Showing to Humbert Humbert (the narrator and main character in VN’s novel *Lolita*, 1955) her house, Charlotte Haze mentions her Lo and her lilies:

Reluctantly I followed her downstairs again; then through the kitchen at the end of the hall, on the right side of the house - the side where also the dining room and the parlor were (under “my” room, on the left, there was nothing but a garage). In the kitchen, the Negro maid, a plump youngish woman, said, as she took her large glossy black purse from the knob of the door leading to the back porch: “I’ll go now, Mrs. Haze.” “Yes, Louise,” answered Mrs. Haze with a sigh. “I’ll settle with you Friday.” We passed on to a small pantry and entered the dining room, parallel to the parlor we had already admired. I noticed a white sock on the floor. With a deprecatory grunt, Mrs. Haze stooped without stopping and threw it into a closet next to the pantry. We cursorily inspected a mahogany table with a fruit vase in the middle, containing nothing but the still glistening stone of one plum. I groped for the timetable I had in my pocket and surreptitiously fished it out to look as soon as possible for a train. I was still walking behind Mrs. Haze though the dining room when, beyond it, there came a sudden burst of greenery “the piazza,” sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses.

It was the same child - the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair. A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory, the juvenile breasts I had fondled one immortal day. And, as if I were the fairy-tale nurse of some little princess (lost, kidnaped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds), I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side. With awe and delight (the king crying for joy, the trumpets blaring, the nurse drunk) I saw again her lovely indrawn abdomen where my southbound mouth had briefly paused; and those puerile hips on which I had kissed the crenulated imprint left by the band of her shorts - that last mad immortal day behind the “Roches Roses.” The twenty-five years I had lived since then, tapered to a palpitating point, and vanished.

I find it most difficult to express with adequate force that flash, that shiver, that impact of passionate recognition. In the course of the sun-shot moment that my glance slithered over the kneeling child (her eyes blinking over those stern dark spectaclesthe little Herr Doktor who was to cure me of all my aches) while I passed by her in my adult disguise (a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood), the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty, and these I checked against the features of my dead bride. A little later, of course, she, this *nouvelle*, this Lolita, *my* Lolita, was to eclipse completely her prototype. All I want to stress is that my discovery of her was a fatal consequence of that “princedom by the sea” in my tortured past. Everything between the two events was but a series of gropings and blunders, and false rudiments of joy. Everything they shared made one of them.

I have no illusions, however. My judges will regard all this as a piece of mummery on the part of a madman with a gross liking for the *fruit vert*. *Au fond, a m’est bien égal.* All I now is that while the Haze woman and I went down the steps into the breathless garden, my knees were like reflections of knees in rippling water, and my lips were like sand, and -

“That was my Lo,” she said, “and these are my lilies.”

“Yes,” I said, “yes. They are beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.” (1.10)

At the end of my previous post, “Elizabeth Talbot, roses & lilies in Lolita,” I quoted an omitted stanza of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (Four: IV), in which women are compared to butterflies and lilies. But I forgot to say that in the preceding stanza of EO (Four: III: 3) Pushkin quotes his friend Delvig, “a vatic poet” who in his MS ode *To Fani* (1815) mentions *Temira, Dafna i Lileta* (Thamyra, Daphne, and Lileta):

Словами вещего поэта  
Сказать и мне позволено:  
Темира, Дафна и Лилета —  
Как сон забыты мной давно.  
Но есть одна меж их толпою...  
Я долго был пленён одною —  
Но был ли я любим, и кем,  
И где, и долго ли?.. зачем  
Вам это знать? не в этом дело!  
Что было, то прошло, то вздор;  
А дело в том, что с этих пор  
Во мне уж сердце охладело,  
Закрылось для любви оно,  
И всё в нём пусто и темно.

In the words of a vatic poet

I also am allowed to say:

Thamyra, Daphne, and Lileta

I’ve long forgotten, like a dream.”

