only are my eyes different, and hearing, and taste—not only the sense of smell, like that of a deer, but touch, like that of a bat—but the main thing: the gift to combine all this in one point... No, the secret is not yet revealed—even this is only a spark—and I haven't even mentioned the birth of fire itself. My life [PF, p. 48-49]. It is worth noting that all trials, except the last one, have a tragicomic character. Hope for salvation ends in disappointment when it turns out that the tunnel was dug by the executioner and the prison director for a cruel joke. Cincinnati's astral journey forms an inescapable cycle. The water stage is also associated with despair and fear. Only the last trial, activating the liberating role of fire, acts literally as a real completion of initiation: "everything in this town was always completely dead and awful compared to Cincinnati's secret life and his criminal flame" [PF, p. 70]. During the last stage of the Masonic ritual, the candidate, addressing the Master, asks for light, as he is blind (remember that the adept's eyes are covered with a bandage). Before endowing him with light, the Master explains some of the canons of the Masonic craft to the novice and then invites him to take an oath on the "cup of libations." The sweet and bitter drink alternating in the cup symbolizes life—sweet at the beginning and bitter at the end. Then the aspirant ascends seven steps, kneels before the altar, bares his right knee, and takes an oath, answering three times "yes" to three questions from the Master. After the symbolic death of the adept, when the "brothers" raise their swords and direct their points towards his chest, the candidate's blindfold is removed. His acceptance into the apprenticeship concludes with a symbolic feast—the so-called "agape"³².

In the novel "Invitation to a Beheading," all these Masonic symbols are mentioned in reverse. The request "Light!" is replaced by Cincinnati's exclamation "Extinguish!" (after which "the complete merging of darkness and

silence took place. It was only then [...] that Cincinnati clearly assessed his situation" [ITB, p. 16-17]). The Masonic "cup of libations" is realized in the grotesque cry of Monsieur Pierre, "the cup of patience is drunk!" [ITB, p. 204], as well as in the episode during the feast when, after the word "Bitter!" the executioner anoints first the condemned man's forehead and then his own with red wine. Before the execution itself, instead of the Masonic oath expressed three times with the word "yes," Cincinnati three times rejects Monsieur Pierre's help, answering "myself," after which he takes twenty steps to the scaffold, serving as a Masonic altar. The Agape is presented in the novel in the form of a feast, abundant in phenomena and objects directly related to Masonic symbolism ("the hall buzzing with a numerous assembly" [ITB, p. 176], the floor in "black and white tiles" [176], "ladies were absent" [177], "a crystal vase with a white rose, distinct from others adorning his utensils" [178]). In addition, Monsieur Pierre, as a Masonic Master, explains to Cincinnati, the disciple, the meaning of all these symbols: "Standing aside with Cincinnati, Monsieur Pierre pointed out these phenomena to his ward" [ITB, p. 177]. It is worth noting that the feast in the novel takes place before the execution, while in Masonic rituals, the Agape occurs after initiation. The reverse order of the ritual indicates that Cincinnati's illumination goes beyond the Masonic ritual and—unlike it—leads to true enlightenment.

In the course of our analysis, it is worth noting that the personal attitude towards the Masonic theme, i.e., the explicit opposition of the protagonist's spiritual initiation in the novel "Invitation to a Beheading" to the Masonic initiation ceremony, has a direct source in Nabokov's life experience. However, in an artistic sense, the Masonic theme serves as the basis for the writer's conscious and consistent construction of his own initiation path.