

## The Question of the Influence of European Modernism on the Creative Identity of Vladimir Nabokov

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### Abstract

Studying Vladimir Nabokov's works, we have been convinced of the continuity of the social codes, beginning with antiquity (there is a special place for mythology in Nabokov's creative works), and ending with the XX century. However, in our opinion, the most powerful influence was exerted on the writer by the cultural traditions of Europe, especially by literature of the XIX century. It is not possible to study all the aspects of the continuity, so within the framework of this article we have considered the most important ones, which, due to the continuity, acquire a deeper philosophical meaning and an additional connotation. We analyzed the existing themes, motives and images in V. Nabokov's creative works, and we saw the influence of F. Nietzsche, A. Bergson, M. Proust and D. G. Lawrence on the artistic method of the writer.

**Keywords:** Idiostyle; Continuity; Motive; Theme; Image; V. Nabokov; F. Nietzsche; A. Bergson; M. proust and D. G. Lawrence.



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### 1. Introduction

Vladimir Nabokov is one of the most controversial writers of the XX century. The talent of the writer is multifaceted, his literary works are deeply philosophical, the form of works is non – standard and unusual, the images of the novels often continue to be revealed in his other works, the themes and motives have experienced the influence of the continuity of world literature. All these served as a reason for various researches, guesses and searches of literary critics in Russia and beyond its boundaries. The researchers, assessing the artistic heritage of the writer in different ways, nevertheless, agree on one thing: the works of Vladimir Nabokov are unique. The uniqueness and fame of the writer led to numerous exaggerations and disputes, not only about his creative heritage, but also his biography. One of the topics of debates is the problem of V. Nabokov's works' the inheritance and parody of world literature. The debates are still continuing nowadays, remaining relevant and not exhausted to the very end. Vladimir Nabokov, synthesizing the various manifestations of modernism of different cultures in his works, created the multidimensional worlds, each of them reflect the subjective reality in their own way. When we talk about the influence of world culture on the author's worldview, we emphasize the involuntary nature of this process, which manifests itself both at the genetic level and in the context of the era. Under the context of the era we understand the time when the author lived and social, political, economic, and other conditions' impact on the creative personality of the writer. In our article we attempt to investigate the influence of European modernism on V. Nabokov's creative self-consciousness.

### 2. The Literary Reputation

The process of the continuity has no end and it is difficult for scientists to determine its beginning. This problem was considered by many researchers of Nabokov's works: B. Boyd, A. Dolinin, B. Nosyk, D. Urnov, etc. We agree with the point of view about the presence of the continuity, but we understand it as an inspiring component of Vladimir Nabokov's creative works.

### 3. Methodology

The investigation is based on the method of analysis and synthesis of the work of art, as well as the comparative method.

### 4. The Influence of f. Nietzsche, a. Bergson, m. Proust and d.g. Lawrence on v. Nabokov's Outlook

Brian Boyd, the author of one of the most complete monographs on V. Nabokov's works, believes that Vladimir Nabokov had the gifts of literature and personal happiness. D. Urnov, the countryman of V. Nabokov, and Prof. N. Struve, on the contrary, were critical of the works by V. Nabokov. Prof. R. Hankel refers V. Nabokov to postmodernism the writer V. Soloukhin considers that V. Nabokov is an extremely talented and not immoral man. The literary critic (Urnov, 1991) thinks that Vladimir Nabokov is a presenter of decadence, and that his outlook is immoral. The aesthetics of any writer includes a personal factor, to which we refer subjective background knowledge, the correlation of literary text (as a display of the aesthetics of the author) and reality, as well as an external factor, which is collective cultural memory. It is impossible to determine the impact of all external factors

on the writer, but it is possible to consider the works of the most prominent philosophers of the XIX – XX centuries, the ideas of which forced more than one generation of outstanding people to think in a different way. Among these figures we have the right to name F. Nietzsche and A. Bergson, because these philosophers's ideas were considered by the writers of the XX century.

