In VN’s novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) Vadim describes his youth and quotes his poem *Vlyublyonnost'* (“Being in Love”):

On the night of July 20, however, I composed a more oblique, more metaphysical little poem which I decided to show her at breakfast in a literal translation that took me longer to write than the original. The title, under which it appeared in an émigré daily in Paris (October 8, 1922, after several reminders on my part and one please-return request) was, and is, in the various anthologies and collections that were to reprint it in the course of the next fifty years, *Vlyublyonnost'*, which puts in a golden nutshell what English needs three words to express.

*My zabyvаem chto vlyublyonnost'*

*Ne prosto povorot litsа,*

*A pod kupаvami bezdonnost',*

*Nochnаya pаnika plovtsа.*

*Pokuda snitsya, snis', vlyublyonnost',*

*No probuzhdиniem ne much',*

*I luchshe nedogovoryonnost'*

*Chem eta shchel' i etot luch.*

*Napominаyu chto vlyublyonnost'*

*Ne yаv', chto metiny ne te,*

*Chto mozhet-byt' potustoronnost'*

*Priotvorilas' v temnote*.

"Lovely," said Iris. "Sounds like an incantation. What does it mean?"

"I have it here on the back. It goes like this. We forget--or rather tend  to forget--that being in love (*vlyublyonnost*') does not depend on the facial angle of the loved one, but is a bottomless spot under the nenuphars, a swimmer's panic in the night (here the iambic tetrameter happens to be rendered--last line of the first stanza, *nochnаya pаnika plovtsа*). Next stanza: While the dreaming is good--in the sense of ‘while the going is good'--do  keep appearing  to us in our dreams, *vlyublyonnost'*, but do not torment us by waking us up or telling too much: reticence is better than that chink and that moonbeam. Now comes the last stanza of this philosophical love poem."

"This what?"

"Philosophical love poem. *Napominаyu, I remind you, that vlyublyonnost'* is not wide-awake reality, that the markings are not the same (a moon-striped ceiling, *polosatyy ot luny potolok*, is, for instance, not the same kind of reality as a ceiling by day), and that, maybe, the hereafter stands slightly ajar in the dark. Voilà." (1.5)

In VN’s novel *Podvig* (“Glory,” 1932) Martin feels flattered by *vlyublyonnost’* (the infatuation) of the English with Chekhov, by *vlyublyonnost’* of the Germans with Dostoevski:

Таких слов, таких понятий и образов, какие создала Россия, не было в других странах, - и часто он доходил до косноязычия, до нервного смеха, пытаясь объяснить иноземцу, что такое "оскомина" или "пошлость". Ему льстила влюблённость англичан в Чехова, влюблённость немцев в Достоевского. Как-то в Кембридже он нашёл в номере местного журнала шестидесятых годов стихотворение, хладнокровно подписанное "А. Джемсон": "Я иду по дороге один, мой каменистый путь простирается далеко, тиха ночь и холоден камень, и ведётся разговор между звездой и звездой".

Such words, such notions and images, as those that Russia had engendered did not exist in other countries, and it often happened that he would lapse into incoherence, or start to laugh nervously when trying to explain to a foreigner the various meanings of some special term, say *poshlost'*. He felt flattered by the infatuation of the English with Chekhov, by that of the Germans with Dostoevski. Once, in Cambridge, he discovered in a sixty-year-old issue of the local review a poem coolly signed: A. Jameson. It began:

I walk along the road alone.      
My stony path spreads far,  
Still is the night and cold the stone,  
And star talks unto star.

and was a shameless paraphrase of Lermontov’s greatest lyrical poem. (Chapter 39)

The plagiarist paraphrased the first stanza of Lermontov’s poem *Vykhozhu odin ya na dorogu* (“I go out on the road alone…” 1841). In his poem *Skazka dlya detey* (“Fairy Tale for Children,” 1841) Lermontov says that he is *bez uma ot vlazhnykh rifm* – *kak naprimer na Yu* (crazy about moist rhymes – as for example on *Yu*):

Стихов я не читаю — но люблю  
Марать шутя бумаги лист летучий;  
Свой стих за хвост отважно я ловлю;  
Я без ума от тройственных созвучий  
И влажных рифм — как например на Ю.  
Вот почему пишу я эту сказку.  
Её волшебно-тёмную завязку  
Не стану я подробно объяснять,  
Чтоб кой-каких допросов избежать,  
Зато конец не будет без морали,  
Чтобы её хоть дети прочитали. (2)

According to Lermontov, he is also *bez uma ot ot troystvennykh sozvuchiy* (crazy about triple rhymes). The last word of each stanza’s first line, *vlyublyonnost’* rhymes in Vadim’s poem with three different words.

