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Multilingualism and Ranges of Tone in Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*

“... ‘Oh, I love her hands, Van, because they have the same *rodinka* (small birthmark), because the fingers are so long, because, in fact, they are Van’s in a reducing mirror, in tender diminutive, *v laskatel’noy forme*’ (the talk—as so often happened at emotional moments in the Veen-Zemski branch of that strange family, the noblest in Estotiland, the grandest on Antiterra—was speckled with Russian, an effect not too consistently reproduced in this chapter—the readers are restless tonight).”—*Ada*

The interpolation of other-language material into the primary language of discourse is a well-known phenomenon in the speech of bi- and multilinguals. Social scientists studying bilingualism have termed this practice “code-switching.” In literature, code-switching is potentially available to any writer who commands another language besides his own and is not restricted from its use by literary canon. Practitioners of code-switching in the West include Petronius and Cicero, medieval translators, Rabelais and Montaigne, Sterne, Tolstoy, Pound, Eliot, Joyce, e. e. cummings, Hemingway, and Anthony Burgess. The motives for literary code-switching are many—terminological precision, connotative nuance, citation and allusion, display of erudition, an illusion of verisimilitude, irony, and word play.¹

Code-switching is a prominent device in all of Nabokov’s English-language novels, with the exception of the first, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, where its application is much more limited. Indeed, I believe that code-switching develops into an important and complex aspect of Nabokov’s art in his English period, though germs of it are discernible in his Russian works as well.² In what follows I shall concentrate on just one of the several functions

1. The survey by Leonard Forster, *The Poet’s Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (Cambridge, 1970), does not contain specific mention of Nabokov.

2. Strong claims about the creative consequences of Nabokov’s multilingual experience are made by George Steiner, in “Extraterritorial,” *TriQuarterly*, 17 (Winter 1970): 123, who writes: “I have no hesitation in arguing that this poly-linguistic matrix is the determining fact of Nabokov’s life and art, or, as Field more aptly phrases it, ‘life in art.’ . . . the multi-lingual, cross-linguistic situation is both the matter and form of Nabokov’s work (the two are, no doubt, inseparable and *Pale Fire* is the parable of their fusion).”

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of Nabokov's code-switching: the range of expressive tone in narrative and dialogue achieved by the use of French and Russian. I shall further limit most of my discussion to the novel *Bend Sinister*. The reasons for this choice of text are several. One is that *Bend Sinister* contains, in approximately equal doses, all the types and uses of code-switching developed by Nabokov. In the other novels, with the exception of *Ada*, one or another of the functions of code-switching is strongly attenuated or absent. The choice between *Bend Sinister* and *Ada* was made in the belief that discretion is the better part of scholarly valor when looking for clear results—that is, because *Bend Sinister* is structurally and thematically less complex. It is my strong impression that the uses of code-switching in *Ada* are essentially the same as those in *Bend Sinister*. However, as regards the topic of this paper, it is also my impression that in none of Nabokov's other English novels is code-switching used to set expressive tone to the extent it is in *Bend Sinister*.³

In order to define the limits of my topic even more closely, I will place it in the context of the frequently remarked, seemingly contradictory tendencies in Nabokov's prose fiction—one endowing the narrative with an “illusion of ‘reality’” and the other threatening this illusion by displaying the authorial self, complete with tricks of the novelistic trade. The “consciousness-expanding” effect of this paradoxical literary technique is suggestively discussed by Alfred Appel, Jr., in his introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*.⁴ Although many of the instances of code-switching in *Bend Sinister* appear briefly in the services of “realism,” only to be parodied, I believe that the tone-setting function falls largely if not entirely within the realm of novelistic realism in its effect, though not in all aspects of its motivation, as I will suggest below.⁵

It is possible to distinguish the tone-setting passages in *Bend Sinister* from two other “realistic” uses of French and Russian in the novel. One of these is a literary convention that has had wide application. A familiar example (not congenial to Nabokov) is Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,

Steiner also raises the question of the nature of the multilingual imagination, “the possible existence of a private mixed idiom ‘beneath,’ ‘coming before’ the localization of different languages in the articulate brain. Like Borges . . . Nabokov is a writer who seems to me to work very near the intricate threshold of syntax; he experiences linguistic forms in a state of manifold potentiality and, moving across vernaculars, is able to keep words and phrases in a charged, unstable mode of vitality.” These conjectures suggestively resemble certain untested hypotheses of modern psycholinguistics, but are beyond the purview of this paper.