The studies of the texts by Vladimir Nabokov demonstrate reflection of the main provisions of Nietzsche's ideas of Superman, not in the context of claims of racial and personal superiority, but self-identity and its desire and understanding of spiritual and moral transformation. The ways to improve oneself can be different: from a person's awareness of the infidelity of his act (for example, in the novel *Mashenka* the main character Ganin vaguely feels that their relationship with Mashenka could be different. Because there were not a place to live for them, their love became to shallow. Therefore he felt guilty.), from the analysis and weighing all the actions and their outcomes, including the creative act (*Other shores*) to understanding oneself as a part of the world (*Ada, or Ardor*), although none of the characters comes to universal love and forgiveness. The idea of Superman influences the development of Nabokov's problem of vulgarity, which means insincerity, falseness, curvature of the truths that is associated with the eternal problem of being or seeming. It is the latter, merging with the ideas of F. Nietzsche, that gives rise to an ideal, a model of behavior that should be inherited by a truly noble person. B. Nabokov actualizes the choice, that each person faces with, and that influences his desire to be perceived in a certain way: either in a real way, as it is, with all shortcomings, miscalculations, or in a mask that represents the most beneficial desired qualities. The problem of being or seeming is akin to temptation. A person, that consciously distorts the truth of his or her own identity, according to Nabokov, becomes vulgar, he or she is like a shadow or the illusion of reality.

The philosophy of intuition had a strong influence on V. Nabokov's aesthetics, especially A. Bergson's views, according to which the essence of reality is a constant flow of inner life, a certain intangible duration or fluidity. The mind cannot comprehend reality as a whole, because it is constantly changing, and therefore it catches only some moments from it. It is possible to understand life, only having merged with it because of intuition, owing to what, it is actually impossible to distinguish contemplation from the contemplated. Thus, the duration, according to A. Bergson, in contrast to the abstract time, requires continuous creation of new forms, as well as the formation and interpenetration of the past and the present, the unpredictability of the future states of freedom (Nabokov, 2003); the reality can be understood not through the limited capacity of the human mind, but through intuition, such as feeling, inspiration, instinct, which were reflected in the works of Proust (1973), whose creative manner is also affected idiosyncrasy of Vladimir Nabokov.

Practically all heroes of V. Nabokov's works not just tell about the world, live in it, but first of all they feel it, and these feelings help them to comprehend both themselves in it, and the value of the words, acts, and to approach understanding of the sense of life, the purpose of the person on the earth. For example, the main character of the novel *The Eye* first feels the need for the presence of his newfound mistress Matilda, She perhaps liked me, this sprightly, full, ox-eyed lady with a big mouth that gathered in the purple ball, when she looked in the mirror. < ... > It was a generous warmth, as soon as she appeared, I already had a dream that the room was hotly flooded, and when, having tasted this great living furnace, I returned alone among the smock and mercury shine of the ruthless night, I felt that it was cold, cold to freezing (Nabokov, 2003). Later, the mistress began to bore him, as the main theme of her talk was her husband's brutal jealousy and carnal passion. For that reason, the hero felt a presentiment of the meeting with him, trying in advance to choose an appropriate model of behavior. The survival instinct forces the hero to worry too much: But I was restless. <...> And I was lost in guesses, imagining the agent of the Communist Union, or the eccentric millionaire who needs an assistant (Nabokov, 1999). Fears of the hero were justified, but he tried to hold on as if he did not understand what was happening: I realized that there is something to be amazing, and I had a smile on my face, and it seemed to be complaisant, and my hand, which stretched, being ready to meet the void, and yet to the end tried to bring the gesture, that was in my head formulated in these words: common courtesy (Lotman, 1996).