But there is one among their throng…

By one I was enraptured long –

but was I loved, and loved by whom,

and where, and did it last? … Why should

you know? ‘Tis not the matter!

What *was* is past, is twaddle;

the matter is that ever since

the heart in me became already cold,

it closed for love,

and all within it is empty and dark.

In his EO Commentary (vol. II, p. 416) VN points out that “Lileta,” or “Lila,” was Batyushkov’s favorite shepherdess. In one of his epigrams Vladimir Solovyov uses the word *batyushki* (good gracious):

Дал вечность Лесбии своей  
Катулл, хоть к ней отнёсся строго...  
Катуллов нет у нас, ей-ей,  
Но Лесбий, батюшки, как много!

Catullus gave eternity to his Lesbia,

Despite his being hard on her…

Among us there is not a single Catullus,

But, good gracious, how many Lesbias!

The name Solovyov comes from *solovey* (nightingale). *Solovey* is Delvig’s romance set to music by Alyabyev. In his poem *Solovey i roza* (“The Nightingale and the Rose,” 1827) Pushkin mentions *vostochnyi solovey* (the nightingale of East) that sings over a rose. On the porch of The Enchanted Hunters (a hotel in Briceland where Humbert Humbert and Lolita spend their first night together) Clare Quilty tells Humbert Humbert that his child needs a lot of sleep, because “sleep is a rose, as the Persians say:”

I left the loud lobby and stood outside, on the white steps, looking at the hundreds of powdered bugs wheeling around the lamps in the soggy black night, full of ripple and stir. All I would do – all I would dare do – would amount to such a trifle… Suddenly I was aware that in the darkness next to me there was somebody sitting in a chair on the pillared porch. I could not really see him but what gave him away was the rasp of a screwing off, then a discreet gurgle, then the final note of a placid screwing on. I was about to move away when his voice addressed me:

“Where the devil did you get her?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said: the weather is getting better.”

“Seems so.”

“Who’s the lassie?”

“My daughter.”

“You lie she’s not.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said: July was hot. Where’s her mother?”

“Dead.”

“I see. Sorry. By the way, why don’t you two lunch with me tomorrow. That dreadful crowd will be gone by then.”

“We’ll be gone too. Good night.”

“Sorry. I’m pretty drunk. Good night. That child of yours needs a lot of sleep. Sleep is a rose, as the Persians say. Smoke?”

“Not now.”

He struck a light, but because he was drunk, or because the wind was, the flame illumined not him but another person, a very old man, one of those permanent guests of old hotels – and his white rocker. Nobody said anything and the darkness returned to its initial place. Then I heard the old-timer cough and deliver himself of some sepulchral mucus. (1.28)

In Russian, *son* means “sleep” and “dream.” According to Pushkin, Thamyra, Dafne, and Lileta, *kak son* (like a dream), he has long forgotten.

In an interview to the Briceland *Gazette* Quilty (the author of *Dark Age*) mentioned “a Persian bubble bird” and roses:

Wine, wine, wine, quipped the author of *Dark Age* who refused to be photographed, may suit a Persian bubble bird, but I say give me rain, rain, rain on the shingle roof for roses and inspiration every time. (2.26)

Вино, вино, вино, изрёк автор "Тёмного  Возраста", который не разрешил нашему фотографу снять его, подходит, может быть, персидскому буль-булю, но я всегда говорю, что дождь, дождь, дождь, стучащий по гонтовой крыше, лучший друг роз и вдохновения.

*Persidskomu bul’-bulyu* (a Persian bubble bird) in the Russian *Lolita* (1967) seems to hint not only at *bul’-bul’* (nightingale), but also at Persitski, the reporter in Ilf and Petrov’s *Dvenadtsat’ stulyev* (“The Twelve Chairs,” 1928).

*Kak khoroshi, kak svezhi byli rozy!* (“How beautiful, how fresh were the roses!), as Turgenev said (quoting Myatlev).

Alexey Sklyarenko