3. Nabokov's linguistic invention (i.e., his “hybridization of tongues”), and the ironic, parodic, and ludic aspects of his multilingualism, are the subject of a separate paper.

4. *The Annotated Lolita* (New York, 1970), pp. xix and lix–lx.

5. For a concise typology of realism see Roman Jakobson, “O khudozhestvennom realizme” (1921), *Readings in Russian Poetics*, Michigan Slavic Materials, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor, 1962), pp. 30–36; and *Texte der russischen Formalisten*, vol. 1, ed. Jurij Striedter (Munich, 1969), pp. 372–91.

where fragments of Spanish and distorted English are intended to remind the reader that the dialogue is not supposed to be in English. Another well-known example is Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, where the dialogue of characters who are members of the Russian aristocracy or Frenchmen is frequently and at length in French.⁶ In line with such a convention, in *Bend Sinister* Nabokov uses fragments of French to represent the speech of a Frenchman (the professor of French, Beuret). French also appears as a label of social class, for example, in the speech and thoughts of multilingual members of the intelligentsia (Krug, Ember). Other (petit-bourgeois) characters use French in a vulgar attempt to appear cultured (Pietro, the head waiter at the University Club; Quist, the gross and treacherous antique dealer; Konkordii Filadelfovich Kolokoliteishchikov, the clerk). This convention is openly parodied in chapter 4, where the author comments ironically on the crudely spelled temporary French accent he is giving to Beuret's English. The realism of the convention is also given the lie when one of Beuret's French pronouncements, a quotation from Baudelaire's "La servante au grand cœur . . .," turns out to be pregnant with allusion to Olga's death, which Beuret doesn't know about (p. 35/31).⁷ The invented language in *Bend Sinister*, referred to as "the vernacular" (p. 37/33), is also used in this manner, representing the speech of the inhabitants of the fictional country in which the novel is set. It might appear that the use of Russian as the language of the Maximovs in chapter 6 is likewise an indicator of nationality. However, Nabokov nowhere makes it *explicit* that the Maximovs are Russian. Neither are Krug or Ember (or Paduk, or the arresters, or the guards), who use Russian, otherwise identified as Russian nationals. Ostensibly they are natives of the fictional country of *Bend Sinister*, as are the Maximovs. I think this detail is important. If code-switching in these cases cannot, in the context of the novel, be taken simply as linguistic labeling of nationality or social status, a different explanation for its use must be sought.

Besides being used as a conventional label of national or class origin, French and Russian (as well as German and Latin) in *Bend Sinister* have another conventional function which is derived from the practice of versatile bilinguals in real life. On this level, French words, especially, are introduced by Nabokov in situations where one word in language X will do what only an entire phrase can do, sometimes less well, in language Y. So *portière* is

6. Cf. the treatment of bilingualism in *War and Peace* in chapter 3 of V. Vinogradov, "O iazyke Tolstogo," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 35–36 (1939): 117–220.

7. The page number before the slash refers to the Henry Holt and Company edition of *Bend Sinister* (1947); the number after the slash, to the Time Reading Program Special Edition (1964). The glosses set off by quotation marks are by the author of this paper; those enclosed in square brackets are Nabokov's own and are so punctuated in the text of the novel.