*Chorb* (*The Return of Chorb*) lives by the resurrection of his feelings: in Switzerland, where they spent the winter and where the apple trees were blossomed then, he learned nothing but hotels; but in Schwarzwald, where they were in the fall, the cold spring did not interfere with the memory. And just like in the southern beach, he tried to find a stone, round, black, with regular white belt, which she showed him before his last walk, and he sought out the path everything she could mention (Nabokov, 2003). For *Luzhin* (*The Luzhin Defense*) it is important to feel insight that may help to win over Turati, the validation of feelings helps the main character of *Mashenka* to make the right choice, Vasily Ivanovich (*Cloud, Castle, Lake*) found something native and the only one, he was looking for and what he lacked, in the unspeakable consistency of the lake, and the old black tower.

Studying V. Nabokov's creations, we noted the obvious influence of M. Proust's poetic world on the works of the Russian writer. This is especially felt in *Other Shores*. Most importantly, we note the similarity of the works in the method of the writers, which aspires to certain syncretism because of the impressionistic vision on the world. To depict not an object, but an impression of it, to orientate to feelings, but not to mind, to keep the narrative in sketchy strokes, that simultaneously capture impressions in details and reveal their relationship with each other – all these are the core features of the impressionistic style and the premise of the flow of consciousness style, as well as concepts of instinctive memory and psychological time. These signs are peculiar to both writers. In our opinion, there is a special place for musicality of the style and fine art in the works of M. Proust and V. Nabokov. Thus, compositionally, the novel by the French writer resembles a musical work: the complication of chord complexes is combined with the simplification of fret thinking, that is a detailed description of the nuances combined with a simple, but unpredictable thread of the narrative in the orchestrating dominated by pure colours, capricious glares,

shaky and elusive rhythms. There is the brilliance of fret harmony and timbre tools. The value of each sound of the chord increases, in other words, for M. Proust the details, the strokes and nuances are the most important.

V. Nabokov, in turn, had a rare physiological property of the human brain – colour hearing, synopsis. In each letter of the alphabet, the protagonist of his story, as the writer himself, saw a colour, peculiar only to it: moving on to the spectrum, we find: a red group with cherry-brick Б (thicker than B), pink-flannel M < ... >; a yellow group with orange Ё, ochre E, pale yellow Д, light pale yellow И, golden Y < ... > (Nosik, 2000). Following Manet, who took over from his predecessors – Delacroix, the young Corot, Velasquez and others – M. Proust uses bright, light colour harmony and plein air discoveries. However, M. Proust inherits the features of Manet in his literature, there is an unusual sharpness and clarity of the colours, the replace of the black shadow with other shades of the solar spectrum, being free from academic rules, the ease the plasticity of the narrative, the form, the depth of the space, and the game with different outlines (there are often temporal layers in Proust's works). In turn, through the prism of his perception of the French culture and the works of M. Proust, in particular, V. Nabokov largely inherits the features mentioned above, but with the only difference: they are all strengthened by the writer-emigrant, the game with the outlines and the colours of the spectrum in Nabokov's works (Khiltukhina, 2018).

One of the leitmotifs of the Swann's Way by M. Proust is the leitmotif of the absurdity of life and the eternal loneliness of a man. The little boy in his mind sees the adult world as boring, useless ritual, a kind of theatrical action; his soul resists, trying to change the indifference of others and comes to the conclusion that life is absurd; the young hero is lonely, no one shares his cheerfulness and curiosity. The aunt Leonie is also lonely, she is one of the characters of the novel, who lives in her book – based world: she is surrounded by care and attention of all her relatives, she is always consulted on all issues, people come to her with different news, her friends and acquaintances want to see her, but the woman deliberately shielded herself from the bustle of the world, because this life is absurd, it makes no sense. Swann, the purpose of which was Odette, is immeasurably lonely. The grandmother of the young hero is lonely in her own way: nobody understands her. The leitmotif of loneliness in V. Nabokov is closely intertwined with the leitmotif of the search for the meaning of life, closely fused with the latter. The leitmotif of the eternal search for the meaning of life contains a number of motives: the motive of love, the motive of death, the motive of loneliness, the motive of absurdity of life. V. Nabokov's problem of the absurdity of life and human loneliness is interesting because the main character thinks of solving it, but the problem unites in itself, as well as at M. Proust, all sorts of its variations: the loneliness of a little boy, curious and cheerful, who is not cared about because of the lack of time, and who lives in his own world and tries to understand the strange and absurd world in all its versatility (Babenko, 2004; Villalobos Antúnez and Bello, 2014).

