

Annotations to *Ada* (8)

Part I Chapter 25

The Kyoto Reading Circle

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Page and line references are to the Vintage International edition.

Part I Chapter 25

156.08: *shlafrok*: шлафрок. “Russ., from Germ. *Schlafrock*, dressing gown” (VN).

156.12-13: (among whom we noticed kitchen Kim with his camera): The phrase “we noticed” enhances the impression that Van and Ada are flipping through an album of their memories. The full name of “kitchen Kim” is Kim Beauharnais (239. 33). A marginal character, always crouching between parentheses, this sneaky “photo-fiend” boy finally emerges as a blackmailer (II.7). Ada buys his album for a thousand, and they have a look at the filthy snapshots together. Thus, the passage above can be called the first glimpse of album motif and Kim episode brought together in a nutshell. We must also note that the album in question is “bound in orange-brown cloth, a dirty hue” (396. 3), which nicely matches in color with a rare Vanessa “*Nymphalis danaus* Nab., orange-brown” in this chapter.

157.03: “She rolls sweetly, sir,:” Bouteillan refers to both the car and Ada by “she.”

157.07: *Tel un lis sauvage confiant au désert--:* This quotation is most probably taken from Jacques Delille’s *Les Trois Règnes de la nature* (1809), but we cannot locate the exact source yet. Delille had a seat in the French Academy, but after the revolution he was deprived of his position and had to leave France. His exile was spent in Switzerland, Germany and England. Perhaps this historical fact casts a shadow on the item below.

157.16-17: *pozheval gubami*: A Russian cliché.

157.22-23: before Louis the Sixteenth migrated to England: In this alternative world Antiterra, he escaped from the beheading which actually took place on January 23, 1793.

157.28-30: *klv zdB AoyvBno wkh gwzxm dqg kzwAAqvo a qwttp vq wifhm Ada in a natural bower of aspens:* The simple cryptographic system employed here is called “Caesar Cipher.” This private key code is quite easy to crack because what a solver should do is to try at most 26 permutations.

See also our discussion on the encoded sentence at the circle meeting participated by Brian Boyd: <http://vnjapan.org/main/ada/ada5.html>.

157.33: eat it up like a good spy: (Cf.) “. . . the little diary which I now propose to reel off (much as a spy delivers by heart the contents of the note he swallowed) covers most of June” (*Lolita*, 41). “A slip of paper was now produced on which Izumrudov, shaking with laughter (death is hilarious), wrote out for Gradus their client's alias, the name of the university where he taught, and that of the town where it was situated. No, the slip was not for keeps. He could keep it only while memorizing it. This brand of paper (used by macaroon makers) was not only digestible but delicious.” (*Pale Fire*, 256). “But Chernyshevski immediately returned, his Adam’s apple convulsively bobbing as he washed something down with cold tea (*swallowed papers* according to Antonovich’s sinister guess), . . .” (*The Gift*, 269).

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158.05: Maria Kuznetsova: A very famous Russian soprano (1880-1966).

158.06: Tschchaikow’s opera *Onegin and Olga:* A mock allusion to the Tchaikovsky’s opera *Eugene Onegin* which Nabokov utterly detests.

158.10-11: fantastically rare vanessian, *Nymphalis danaus Nab.:* Nabokov’s drawing of this fantastic creation is now held in the Berg Collection.

158.12-13: Professor Nabonidus: Nabonidus is the name of a Babylonian king (555- 539 BC). Hence, the professor teaches at “Babylon College, Nebraska.”

158.14-15: the Viceroy, one of the Monarch’s best known imitators: The Viceroy butterfly mimics the

poisonous Monarch butterfly to gain protection from predators.

158.19-21: She kissed him all over the face, she kissed his hands, then again his lips, his eyelids, his soft black hair. He kissed her ankles, her knees, her soft black hair: If we assume the slow upward movement of their kissing, then “her soft black hair” means nether hair. Thus, although the expressions “his soft black hair” and “her soft black hair” are the same, they point to the different parts of the body.

158.26-27: wiping off the P’s and the F’s: A funny variation on the common expression “mind your P’s and Q’s.”

159.07: Stumbling on melons, fiercely beheading the tall arrogant fennels with his riding crop: “Allusions to passages in Marvell’s ‘Garden’ and Rimbaud’s ‘Mémoire’” (VN). The allusions point to the past dinner scene in I.10 where these two poems are referred to.

159.09: Morio, his favorite black horse, stood waiting for him: The family motorcar which should be waiting for him at the Forest Park transforms quite inexplicably into a saddled horse. The process makes a fine pair with the metamorphosis of a hackneyed coach into a saddled horse during Van’s journey from the station to Ardis Hall in I.5, and thus it can be regarded as a fitting farewell to the summer of 1884 for him.