used for “door curtain,” *en laid* for something like “in an uglier version,” *voilette* for “small veil on a woman’s hat,” *même jeu* for “same manner, tone, business (stage direction),” (Flaubertian) *farceurs* for “brash and banal bourgeois social climbers like M. Homais in *Madame Bovary*,” *néant* for “nothingness (Sartre, Pascal),” and so forth. Some of these are international clichés like *enfant terrible*, *pièce de résistance*, and *modus vivendi*. Others are established terms—*en escalier* “verse lines broken up into parts and printed staircase fashion,” *mouches volantes* “*muscae volitantes* (medical),” *illusions hypnagogiques* “hypnagogic or praedormital images (medical and psychological).” Similarly the Russian word *dacha* is used for “summer house” and German *gemütlich* (that arch-example of lexical untranslatability, used by Nabokov in a highly ironic context) for “cosy, well-appointed, with a pleasant atmosphere.” The best example of this use is perhaps *shchekotiki*, a Russian childhood term of Nabokov’s for a special tinge of excitement, whose sense it takes a longish sentence to explain in English (see also *Ada*, p. 537, where it is glossed as “tickles”). This use of code-switching takes account of the pragmatic differences between naming and describing. Semantically there is a gain in precision of reference, owing to connotations that exist for lexical items in a language. Furthermore, naming appears to isolate and fix the referent as a discrete *sui generis* experience. Stylistically, naming, as opposed to periphrasis, promotes a succinctness which may be desirable. The very presence of code-switching itself also appears to impart a certain distinct stylistic tinge. Code-switching in this function is in accord with the importance Nabokov attaches to *le mot juste*, as is evident especially in his translations and commentaries thereto. The *mot juste* aspect is parodied in *Bend Sinister* when perfectly ordinary words are supplied with parenthetical invented glosses: “Krug played football [*vooter*], Paduk did not [*nekht*].”

I now turn to what is, to my mind, the most important of the “realistic” uses of code-switching in *Bend Sinister*, namely that French and Russian contribute to the establishing of tone in dialogue and narrative. In this tone-setting function, these two languages have contrasting domains, much as they did in prerevolutionary Russia, where for the upper social strata Russian was an intimate, familiar, or private language and French was a distancing, impersonalizing, or public language.⁸ Accordingly, in *Bend Sinister*, French

8. French-Russian diglossia (the use of two or more languages within the same society) in prerevolutionary (especially early nineteenth-century) Russia was limited to the upper classes—the nobility and bureaucratic aristocracy. As such, it had a dual function—social and expressive. The use of French was, per se, a label of social class. At this point, however, I am concerned with the in-group expressive functions of diglossia. Vinogradov describes Tolstoy’s view of French speech (in its use by Russian high society and by Frenchmen as well) as being artificial, contrived, vapid, and insincere.

is used when a character is presented as wanting to maintain social and emotional distance or emotional self-control. For example, he may be speaking disparagingly or ironically about something with which he disdains to show personal involvement. Or he may be under stress but does not wish to betray personal passion, anguish, or fear. Disparagement is intended when Krug tells Ember of the meeting of professors he is reluctantly going to attend (p. 32/29): "*Ce sont mes collègues et le vieux et tout le trimbala*" ("It's my colleagues and the old man [i.e., University President Azureus] and all that business"). The irony intended by Krug in the phrase meaning "as regards childhood memories" is evident from the context in the following passage (p. 49/44): "What I and the Toad hoard *en fait de souvenirs d'enfance* is the habit I had of sitting upon his face." Irony is also intended in the cliché (p. 16/14), "*C'est simple comme bonjour*, as Pietro would say" ("It's as simple as rolling off a log"), spoken by Krug to a soldier guarding the bridge in a surrealist burlesque sequence. It alludes to the social affectations of Pietro, the University Club waiter. Ironic disdain is expressed by Krug (p. 90/79)—"*Je resterai coi*" ("I shall remain silent")—in response to his friend Maximov's worried entreaty that Krug leave the country, suggesting that Krug will not be permitted to lecture or publish his work if he remains. (Krug himself translates the phrase for Maximov's benefit as "I shall lie *doggo*," an antiquated British phraseologism, probably cribbed by Nabokov from Heath's dictionary.) Some of the examples of this kind are ironic euphemisms, used when the speaker feels it is gauche or indelicate to speak of something directly, for example, about the Deity (especially by or to a disbeliever). In such a context "Kol" quotes a certain d'Abrikossov using *la grâce* for "grace" (p. 213/191).

