In VN’s novel *Ada* (1969) Van Veen (the narrator and main character) describes Kim Beauharnais’ album and mentions a picture of Ivan Durmanov, Aqua’s and Marina’s brother who died young and famous and who provides a vivisectional alibi:

A formal photograph, on a separate page: Adochka, pretty and impure in her flimsy, and Vanichka in gray-flannel suit, with slant-striped school tie, facing the *kimera* (chimera, camera) side by side, at attention, he with the shadow of a forced grin, she, expressionless. Both recalled the time (between the first tiny cross and a whole graveyard of kisses) and the occasion: it was ordered by Marina, who had it framed and set up in her bedroom next to a picture of her brother at twelve or fourteen clad in a *bayronka* (open shirt) and cupping a guinea pig in his gowpen (hollowed hands); the three looked like siblings, with the dead boy providing a vivisectional alibi. (2.7)

In his essay on Artsybashev in *Literaturnye eskizy* II (“Literary Sketches,” 1924) the critic Yuli Ayhenvald says that in Artsybashev’s writings any intellect could easily prove its absolute alibi:

Известно несложное мировоззрение Арцыбашева, его взгляд на женщину, его взгляд на мужчину. Как неожиданное открытие, как новейшую Америку, как неслыханную ересь, провозглашает писатель мысль о взаимном тяготении полов. В себе он видит Ньютона этого тяготения и доказывает его сценами изнасилования, которых, например, в рассказе "Женщина, стоящая посреди", насчитывается несколько. Признаком умственной смелости считает наш автор и такие рассуждения: "мать... другом, конечно, может быть, но какая же это заслуга - быть другом чьим бы то ни было, а тем более - своего собственного щенка!.. любая свинья - друг своего поросёнка"... Когда с отвагою передового гимназиста вам преподносят такого рода откровения, то становится неловко, и вы чувствуете, что всякий ум легко доказал бы здесь своё полное alibi.

As an example of revelations offered by Artsybashev with the courage of an advanced schoolboy Ayhenvald quotes the following reasoning: “the mother can be a friend, of course, but what merit is it to be anybody’s friend, particularly, a friend of one’s own pup!.. Any sow is a friend of her piglet.”

In a letter of May 26, 1921, to Korney Chukovski Alexander Blok compares himself to *porosyonok* (a piglet) and *matushka Rossiya* (mother Russia) to *chushka* (a sow) that ate her child:

Итак, «здравствуем и по сейчас» сказать уже нельзя: слопала-таки поганая, гугнивая, родимая матушка Россия, как чушка — своего поросёнка.

*Svinka* being a diminutive of *svin’ya* (pig, swine; hog; sow), a word used by Artsybashev, one is reminded of *morskaya svinka* (a guinea pig) that Ivan Durmanov holds in his gowpen. The rare word “gowpen” was used by Walter Scott in *The Black Dwarf* (1816):

A bag was suspended in the mill for David Ritchie’s benefit; and those who were carrying home a melder of meal, seldom failed to add a gowpen to the alms-bag of the deformed cripple.

Describing the Night of the Burning Barn (when he and Ada make love for the first time), Van mentions a child or dwarf:

‘Look, gipsies,’ she [Ada] whispered, pointing at three shadowy forms — two men, one with a ladder, and a child or dwarf — circumspectly moving across the gray lawn. They saw the candlelit window and decamped, the smaller one walking *à reculons* as if taking pictures. (1.19)

A child or dwarf who moves backwards as if taking pictures is Kim Beauharnais, the kitchen boy and photographer at Ardis whom Ada bribed to set the barn on fire. A formal photograph of Adochka and Vanichka was ordered by Marina to Kim. There is Kim in *kimera* (chimera, camera). The surname Beauharnais hints at Josephine Beauharnais, Napoleon’s first wife who is known on Antiterra (aka Demonia, Earth’s twin planet on which *Ada* is set) as Queen Josephine (1.5). In a letter of Sept. 24, 1820, to his brother Pushkin mentions Napoleon’s *khimericheskiy plan* (chimerical plan) of conquering India:

Должно надеяться, что эта завоеванная сторона, до сих пор не приносившая никакой существенной пользы России, скоро сблизит нас с персиянами безопасною торговлею, не будет нам преградою в будущих войнах — и, может быть, сбудется для нас химерический план Наполеона в рассуждении завоевания Индии.