The last letter of the Russian alphabet, Я (*Ya*) is also the first person pronoun (“I”). The alphabet’s penultimate letter, Ю (*Yu*) is pronounced rather like “you.” In “Glory” VN mentions the fact that in England the second person pronoun had died out with the bowmen:

Он вышел, тихо закрыв за собою дверь, и Мартын подумал зараз три вещи: что страшно голоден, что такого второго друга не сыскать, и что этот друг будет завтра делать предложение. В эту минуту он радостно и горячо желал, чтобы Соня согласилась, но эта минута прошла, и уже на другое утро, при встрече с Соней на вокзале, он почувствовал знакомую, унылую ревность (единственным, довольно жалким преимуществом перед Дарвином был недавний, вином запитый переход с Соней на ты; в Англии второе лицо, вместе с луконосцами, вымерло; всё же Дарвин выпил тоже на брудершафт и весь вечер обращался к ней на архаическом наречии).

He went out, quietly closing the door behind him, and Martin had three simultaneous thoughts: that he was terribly hungry, that you couldn’t find another friend like that, and that tomorrow this friend would propose. At that moment he joyously and ardently wished that Sonia would accept, but the moment passed, and next morning, when he and Darwin met Sonia at the station, he felt the old familiar, dreary jealousy (his only, rather pathetic advantage over Darwin was his recent, wine-toasted transition to the intimate second-person singular, the Russian “*ty*,” with Sonia; in England that form had died out with the bowmen; nonetheless Darwin had also drunk *auf Bruderschaft* with her, and had addressed her all evening with the archaic “thou”). (Chapter 25)

In LATH Vadim calls his last love “You” (just as VN calls his wife in the last chapter of his autobiography *Speak, Memory*). According to “You,” everything is beautiful *na fone neba* (against the sky):

I drew your attention to the beauty of the climbing roses. You said: "Everything is beautiful against the sky (*na fone neba*)" and apologized for the "aphorism." At last, in the most casual of tones I asked how you had liked the fragment of *Ardis* I gave you to read just before taking the little walk  from which I had returned only now, three weeks later, in Catapult, California. (7.4)

Vadim’s *Ardis* (1970) corresponds to VN’s *Ada* (1969). In *Ada* (1.36) Mlle Larivière (Lucette’s governess) says that Ardis (the family estate of Daniel Veen, Lucette’s father) means in Greek “point of an arrow.” It brings to mind *lukonostsy* (the bowmen) mentioned by VN in *Podvig*.

In Chapter Four of VN’s novel *Dar* (“The Gift,” 1937), “The Life of Chernyshevski,” Fyodor mentions *prozrachnyi privkus neba vo vlazhnom stikhe* (the transparent tang of the celestial in Lermontov’s moist verse):

Счастливее оказался Лермонтов. Его проза исторгла у Белинского (имевшего слабость к завоеваниям техники) неожиданное и премилое сравнение Печорина с паровозом, сокрушающим неосторожно попадающихся под его колёса. В его стихах разночинцы почуяли то, что позже стало называться «надсоновщиной». В этом смысле Лермонтов – первый надсон русской литературы. Ритм, тон, бледный, слезами разбавленный стих гражданских мотивов до «Вы жертвою пали» включительно, все это пошло от таких лермонтовских строк, как: «Прощай, наш товарищ, недолго ты жил, певец с голубыми очами, лишь крест деревянный себе заслужил да вечную память меж нами». Очарование Лермонтова, даль его поэзии, райская её живописность и прозрачный привкус неба во влажном стихе – были, конечно, совершенно недоступны пониманию людей склада Чернышевского.

Lermontov came off luckier. His prose jerked from Belinski (who had a weakness for the conquests of technology) the surprising and most charming comparison of Pechorin to a steam engine, shattering all who were careless enough to get under its wheels. In his poetry the middle-class intellectuals felt something of the sociolyrical strain that later came to be called “Nadsonism.” In this sense Lermontov was the first Nadson of Russian literature. The rhythm, the tone, the pale, tear-diluted idiom of “civic” verse up to and including “as victims you fell in the fateful contest” (the famous revolutionary song of the first years of our century), all of this goes back to such Lermontov lines as:

Farewell, our dear comrade! Alas, upon earth

Not long did you dwell, blue-eyed singer!

A plain cross of wood you have earned, and with us

Your memory always shall linger….

Lermontov’s real magic, the melting vistas in his poetry, its paradisial picturesqueness and the transparent tang of the celestial in his moist verse—these, of course, were completely inaccessible to the understanding of men of Chernyshevski’s stamp.