An effort to decrease intimacy or emotional intensity is conveyed in the following instances. As he goes in to say good night to his little son, David, on the evening of Olga's death, Krug feels he can restrain his tears provided David does not ask about his mother: "*Pourvu qu'il ne pose pas la question atroce*" (p. 24/22). In the course of the scene of his arrest, while getting dressed in the presence of one of the arresters, Ember switches to French to address Krug (whereas in the preceding several pages of a long, friendly conversation between Ember and Krug, no French was used): "*'Et voilà . . . et me voici . . .'* he said with an infantile little whine in his voice. '*Un pauvre bonhomme qu'on traîne en prison. Oh, I don't want to go at all! Adam, isn't there anything that can be done? Think up something, please! Je suis souffrant, je suis en détresse. I shall confess I had been preparing a coup d'état*

By contrast, Russian speech in *War and Peace* is (in particular passages) presented as simple, direct, and honest (see "O iazyke Tolstogo," pp. 150–58).

if they start torturing me' ” (p. 130/113–14). (“And that’s it . . . and here I am. . . . A poor fellow being hauled off to prison. . . . I’m sick, I’m in misery.”) A further interpretation of this passage is that Ember is shown following the Russian upper-class practice of speaking French in the presence of servants and other low-status individuals so that he will not be understood by them. In a later episode the imprisoned Ember, while affirming his readiness to die, complains about the intolerable indignity of the prison toilet facilities as *la tragédie des cabinets* (this is an ironic euphemism as well) (p. 239/215).

Whereas French is an impersonalizing language, used primarily by the intelligentsia, Russian appears in the novel as the language of intimacy used with familiars and friends. Russian also breaks through at moments of strong emotion, when the opposite of irony or distancing is intended. An important authorial clue to this function of Russian appears in the first chapter. The farce of signing the pass has finally been brought to a happy conclusion, and the little grocer, who is enabled to join Krug in crossing the bridge, is much relieved (p. 17/15–16):

Krug and the grocer started walking across the bridge; at least Krug walked: his little companion expressed his delirious joy by running in circles around Krug, he ran in widening circles and imitated a railway engine: chug-chug, his elbows pressed to his ribs, his feet moving almost together, taking small firm staccato steps with knees slightly bent. Parody of a child—*my* child.

“*Stoy, chort* [stop, curse you],” cried Krug, for the first time that night using his real voice.

The exclamation uttered by Krug is colloquial Russian (literally, “stop, devil”). Prior to this utterance, Krug has thought and spoken in French and in the English of the narrative. We are now told that neither of these languages represents his “real voice.” The circumstance that provokes the angry outburst is significant. The scene is taking place very shortly after Krug has learned of his wife’s death. The peculiar behavior of the grocer strikes Krug as a parody of his little boy, David (whom we later see playing “train”), and this is intolerable for Krug in his distress. The Russian is provoked both by the sharpness of the emotional response to the associations produced by the grocer’s antics and the familial context of this emotion.⁹

A manifestation of Russian as the familiar or intimate language appears

9. Viewed from outside the novel, the grocer’s grotesque behavior is indeed a parody of a child, an authorial parody. This passage is one of the links between the author and his characters that Nabokov has so carefully placed throughout the novel. We know that Nabokov has elsewhere commented on Russian being *his* real voice. We also know that Nabokov has a son, Dmitry, who at the time of the writing of this novel was around eleven years old, had been David Krug’s age only a few years before, and, as a European child, very likely played “train.”

in chapter 6, set at the summer house (*dacha*) of Krug's friends the Maximovs. In addition to the surname, there are other details that indicate this to be a Russian household: the patronymic extension of Mrs. Maximov's name (Anna Petrovna), Maximov shaking Krug's hand as the latter comes in for breakfast, the coxcomb cozy on the coffeepot, Maximov's house jacket with toggles and the tasseled skullcap on his bald head, and his gesture of old-fashioned philistine refinement (pointing with his fifth finger, instead of rudely with the index). Along with his physical appearance, Maximov anticipates some of the moral qualities of Pnin—great honesty and a loyalty to friends. Mrs. Maximov is described as somewhat too sweet, but a brave and kind old lady. This elderly, apolitical couple is soon to head the long list of people who are detained and faced with liquidation by the Ekwilist regime for their association with the ideologically and morally intractable Krug.