Van blinds Kim Beauharnais for spying on him and Ada and attempting to blackmail Ada:

‘I would have killed myself too, had I found Rose wailing over your corpse. *"Secondes pensées sont les bonnes,"* as your other, white, *bonne* used to say in her pretty patois. As to the apron, you are quite right. And what *you* did not make out was that the artist had about finished a large picture of your meek little palazzo standing between its two giant guards. Perhaps for the cover of a magazine, which rejected that picture. But, you know, there’s one thing I regret,’ she added: ‘Your use of an alpenstock to release a brute’s fury — not yours, not my Van’s. I should never have told you about the Ladore policeman. You should never have taken him into your confidence, never connived with him to burn those files — and most of Kalugano’s pine forest. *Eto unizitel’no* (it is humiliating).’

‘Amends have been made,’ replied fat Van with a fat man’s chuckle. ‘I’m keeping Kim safe and snug in a nice Home for Disabled Professional People, where he gets from me loads of nicely brailled books on new processes in chromophotography.’

There are other possible forkings and continuations that occur to the dream-mind, but these will do. (2.11)

In VN’s novel *Kamera obskura* (“Laughter in the Dark,” 1933) Kretschmar loses his eyesight in a car accident. At the beginning of VN’s novel *tsvetnye otkrytki* (the colored post-cards) with Cheepy (a charming guinea pig created by Robert Horn) are mentioned:

Приблизительно в 1925 г. размножилось по всему свету милое, забавное существо - существо теперь уже почти забытое, но в своё время, т. е. в течение трёх-четырёх лет, бывшее вездесущим, от Аляски до Патагонии, от Маньчжурии до Новой Зеландии, от Лапландии до Мыса Доброй Надежды, словом, всюду, куда проникают цветные открытки, - существо, носившее симпатичное имя Cheepy.

Describing Eric Veen’s foramors (palatial brothels), Van (or rather Dr Lagosse, old Van’s doctor) mentions *Künstlerpostkarte* Nr. 6034:

Three Egyptian squaws, dutifully keeping in profile (long ebony eye, lovely snub, braided black mane, honey-hued faro frock, thin amber arms, Negro bangles, doughnut earring of gold bisected by a pleat of the mane, Red Indian hairband, ornamental bib), lovingly borrowed by Eric Veen from a reproduction of a Theban fresco (no doubt pretty banal in 1420 B.C.), printed in Germany *(Künstlerpostkarte* Nr. 6034, says cynical Dr Lagosse), prepared me by means of what parched Eric called ‘exquisite manipulations of certain nerves whose position and power are known only to a few ancient sexologists,’ accompanied by the no less exquisite application of certain ointments, not too specifically mentioned in the pornolore of Eric’s Orientalia, for receiving a scared little virgin, the descendant of an Irish king, as Eric was told in his last dream in Ex, Switzerland, by a master of funerary rather than fornicatory ceremonies. (2.3)

Three Egyptian squaws bring to mind “Ramses the Scotsman,” as Van (who draped himself in his tartan lap robe) calls himself in the Night of the Burning Barn chapter:

‘Can one see anything, oh, can one see?’ the dark-haired child kept repeating, and a hundred barns blazed in her amber-black eyes, as she beamed and peered in blissful curiosity. He relieved her of her candlestick, placing it near his own longer one on the window ledge. ‘You are naked, you are dreadfully indecent,’ she observed without looking and without any emphasis or reproof, whereupon he cloaked himself tighter, Ramses the Scotsman, as she knelt beside him. For a moment they both contemplated the romantic night piece framed in the window. He had started to stroke her, shivering, staring ahead, following with a blind man’s hand the dip of her spine through the batiste. (1.19)

Note “a blind man’s hand.” In German, *Künstler* (cf. *Künstlerpostkarte*) means “artist” and comes from *Kunst* (“art”). In his essay on Artsybashev Ayhenvald says that the author “Sanin” is a pornographer and does not belong to art:

