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Nabokov's Time Doubling: From *The Gift* to *Lolita*

Alexander Dolinin

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Nabokov Studies, 2 (1995), 1-86. FORUM Did Humbert Kill Quilty? The Chronology of Lolita
Nabokov Studies, 2 (1995), 3-40. ALEXANDER DOLININ (St. Petersburg, Russia-Madison, WI, USA) NABOKOV'S TIME DOUBLING: FROM THE GIFT TO LOLITA* ... if there were no future, then one had the right of making up a future, and in that case, one's very own future did exist, insofar as one existed oneself. Vladimir Nabokov, in his university lectures on Leo Tolstoy, Nabokov devotes considerable attention to the problems of time in Anna Karenina and to the question of how to date the first part of the novel. Nabokov notes that the action begins on a Friday and that Steve Oblonsky reads in the morning paper about von Beust, the Austrian envoy to the British court, leaving for Wiesbaden. Using historical data, Nabokov was able to determine which particular day Tolstoy had in mind: February 23 (11 old style), 1872. Nabokov explains to his students his interest in such details: Some of you may still wonder why Tolstoy mentions such trifles. To make his magic, fiction, look

real the artist sometimes places it as Tolstoy does, within a definite, specific historical frame, citing facts that can be checked in a library—that citadel of illusion. The case of Count Beust is an excellent example to bring into any discussion about so-called real life and so-called fiction. There on the one hand is a historical fact, a certain Beust, a statesman, a diplomat, who not only has existed but has left a book of memoirs in two volumes, wherein he carefully recalls all the witty repartees, and political puns, which he had made in the course of his long political career on this or that occasion. And here, on the other hand, is Steve Oblonski whom Tolstoy created from top to toe, and the question is which of the two, the "real-life" Count Beust, or the "fictitious" Prince Oblonski is more alive, is more real, is more believable. Despite his memoirs— * This is a slightly revised version of my Russian essay "Dvoine vreme u Nabokova: ot Dara k Lolite " written in 1990 and accepted for publication by editors of a book with the tentative title "Puti i mirazhi russkoi kul'tury," which, as far as I know, is still on its long and mirage-like road to press. I am indebted to Angela Brintlinger and Dan Ungurianu who translated the essay into English. Nabokov Studies long-winded memoirs full of dead clichés—the good Beust remains a vague and conventional figure, whereas Oblonski, who never existed, is immortally vivid. Nabokov considers Tolstoy's referring to a specific historical fact, which places the beginning of the narration into the framework of calendar time, to be nothing more than a literary device aimed exclusively at mimicry, the camouflaging of fiction as empirical reality. The final scene of Anna Karenina can be dated in a similar way, though not with such precision, since allusions to political events on the eve of the Russo-Turkish War place the scene in July of 1876. However, within this historical frame, in the world created by the author's imagination, "chronology is based on a sense of artistic timing"² and therefore follows not the calendar, but rather the psychological laws of perceiving time as a Bergsonian pure continuum. Analyzing the novel's structure in detail, Nabokov demonstrates that each of Anna Karenina's two sets of characters lives according to its own clock. He compares their asynchronous existence to a race, with the participants catching up to each other and then falling back and spreading out along the track. Lyovin and Kitty's "spiritual time," Nabokov claims, passes much more slowly than the "physical time" of Anna and Vronsky, and by the end of the novel lags behind by an entire year.³ In this context, even Tolstoy's obvious anachronism, presumably accidental, can be regarded as meaningful: in the first part of the novel, the same day turns out to be Friday at the Oblonsky's ("It was a Friday, the day on which a German clockmaker always came to...

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+1 (410) 516-6989
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