Maximov addresses Krug in Russian ("How did you rest [*Kak pochivali*]?"), and it becomes apparent from the subsequent interpolations that the Maximovs habitually speak Russian with Krug. Maximov to Krug: "*Ia, sobstvenno, uzhe vchera khotel* [I should have broached the subject yesterday]." Krug to Maximov: "*Yer un dah* [stuff and nonsense]." Krug to Maximov: "No. I am not up to it [*ne do tovo*] for the moment. It is kind of you to worry about me [*obo mne*] the way you do, but really [*pravo*] you exaggerate the danger. I shall keep your suggestion in mind, of course [*koneshno*]. Let us not talk of it any more [*bol'she*]." Maximov to Krug: "Well, you know what I think at least [*po krainei mere*]." Later, Anna Petrovna, trying to push David in a wheelbarrow, exclaims, "*Ne mogoo!* [I cannot]." Only once is the reader fooled. Maximov speaks of Krug's style, his *begonia* (p. 90/80). The author glosses this as "brilliancy." The actual meaning of *begonia* in Russian is, of course, the same as in English. It may be that this word is supposed to be taken as an item of the invented language. (Indeed, the boundaries between real and invented language material in the novel are intentionally fluid.) However intended, this is an authorial shift into parody.

The next use of Russian appears in chapter 7, the Shakespearean episode between Krug and his friend Ember. It occurs as an isolated instance in the dialogue, as part of the "vernacular" which also includes German and invented words. But toward the middle of the chapter Russian enters prominently in the translation of two passages from *Hamlet*, preceded by two parodies of translations, one a German-Russian macaronic, the other French.¹⁰ At the end

10. I have been unable to compare these translations with Nabokov's translations from *Hamlet*, which were published in 1930 in the émigré newspaper *Rul'*. According to Field's bibliography, these included the soliloquy of act 3, scene 1, and the speech from act 4, scene 3, but not act 3, scene 2.

of the episode, when Ember is being arrested, we have a metalinguistic comment which underscores that the language that was used during the exchange between Krug and Ember throughout the chapter was not English; namely, Krug is presented as switching to English so that he may not be understood by the arresters: “‘This idiot here has come to arrest you,’ said Krug in English.” To this one of the arresters objects: “‘We are not in a classroom, Professor,’ he said, turning to Krug, ‘so please use language that everybody can understand.’” This is a pretty broad authorial joke, since English is precisely the language which every reader of the novel is sure to understand. At the conclusion of the chapter we learn that the name of Ember’s frightened valet is Ivan. Russian recurs in chapter 11—Krug’s interview with the dictator Paduk. Though Krug and Paduk are by no means friends, Krug calls him *dragotzennyi*, affecting an ironic familiarity not unwarranted in view of their former association as schoolboys. (The speech which Paduk has prepared for Krug to deliver is also in Russian—“The revolution has brought to the fore problems [*zadachi*] of unusual difficulty, of colossal importance, of world-wide scope [*mirovovo mashtaba*],” and so forth. This is not the familiar use of Russian; rather, it is an allusion to Soviet political oratory.)

The next signal that Russian is being used is in the conversation with David in chapter 12. David is admonished by his father not to step in any puddles. “And if I do it by chance [*nechaianno*]?” asks David. “I shall see to that. Come, *raduga moia* [my rainbow], give me your hand and let us be moving,” Krug replies. In the course of the conversation David asks whether his mother is dead or not. The exchange closes as Krug, moved by David’s childish delight and innocence, again addresses him “*Raduga moia!*” (*Raduga* is not a common Russian endearment. It is either a private term of Nabokov’s or a Krugian modification of the normal *radost’ moia*.) Extended use of Russian reappears in the bedtime exchange between Krug and David in chapter 16. David demands a bedtime story, and Krug refuses. David in turn sulks and refuses to be kissed good night: “‘Just as you like,’ said Krug, ‘but you’d better say good night [*pokoinoi nochi*] because I’m not going to come again.’” (These, the reader will learn shortly, are prophetic words.) David still resists. “‘*Pokoinoi nochi, dushka* [*animula*],’ said Krug from the threshold.”

This is the last time that Krug has the opportunity to address his son in a setting of tenderness and intimacy. When he is next shown using Russian, it is as invective at his brutal arresters, who restrain protesting David: “‘Leave him alone, *merzavtzy!*’ [a term of monstrous abuse] cried Krug” (p. 201/180). Finally, in chapter 17, as Krug sees the body of murdered David and runs amok, the narrator shifts into Russian journalese—for once using Russian to distance the reader and himself from the climax of Krug’s anguish (p. 224/

202). The last speaker to use Russian is the fawning Rufel, who affects an unwarranted familiarity in trying to persuade Krug, now mad, to accede to Paduk's wishes (pp. 235–37/212–13).