Об этом думаешь, когда, например, предлагает нам Арцыбашев плоды своего литературного дерева. Названному беллетристу вообще обеспечена читательская аудитория, потому что порнографию все бранят, но многие интересуются ею. Правда, её ждут не от искусства, но творец "Санина" к искусству мало и принадлежит. Он описывает такие подробности, которые нужны совсем не художеству и которые Аполлон принимает от своих жрецов лишь тогда, когда они претворены в живую красоту и физиология сделалась в них психологией. Арцыбашев же терпит крушение всякий раз, когда покидает чисто-физиологическую область; да и в ней даются ему только рефлексы мозга не головного. Приемлемо всё, что необходимо; но вот в необходимости своих описаний наш автор далеко не убедил, и не видно, чтобы он сам был в ней убеждён. Их можно убавить, прибавить, - всё равно перед нами будут одни лишь человеческие организмы, но не художественная органичность.

Unlike Artsybashev, the author of *Kamera obskura*, *Lolita* (a novel that was brought out by Olympia Press, a publishing house that printed pornographic books) and *Ada* is a great artist.

According to Ayhenvald, Artsybashev is *bezalkogol’nyi pisatel’* (an alcohol-free writer):

В жизни тело имеет все права; на искусство же имеет право только душа тела. Между тем, Арцыбашев ограничивается телом тела. И, в связи с этим, он рисует его грубо, цинично, без той игры и остроты, какая пенится и сверкает, и колет, например, у Мопассана. В иглах и искрах шампанского вина приобретает свою красоту и эротический алкоголизм; но Арцыбашев, в сущности, - безалкогольный писатель. Сам не пьяный, и других, если и опьяняющий, то во всяком случае хмелем не тонким, он всегда теоретизирует, он умышляет, а не мыслит, и кустарно шьет свои произведения белыми нитками тенденций.

In a letter of Nov. 25, 1892, to Suvorin Chekhov compares his story *Palata No. 6* (“Ward Six,” 1892) to a lemonade and complains of the lack of alcohol in the works of modern artists:

Вас нетрудно понять, и Вы напрасно браните себя за то, что неясно выражаетесь. Вы горький пьяница, а я угостил Вас сладким лимонадом, и Вы, отдавая должное лимонаду, справедливо замечаете, что в нем нет спирта. В наших произведениях нет именно алкоголя, который бы пьянил и порабощал, и это Вы хорошо даете понять. Отчего нет? Оставляя в стороне «Палату № 6» и меня самого, будем говорить вообще, ибо это интересней. Будем говорить об общих причинах, коли Вам не скучно, и давайте захватим целую эпоху. Скажите по совести, кто из моих сверстников, т. е. людей в возрасте 30-45 лет дал миру хотя одну каплю алкоголя? Разве Короленко, Надсон и все нынешние драматурги не лимонад? Разве картины Репина или Шишкина кружили Вам голову? Мило, талантливо, Вы восхищаетесь и в то же время никак не можете забыть, что Вам хочется курить. Наука и техника переживают теперь великое время, для нашего же брата это время рыхлое, кислое, скучное, сами мы кислы и скучны, умеем рождать только гуттаперчевых мальчиков, и не видит этого только Стасов, которому природа дала редкую способность пьянеть даже от помоев. Причины тут не в глупости нашей, не в бездарности и не в наглости, как думает Буренин, а в болезни, которая для художника хуже сифилиса и полового истощения. 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.