When VN’s novel was serialized in *Sovremennye zapiski* (“Contemporary Notes”), Chapter Four was omitted by the editors. In its full form “The Gift” was brought out by the Chekhov Publishing House only in 1952. VN’s *Dar* corresponds to Vadim’s novel *The Dare* (1950). According to Vadim, his novel includes a concise biography and critical appraisal of Fyodor Dostoevski:

The reader must have noticed that I speak only in a very general way about my Russian fictions of the Nineteen-Twenties and Thirties, for I assume that he is familiar with them or can easily obtain them in their English versions. At this point, however, I must say a few words about *The Dare* (*Podarok Otchizne* was its original title, which can be translated as "a gift to the fatherland"). When in 1934 I started to dictate its beginning to Annette, I knew it would be my longest novel. I did not foresee however that it would be almost as long as General Pudov's vile and fatuous "historical" romance about the way the Zion Wisers usurped St. Rus. It took me about four years in all to write its four hundred pages, many of which Annette typed at least twice. Most of it had been serialized in *émigré* magazines by May, 1939, when she and I, still childless, left for America; but in book form, the Russian original appeared only in 1950 Turgenev Publishing House, New York), followed another decade later by an English translation, whose title neatly refers not only to the well-known device used to bewilder noddies but also to the daredevil nature of Victor, the hero and part-time narrator.

The novel begins with a nostalgic account of a Russian childhood (much happier, though not less opulent than mine). After that comes adolescence in England (not unlike my own Cambridge years); then life in émigré Paris, the writing of a first novel (*Memoirs of a Parrot Fancier*) and the tying of amusing knots in various literary intrigues. Inset in the middle part is a complete version of the book my Victor wrote "on a dare": this is a concise biography and critical appraisal of Fyodor Dostoyevski, whose politics my author finds hateful and whose novels he condemns as absurd with their black-bearded killers presented as mere negatives of Jesus Christ's conventional image, and weepy whores borrowed from maudlin romances of an earlier age. The next chapter deals with the rage and bewilderment of *émigré* reviewers, all of them priests of the Dostoyevskian persuasion; and in the last pages my young hero accepts a flirt's challenge and accomplishes a final gratuitous feat by walking through a perilous forest into Soviet territory and as casually strolling back.

I am giving this summary to exemplify what even the poorest reader of my *Dare* must surely retain, unless electrolysis destroys some essential cells soon after he closes the book. Now part of Annette's frail charm lay in her forgetfulness which veiled everything toward the evening of everything, like the kind of pastel haze that obliterates mountains, clouds, and even its own self as the summer day swoons. I know I have seen her many times, a copy of *Patria* in her languid lap, follow the printed lines with the pendulum swing of eyes suggestive of reading, and actually reach the "To be continued" at the end of the current installment of *The Dare*. I also know that she had typed every word of it and most of its commas. Yet the fact remains that she retained nothing--perhaps in result of her having decided once for all that my prose was not merely "difficult" but hermetic ("nastily hermetic," to repeat the compliment Basilevski paid me the moment he realized--a moment which came in due time--that his manner and mind were being ridiculed in Chapter Three by my gloriously happy Victor. I must say I forgave her readily her attitude to my work. At public readings, I admired her public smile, the "archaic" smile of Greek statues. When her rather dreadful parents  asked to see my  books  (as  a suspicious physician might ask for a  sample of semen), she gave them to read  by mistake another

man's novel because of a silly similarity of titles. The only real shock I experienced was when I overheard her informing some idiot woman friend that my *Dare* included biographies of "Chernolyubov and Dobroshevski"! She actually  started to argue when I retorted that only a lunatic would have chosen a pair of third-rate publicists to write about--spoonerizing their names in addition! (2.5)

At the end of VN’s “Glory” Martin Edelweiss walks into Soviet territory (“Zoorland”) and never comes back. The name Chernyshevski comes from *chyornyi* (black) and brings to mind Iris Black. In April of 1930 Vadim’s first wife is killed by her admirer, Wladimir Starov, *alias* Blagidze (1.13). A couple of years after Iris’ death Vadim marries his typist, Annette Blagovo. In Chapter Five of “The Gift” Fyodor mentions *blago* (good) and *blague* (Fr., blunder):

Он лёг и под шёпот дождя начал засыпать. Как всегда, на грани сознания и сна всякий словесный брак, блестя и звеня, вылез наружу: хрустальный хруст той ночи христианской под хризолитовой звездой… — и прислушавшаяся на мгновение мысль, в стремлении прибрать и использовать, от себя стала добавлять: и умер исполин яснополянский, и умер Пушкин молодой… — а так как это было ужасно, то побежала дальше рябь рифмы: и умер врач зубной Шполянский, астраханский, ханский, сломал наш Ганс кий… Ветер переменился, и пошло на зе: изобразили и бриз из Бразилии, изобразили и ризу грозы… тут был опять кончик, доделанный мыслью, которая опускалась всё ниже в ад аллигаторских аллитераций, в адские кооперативы слов, не «благо», а «blague».