The use of Russian in *Bend Sinister* is not realistically motivated in the conventional sense. That is to say, the cited instances of Russian are not explicitly identified as Russian, nor is there any contextual information that would indicate that its users in the novel are to be thought of as being of Russian national origin. This is in contrast with the motivation in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (whose narrator, Sebastian's half-brother V, is Russian) and in *Pnin*. It is akin to the situation in *Pale Fire*, where Zemblans occasionally affect French and resort to Russian, and in *Ada*, one of whose "Antiterranean" settings is an imaginary Russia superimposed on an imaginary New England. In *Bend Sinister* the characters are all natives of "Padukgrad" or "Sinisterbad." Moreover, as was pointed out earlier, the Russian used in the text is not sharply delimited from the invented language of the novel. It is simply what the author chooses to use as the familiar, intimate, and affective vehicle of expression of the humane characters in the novel. In this one may perceive another authorial entry into the fictional world he has created, somewhat like the motif of the spatulate puddle which Nabokov claims as one of his visible links with his creation. I would suggest that the linguistic watermark betrays an even deeper involvement between author and work than the visual one does.

It is ironic that the familiar language of the victims of the novel is shared by those who contribute to their torment. The soldiers—the "simple people"—guarding Krug comment in vulgar slang, "*Podi galonishcha dva vysvital za-noch* [I fancy he must have drunk a couple of gallons during the night]" (p. 220/198), "*Yablochko, kuda-zh ty tak kotishsa* [little apple, whither are you rolling]?" (an allusion to a latter-day folk song)¹¹ (p. 224/201), and "*A po zhabram, milai, khochesh* [want me to hit you, friend]?" (p. 224/202). In the next chapter Paduk in disguise addresses Krug as *Drug* "friend" and affects all sorts of other Russisms. Particularly suggestive in this context is the linguistic link between the two arrest scenes—that of Ember and that of Krug and David. In the first, German is used by the arresters. One of the phrases, "*Heraus, Mensch, marsch*" ("Out, man, get going"), in this episode (p. 128/112) is echoed in Russian some seventy pages later: "*Marsh vniz* [Go downstairs]!" (p. 200/180). The choice of languages introduces an association between the two totalitarian regimes in existence at the time the novel was written.

11. The approximate text of this song, probably dating from the Civil War, is, "Ekh, iablochko,/Kudy kotishsia?/V vecheka popadesh!/Ne vorotish'sia" ("Hey, little apple, whither are you rolling? If the *cheka* gets you, you won't return").

The Russian trappings are displayed in other ways as well—in jokes, as parts of the invented language, and in the names. As other critics and Nabokov himself have pointed out, the main protagonist's name, Krug, means "circle." (It is not a typical Russian name. Another lexical connection, with German *Krug*, "cup, mug," is not mentioned by Nabokov.) The name of his wife, who is made to play an important posthumous part in establishing the quality of Krug's memory, is Olga. The brother and sister who run the delightful nursery school attended by David are the Zerkalskys, Klara and Miron (cf. Russian *zerkalo*, "mirror"). Realistic motivation is not maintained here either, for not all of those who use Russian have Russian names. Ember, who is able to appreciate the Baconian joke, *Grudinka*, in chapter 7 and to translate *Hamlet* into Russian, has a name which means "man" in Hungarian. The Toad's toady, Rufel, owes his name to an obscene five-verse epigram by Catullus (poem 59, "Bononiensis Rufa Rifulum fellat").

Some well-camouflaged Russian is present on at least three occasions where no actual Russian word is quoted. One is to be found in the first Ember episode (p. 31/28):

The unfinished translation of his favourite line in Shakespeare's greatest play—

follow the perttaunt jauncing 'neath the
rack with her pale skeins-mate.

crept up tentatively but it would not scan because in his native tongue "rack" was anapaestic.