It is easy to understand you, and there is no need for you to abuse yourself for obscurity of expression. You are a hard drinker, and I have regaled you with sweet lemonade, and you, after giving the lemonade its due, justly observe that there is no spirit in it. That is just what is lacking in our productions — the alcohol which could intoxicate and subjugate, and you state that very well. Why not? Putting aside “Ward No. 6” and myself, let us discuss the matter in general, for that is more interesting. Let ms discuss the general causes, if that won’t bore you, and let us include the whole age. Tell me honestly, who of my contemporaries — that is, men between thirty and forty-five — have given the world one single drop of alcohol? Are not Korolenko, Nadson, and all the playwrights of to-day, lemonade? Have Repin’s or Shishkin’s pictures turned your head? Charming, talented, you are enthusiastic; but at the same time you can’t forget that you want to smoke. Science and technical knowledge are passing through a great period now, but for our sort it is a flabby, stale, and dull time. We are stale and dull ourselves, we can only beget gutta-percha boys, and the only person who does not see that is Stasov, to whom nature has given a rare faculty for getting drunk on slops. The causes of this are not to be found in our stupidity, our lack of talent, or our insolence, as Burenin imagines, but in a disease which for the artist is worse than syphilis or sexual exhaustion. 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 Blok’s poem *Neznakomka* (“Incognita,” 1906) *p’yanitsy s glazami krolikov* (the drunks with the eyes of rabbits) cry out: “*In vino veritas!*” (in wine is truth). In *Ada* Dr Krolik is a local entomologist and Ada’s beloved teacher of natural history. In Kim Beauharnais’ album there is a photograph of Dr Krolik’s brother:

‘Well,’ said Van, when the mind took over again, ‘let’s go back to our defaced childhood. I’m anxious’ — (picking up the album from the bedside rug) — ‘to get rid of this burden. Ah, a new character, the inscription says: Dr Krolik.’

‘Wait a sec. It may be the best Vanishing Van but it’s terribly messy all the same. Okay. Yes, that’s my poor nature teacher.’

Knickerbockered, panama-hatted, lusting for his *babochka* (Russian for ‘lepidopteron’). A passion, a sickness. What could Diana know about *that* chase?

‘How curious — in the state Kim mounted him here, he looks much less furry and fat than I imagined. In fact, darling, he’s a big, strong, handsome old March Hare! Explain!’

‘There’s nothing to explain. I asked Kim one day to help me carry some boxes there and back, and here’s the visual proof. Besides, that’s not *my* Krolik but his brother, Karol, or Karapars, Krolik. A doctor of philosophy, born in Turkey.’

‘I love the way your eyes narrow when you tell a lie. The remote mirage in Effrontery Minor.’

‘I’m not lying!’ — (with lovely dignity): ‘He *is* a doctor of philosophy.’

‘Van *ist auch* one,’ murmured Van, sounding the last word as *‘wann.’* (2.9)

“Karol, or Karapars, Krolik” hints at Lewis Carroll. The White Rabbit (*Belyi Krolik*) and the March Hare are characters in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. As pointed out by Victor Fet, in Alice's Adventures the guinea pig is the animal that is being actively “suppressed.” In the Lewis Carroll book Alice mentions Ada:

`I'm sure I'm not Ada,' she said, `for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn't go in ringlets at all; and I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh! she knows such a very little! Besides, *she's* she, and I'm I, and--oh dear, how puzzling it all is! (chapter II: “The Pool of Tears”).

According to Ada, she never read *Palace in Wonderland*:

‘Playing croquet with you,’ said Van, ‘should be rather like using flamingoes and hedgehogs.’

‘Our reading lists do not match,’ replied Ada. ‘That *Palace in Wonderland* was to me the kind of book everybody so often promised me I would adore, that I developed an insurmountable prejudice toward it. Have you read any of Mlle Larivière’s stories? Well, you will. She thinks that in some former Hindooish state she was a boulevardier in Paris; and writes accordingly. We can *squirm* from here into the front hall by a secret passage, but I think we are supposed to go and look at the *grand chêne* which is really an elm.’ Did he like elms? Did he know Joyce’s poem about the two washerwomen? He did, indeed. Did he like it? He did. In fact he was beginning to like very much arbors and ardors and Adas. They rhymed. Should he mention it? (1.8)

Mlle Larivière is Lucette’s governess. On Antiterra Maupassant’s story *La Parure* (1884) is known as *La rivière de diamants* by Guillaume de Monparnasse (Mlle Larivière’s penname), a story that the author reads at the picnic on Ada’s twelfth birthday (1.13).