He went to bed and began to fall asleep to the whisper of the rain. As always on the border between consciousness and sleep all sorts of verbal rejects, sparkling and tinkling, broke in: “The crystal crunching of that Christian night beneath a chrysolitic star”… and his thought, listening for a moment, aspired to gather them and use them and began to add of its own: Extinguished, Yasnaya Polyana’s light, and Pushkin dead, and Russia far… but since this was no good, the stipple of rhymes extended further: “A falling star, a cruising chrysolite, an aviator’s avatar …” His mind sank lower and lower into a hell of alligator alliterations, into infernal cooperatives of words [not *blago*, but *blague*].

In a letter to his mother Fyodor mentions *roman o krovosmeshenii* (a novel about incest) considered in Germany the crown of literature:

Вообще, я бы завтра же бросил эту тяжкую, как головная боль, страну, — где всё мне чуждо и противно, где роман о кровосмешении или бездарно-ударная, приторно-риторическая, фальшиво-вшивая повесть о войне считается венцом литературы; где литературы на самом деле нет, и давно нет; где из тумана какой-то скучнейшей демократической мокроты, — тоже фальшивой, — торчат всё те же сапоги и каска; где наш родной социальный заказ заменён социальной оказией, — и так далее, так далее… я бы мог ещё долго, — и занятно, что полвека тому назад любой русский мыслитель с чемоданом совершенно то же самое строчил, — обвинение настолько очевидное, что становится даже плоским.

Generally speaking I’d abandon tomorrow this country, oppressive as a headache—where everything is alien and repulsive to me, where a novel about incest or some brash trash, some cloyingly rhetorical, pseudobrutal tale about war is considered the crown of literature; where in fact there is no literature, and hasn’t been for a long time; where sticking out of the fog of a most monotonous democratic dampness—also pseudo—you have the same old jackboot and helmet; where our native enforced ‘social intent’ in literature has been replaced by social opportunity—and so on, and so on… I could go on much longer—and it is amusing that fifty years ago every Russian thinker with a suitcase used to scribble exactly the same—an accusation so obvious as to have become even banal. (Chapter Five)

“A novel about incest” mentioned by Fyodor is Leonhard Frank’s *Bruder und Schwester* (“Brother and Sister,” 1929). The action in it begins in St. Petersburg (VN’s and Vadim’s native city). In Chapter Five of LATH Vadim describes his visit to Leningrad (St. Petersburg’s name in 1924-91) in the late nineteen-sixties. According to Dora (a lame lady whom Vadim meets in Leningrad), as girl she dreamt of becoming a female clown, Madame Byron or Trek Trek (5.2). Byron had a sexual relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. Vadim and his first three wives (Iris Black, Annette Blagovo and Louise Adamson) seem to be the children of Count Starov. One of Lermontov’s most famous poems begins: *Net, ya ne Bayron, ya drugoy…* (“No, I’m not Byron, I’m another…” 1832).

The action in “The Gift” (in fact, in almost all of VN’s Russian novels) takes place in Berlin. One of Anna Akhmatova’s poems addressed to Isaiah Berlin begins:

Ты выдумал меня. Такой на свете нет,

Такой на свете быть не может.

You invented me. There is no such earthly being,  
Such an earthly being there could never be.

According to Vadim, he began inventing reality as a child of seven or eight:

I saw my parents infrequently. They divorced and remarried and redivorced at such a rapid rate that had the custodians of my fortune been less alert, I might have been auctioned out finally to a pair of strangers of Swedish or Scottish descent, with sad bags under hungry eyes. An extraordinary grand-aunt, Baroness Bredow, born Tolstoy, amply replaced closer blood. As a child of seven or eight, already harboring the secrets of a confirmed madman, I seemed even to her (who also was far from normal) unduly sulky and indolent; actually, of course, I kept daydreaming in a most outrageous fashion.

"Stop moping!" she would cry: "Look at the harlequins!

"What harlequins? Where?"

"Oh, everywhere. All around you. Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. So are situations and sums. Put two things together--jokes, images--and you get a triple harlequin. Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!"