If the spiritual death of the hero of M. Proust leads to loneliness, the case of Lodi presents the opposite. Loneliness makes him come into an empty room of the parents (it is alone, too). The hero is considering the items in the room: a random beam, shades, and the petal of the old chrysanthemum... We face with the striking ambivalence of interpretation of the images: on the one hand, in Japan, the chrysanthemum is considered as a symbol of the sun that gives life to everything, but, on the other hand, in Europe, the image of the chrysanthemum is the symbol of deep sorrow, this flower is often put on the coffin and the grave of the deceased (Zolotnitskiy, 1992). We tend to believe that V. Nabokov's chrysanthemum contains the second meaning. The epithet old proves it. The old age and the death are connected with each other. However, one should remember Chaos of V. Nabokov, who is pure, initially bright, gives life to others and accepts them again to clean and correct. So, V. Nabokov's chrysanthemum is a symbol of death, but also is a symbol of light at the same time. The hero does not die spiritually at all, but there is a break in him, the cause of which is loneliness. That is why we see not the chrysanthemum itself, but its petal. This petal is a step that leads a person to his spiritual death. One of the brightest motives in the works of M. Proust and V. Nabokov is the motive of social differences. However, M. Proust describes the manners and customs of degraded aristocrats, while Vladimir Nabokov draws already the shallowed souls of the noblest families, the decline of morals, angrily denies the Bolshevik system of morality that leads to human degradation.

The motivic structure of M. Proust's works is not limited with the motives mentioned in our article. There are the motives that are a kind of thin connecting threads of instinctive memory in the text of the French writer. Creatively perceived, they were reflected in the Russian and American novels by V. Nabokov. We believe that it is impossible to ignore the influence of David Herbert Lawrence: the openness of the themes, which the English aristocracy would prefer to not speak about, could not fail to attract the observation of Vladimir Nabokov. Sexuality, openness in the understanding of the impulses of the soul and the desires of the body – all these formed the revolutionary thought. D. G. Lawrence's works convey a deeply individual perception of the world, through this prism, the reader perceives a new attitude of a certain individual's reference to reality. The novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* for a long time was not printed for reasons of indecency. The same happened with *Lolita* by V. Nabokov, in which some critics saw the elements of pedophilia, and pornography. The problem of the irresponsibility of feelings, even in the presence of physical love, its impact on self – esteem, self-perception and self-determination of man, is the real theme of V. Nabokov's novel, which grew out of the instinctiveness and sensual love of the English writer (Akhmanova and Gyubbenet, 1977).

## 5. Conclusion

Describing the aesthetic views of the outstanding Russian writer, we should take into account the experience and peculiarities of the age, the legacy of previous generations, and the personal factor. Analyzing the artistic works of Vladimir Nabokov, we came to the indisputable statement of the impact of the philosophers F. Nietzsche, A. Bergson, and the influence of creative method of M. Proust and D.H. Lawrence on his creative heritage. The features of impressionism, implemented through the technique of stream of consciousness in the work of the French writer,

resonate in the manner of writing of the novel by V. Nabokov *Other shores*. The author of this article has studied the most characteristic Proust's motives in the works of Vladimir Nabokov (death, loneliness, absurdity of life). As a result of the study, the evidence of Nabokov's inheritance of the traits of European modernism was found. However, we emphasize that Vladimir Nabokov has created his own style that is fundamentally different from the idiosyncrasy of M. Proust and D.H. Lawrence. The motivic structure of *Sirin* is filled with philosophical meaning, and its elements, at times, become ambivalent (for example, the motive of loneliness) and therefore receive additional connotation (Akimzhanov *et al.*, 2018).

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