A Russian equivalent for "rack," suitably anapestic, is *kolesó*. (Note again a potential authorial self-reference. "His favourite line" presumably refers to Ember, but Russian is Nabokov's native tongue as well.) Another instance of crypto-Russian appears in the account of the midnight meeting called by University President Azureus (chapter 3), where Krug is wearing "a badly creased dark suit and a bow tie, always the same, hyssop violet with (pure white in the type, here Isabella) interneural macules and a crippled left hindwing" (p. 46/41). The description of the bow tie as a butterfly is mediated by the Russian word for "bow tie," *babochka* (not mentioned in the text), which is also the word for "butterfly." In the sequence with Maximov the author presents a simile which can only be appreciated after translating part of the text into Russian. The English passage in question reads as follows:

No subtlety of thought tainted his [Maximov's] honesty, he was as reliable as iron and oak, and when Krug mentioned once that the word "loyalty" phonetically and visually reminded him of *a golden fork lying in the sun on a smooth spread of pale yellow silk*, Maximov replied somewhat stiffly that to *him* loyalty was limited to its dictionary denotation. (p. 86/76)

The phrase I have italicized in the excerpt, paraphrased into Russian, yields *zolataia vilka (lezháshchaia) na sólnce na gládkom odeiále (pokryvale) iz blédno (svétlo) zhóltovo shólka*. The phonetic resemblance to the English word "loyalty" (the Russian *loialnost'* is a loanword from English) is obvious. These instances of Russian cannot readily be counted among those contributing to a "realistic" effect. However, the reader who recognizes the underlying Russian may well feel a special rapport with the author, and can temporarily fancy himself, as it were, the author's intimate.

As the epigraph to this article shows, Nabokov acknowledges the affective motivation of (some) of his Russian interpolations and has continued this practice in subsequent novels. Affective Russian appears in *Pnin* (for example, in the scene between Pnin and his former wife, Liza), but the occurrences are isolated. In *Ada* it plays a somewhat more important role, but my impression is that although the familial and intimate use of Russian is fairly frequent, affective Russian is not as crucial as in *Bend Sinister*. Nabokov's comment about "restless" readers is more than a casual jest. One can suppose that code-switching would tend to have the effect of disrupting textual continuity, and that for monolingual readers this would serve to lower the level of emotional response to the passages in question. It is further likely that the full pathos of several key passages in *Bend Sinister* will be missed even by readers who know a substantial amount of classroom Russian.

The lack of access to a normal range of readers can be an acute personal and artistic problem for an émigré writer. A tragic case in point among Russian émigrés was Marina Tsvetaeva. Nabokov's change to English as his literary medium, presumably motivated in part by a desire for a less limited readership, eventuated in a new, probably unforeseen, reader problem. In the process of developing as a writer in English, Nabokov has evolved a style that incorporates the cognitive and expressive riches and delights of a versatile multilingual. Among other things, the author finds himself with the capability of varying the expressive nuances of his text by his choice of linguistic vehicle. Perhaps the biggest pay-off is the possibility of enhancing the poignancy of particular passages by lending to a character or narrator the use of his (the author's) emotional language par excellence—his "mother" tongue, Russian.¹²

12. Relatively little has been done in the study of bilingualism that bears on the question of language and affect, although it seems to be a commonplace that "one can be angrier or sadder in one's mother tongue." See Susan Ervin-Tripp, "Structure and Process of Language Acquisition," *Report of the Twenty-first Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies: Bilingualism and Language Contact* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1970), pp. 331-32. Clinical psychiatric evidence suggests that traumatic past experiences and personality conflict may be evoked in only one of a (coordinate) bilingual's languages. See A. Richard Diebold, Jr., "The Consequences of Early Bilingualism in Cognitive Development and Personality Formation," in Edward Norbeck et al., eds., *The Study of Personality: An Interdisciplinary Appraisal* (New

My own evaluation of such passages in Nabokov is that they are exceedingly effective, though one may ask whether the cost of using this superb expressive resource is not disproportionately high. It may be that an awareness of the costs in readership led Nabokov to moderate the affective use of Russian in his later novels.

York, 1968), p. 237. John Gumperz documents cases of switching into Spanish by English-Spanish bilinguals under conditions of increased emotional arousal. See his "Verbal Strategies in Multilingual Communication," *Report of the Twenty-first Annual Round Table Meeting*, pp. 129–47. Nabokov's involvement with Russian as a writer of course goes well beyond the ordinary speaker's affective associations (see, for example, the last paragraph of his 1956 afterword to *Lolita*). But the particular affective uses of Russian in *Bend Sinister* may reflect a common aspect of linguistic differentiation of bilinguals.