In his essay on Artsybashev Ayhenvald contrasts Artsybashev with Maupassant, a writer who intoxicates his readers (see a quote above). In Chekhov’s story *Bab’ye tsarstvo* (“A Woman’s Kingdom,” 1894) the lawyer Lysevich recommends Maupassant to Anna Akimovna and suggests that she should “drink” him. The name Lysevich comes from *lysyi*, “bald,” and brings to mind Judge Bald mentioned by Van in the “library” chapter of *Ada*. As he speaks of Judge Bald and his followers, Van mentions “suppression:”

But as Judge Bald pointed out already during the Albino Riots of 1835, practically all North American and Tartar agriculturists and animal farmers used inbreeding as a method of propagation that tended to preserve, and stimulate, stabilize and even create anew favorable characters in a race or strain unless practiced too rigidly. If practiced rigidly incest led to various forms of decline, to the production of cripples, weaklings, ‘muted mutates’ and, finally, to hopeless sterility. Now *that* smacked of ‘crime,’ and since nobody could be supposed to control judiciously orgies of indiscriminate inbreeding (somewhere in Tartary fifty generations of ever woolier and woolier sheep had recently ended abruptly in one hairless, five-legged, impotent little lamb — and the beheading of a number of farmers failed to resurrect the fat strain), it was perhaps better to ban ‘incestuous cohabitation’ altogether. Judge Bald and his followers disagreed, perceiving in ‘the deliberate suppression of a possible benefit for the sake of avoiding a probable evil’ the infringement of one of humanity’s main rights — that of enjoying the liberty of its evolution, a liberty no other creature had ever known. Unfortunately after the rumored misadventure of the Volga herds and herdsmen a much better documented *fait divers* happened in the U.S.A. at the height of the controversy. An American, a certain Ivan Ivanov of Yukonsk, described as an ‘habitually intoxicated laborer’ (‘a good definition,’ said Ada lightly, ‘of the true artist’), managed somehow to impregnate — in his sleep, it was claimed by him and his huge family — his five-year-old great-granddaughter, Maria Ivanov, and, then, five years later, also got Maria’s daughter, Daria, with child, in another fit of somnolence. Photographs of Maria, a ten-year old granny with little Daria and baby Varia crawling around her, appeared in all the newspapers, and all kinds of amusing puzzles were provided by the genealogical farce that the relationships between the numerous living — and not always clean-living — members of the Ivanov clan had become in angry Yukonsk. (1.21)

Albino = Albion. *Doch’ Al’biona* (“A Daughter of Albion,” 1883) is a story by Chekhov about the English governess of a Russian landowner’s children. The story’s characters include Ottsov, a marshal of nobility whose name brings to mind Turgenev’s novel *Ottsy i deti* (“Fathers and Sons,” 1862). In his essay on Artsybashev Ayhenvald mentions Bazarov, the main character in Turgenev’s novel:

Писатели-художники говорят нам, что геометрия жизни - совсем иная, гораздо более сложная. Вот Базаров теоретически отрицал любовь, а практически влюбился; всякий романтизм он признавал чепухой, а умер как романтик, и этот изследователь лягушек, этот нигилист и материалист, к своему смертному орду, точно ангела смерти, позвал Одинцову и попросил ее, чтобы она поцеловада его, дунула на угасающую лампу его жизни... Тургенев думал, что вся эта нежность и поэзия - к лицу Базарова, потому что от живого дыхания рушатся теоретическия построения; герои же Арцыбашева в своих карточных домиках выделывают схемы и рамки для жизни, и жизнь в эти рамки удобно и послушно укладывается.

In his essay on Turgenev (in “The Silhouettes of Russian Writers”) Ayhenvald regrets that Turgenev missed the chance to become a Russian Boccaccio:

Вообще, Тургенев, кажется, не имел мужества говорить о любви так, как ему хотелось; он выдумывал женщин, облекал их мнимой значительностью, неискренне идеализировал неидеальную Ирину; что он сведущ в "науке страсти нежной", этого он не скрыл, но ему бы следовало идти дальше и свободнее, и тогда в нём выступили бы скрываемые теперь черты русского Боккаччо.

It is VN (whom Ayhenvald called “our new Turgenev” after listening to *Mashen’ka*, VN’s first novel, in the author’s reading) who became the Russian Boccaccio.

Alexey Sklyarenko