I did. By Jove, I did. I invented my grand-aunt in honor of my first daydreams, and now, down the marble steps of memory's front porch, here she slowly comes, sideways, sideways, the poor lame lady, touching each step edge with the rubber tip of her black cane. (1.2)

Describing his convalescence after a stroke, Vadim mentions Reality (by “Reality” Vadim means his last love, “You”):

One of the windows was wide open when I woke up. My mind and my eye were by now sufficiently keen to make out the medicaments on my bedside table. Amidst its miserable population I noticed a few stranded travelers from another world: a transparent envelope with a nonmasculine handkerchief found and laundered by the staff; a diminutive golden pencil belonging to the eyelet of a congeric agenda in a vanity bag; a pair of harlequin sunglasses, which for some reason suggested not protection from a harsh light but the masking of tear-swollen lids. The combination of those ingredients resulted in a dazzling pyrotechny of sense; and next moment (coincidence was still on my side) the door of  my room moved: a small soundless move that came to a brief soundless stop and then was continued in a slow, infinitely slow sequence of suspension dots in diamond type. I emitted a bellow of joy, and Reality entered. (7.3)

Anna Akhmatova’s real name, Gorenko, brings to mind Trigorin, the writer in Chekhov’s play *Chayka* (“The Seagull,” 1896). In Chekhov’s play Treplev says that life should be portrayed as it appears in dreams:

Нина. В вашей пьесе трудно играть. В ней нет живых лиц.   
Треплев. Живые лица! Надо изображать жизнь не такою, как она есть, и не такою, как должна быть, а такою, как она представляется в мечтах.

NINA. Your play is very hard to act in; there are no living characters in it.  
TREPLEV. That’s the whole point! Life must be represented not as it is and not as it should be, but as it appears in dreams. (Act One)

In a letter of Nov. 25, 1892, to Suvorin Chekhov says that the best writers are realists who paint life as it is, but, through every line’s being soaked in the consciousness of an object, you feel, besides life as it is, the life which ought to be:

У нас нет «чего-то», это справедливо, и это значит, что поднимите подол нашей музе, и Вы увидите там плоское место. Вспомните, что писатели, которых мы называем вечными или просто хорошими и которые пьянят нас, имеют один общий и весьма важный признак: они куда-то идут и Вас зовут туда же, и Вы чувствуете не умом, а всем своим существом, что у них есть какая-то цель, как у тени отца Гамлета, которая недаром приходила и тревожила воображение. У одних, смотря по калибру, цели ближайшие — крепостное право, освобождение родины, политика, красота или просто водка, как у Дениса Давыдова, у других цели отдаленные — бог, загробная жизнь, счастье человечества и т. п. Лучшие из них реальны и пишут жизнь такою, какая она есть, но оттого, что каждая строчка пропитана, как соком, сознанием цели, Вы, кроме жизни, какая есть, чувствуете еще ту жизнь, какая должна быть, и это пленяет Вас.

We lack “something,” that is true, and that means that, lift the robe of our muse, and you will find within an empty void. Let me remind you that the writers, who we say are for all time or are simply good, and who intoxicate us, have one common and very important characteristic; they are going towards something and are summoning you towards it, too, and you feel not with your mind, but with your whole being, that they have some object, just like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who did not come and disturb the imagination for nothing. Some have more immediate objects — the abolition of serfdom, the liberation of their country, politics, beauty, or simply vodka, like Denis Davydov; others have remote objects — God, life beyond the grave, the happiness of humanity, and so on. The best of them are realists and paint life as it is, but, through every line’s being soaked in the consciousness of an object, you feel, besides life as it is, the life which ought to be, and that captivates you.

In his poem *Kogda ya byl vlyublyon*… (“When I was in love…” 1911) Gumilyov (Anna Akhmatova’s first husband) says that he is *vlyublyon vsegda* (always in love) and mentions *vlyublyonnost’*:

И я сказал: “Царица, вы одни  
Сумели воплотить всю роскошь мира,  
Как розовые птицы — ваши дни,  
Влюбленность ваша — музыка клавира.”

A Russian explorer of Africa, Gumilyov is the author of *Zabludivshiysya tramvay* (“The Lost Tram,” 1921). Describing his convalescence after a stroke, Vadim mentions a surprised Russian traveler in Abyssinia to whom drunken Rimbaud recited the poem *Le Tramway ivre*:

Somewhere in Abyssinia drunken Rimbaud was reciting to a surprised Russian traveler the poem Le *Tramway ivre* (...*En blouse rouge, à face en pis de vache, le bourreau me trancha la tête* *aussi.*..). (7.2)

Alexey Sklyarenko