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John Baldessari, What is Painting*, 1958*
oil on canvas, MoMA, New York

This canvas by John Baldessari illustrates the artist's attempt at tackling the frontier between language and image: "art is a creation for the eye and can only be hinted at with words." He encapsulates here the paradox and limitation of speaking or writing about art: indeed, unlike literary criticism, art discourse cannot use the materials of

the medium that it discusses. Yet, when literary discourse appropriates paintings and changes their wooden frames for frames of words, the very limits of image, in words or in colours, are themselves reframed.

My purpose is to look at, or read, those images framed in words that exchange their material visibility for readability¾a visibility of the imaginary. My paper will focus upon Nabokov's use of pictorial references when depicting objects of desire, and especially the technique of ekphrasis. Let me define further what I mean by "ekphrasis" and by "objects of desire" in the nabokovian context.

Ekphrasis can be seen as the paradigm for a text in which another semiotic code is introduced. Murray Krieger defines it as "the name of a literary genre, or at least *topos*, that attempts to imitate in words an object of the plastic arts," and recalls: "*Ekphrasis*, under this definition, clearly presupposes that one art, poetry, is defining its mission through its dependence on the mission of another art—painting, sculpture, or others. From the first, the study of ekphrasis, resting on that dependence, seemed to me the most extreme . . . way to put into question the pictorial limits of the function of words in poetry" (6). Briefly stated, an ekphrasis is the literary description of a work of art within a piece of fiction.

In his descriptions, Nabokov frequently blends image and text. His prose teems with references to visual art: painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, and even advertising. As we will see, these references are often made in the ekphrastic mode, especially when Nabokov tries to describe objects of desire. A close study of the descriptive technique used for girls —or maidens as he calls them—shows that, in his fiction, he repeatedly resorts to the detour of a pictorial referent to describe the nubile bodies of young girls. Indeed those figures that are between childhood and womanhood persistently escape depiction: nabokovian narrators continually complain that they cannot portray their beauty. In Nabokov's fictive world, girls, among whom the famous nymphet Lolita is a special type, resist representation because their metamorphic nature, reflected in their transforming bodies, is not easily captured. Ambivalence (child/woman, angel/demon, desired/forbidden, innocent/seductive, ephemeral/eternal) is probably the key word to characterize these figures, and hence, using an overdetermined image (i.e. the image in words of an image in colours), nabokovian narrators may provide a more stable picture of these evanescent creatures.

Nabokov claimed he was "born a painter" (*Strong Opinions* 17),[1] and even though he abandoned that first vocation to turn to writing and entomology,[2] he gave a prominent role to painting in his literary works. Critic Gavriel Shapiro explains: "Even though in time Nabokov came to realise that his vocation was literature, his keen sense of vision and colour, and his great interest in and vast knowledge of the fine arts, are all manifest in his belles-lettres" (241). I would like to focus on Nabokov's descriptions, because it seems to me that descriptions provide the ideal place for text and image to meet, as they are the prototype for textual images. Descriptions

are a sort of oxymoron drawing together two semiotic modes, the scriptural and the pictorial. This recalls both Alberti and Barthes, who saw painting and writing in the same framing terms: Barthes explained that "every literary description is a *view*. It is as if the enunciator, before describing, had stopped at the window, not only to see well, but also to found what he/she sees through the frame itself: the frame produces the show."[3] Similarly, Leo Alberti, in his painting principles, saw painting as opening a window onto the world.

Regarding the *Ut pictura poesis*[4] doctrine, Nabokov is clearly more on the side of *poesis* than of *pictura*: for instance, he does not include pictures in his text. Yet, his writing very often stands at the crossroads where the two types of representation intersect. As Lee Rensselaer explains, the contemporary understanding of *Ut pictura poesis* is a distortion of the original ideas of Aristotle and Horatius (7-19). This misinterpretation has led both to the misguided comparison of poetry and painting over the centuries, and a tendency to award the upper hand to either one or the other. Despite the infinite and irreducible relation that binds the two codes, poetry and painting have never stopped inviting each other, looking for the key to representation in the "sister art," an expression I borrow from Jean Hagsträm.

The paradoxical conjunction of the two representational modes is one of the main traits of Nabokov's portraits of young ladies. He chooses a paradoxical form to duplicate the ambivalent nature of the subject. Indeed referring to pre-existing aesthetic objects betrays the narrators' intention to fix the heroines' beauty within a frame, even as they repeatedly complain about their failure at describing them.

In *Swann's Way*, Proust compares Odette to Zephora, painted by Botticelli in the Sistine Chapel [Figure 1]. Similarly, Humbert Humbert compares Lolita to the famous Venus painted by the same artist:[5] "I definitely realised . . . how much she looked—had always looked—like Botticelli's russet Venus—the same soft nose, the same blurred beauty" (*Lo* 270).

Figure 1. Sandro Botticelli. The Birth of Venus*, circa 1483-1485*
tempera on canvas, detail
Courtesy Uffizi Museum, Florence

Resemblance is here expressed through duplication, via the anaphora and the alliterations in [s] and [b]. Humbert repeatedly deplores his inability at "fixing the perilous magic of nymphets" (*Lo* 134), so he resorts to a pictorial reference, which gives him the delusion that he can conjure up and master the metamorphic image of the nymphet within the frame of a painting.

Indeed, even if, traditionally, painting conjures up the visual better than writing, both arts are founded on the same paradox: when you represent, that which is represented is not there. Liliane Louvel explains that representing an object also implies "to feel, at the same time, that it irremediably escapes" (23).[6] Any representation works *in absentia*. Just as the nabokovian young girl is not present when she is evoked in the text: her image, her re-presentation, is always reconstructed*a posteriori* by memory. The painter Louis Marin elegantly said that images are a way to "*presentify* absence" (11).[7] In the case of pictorial references, we find that absence itself is embedded, as Nabokov refers to a painting that is not reproduced on the page, and that itself summons the image of an absent girl.

Vadim, the narrator of *Look at the Harlequins!*, is a writer who stands for a *manqué* Nabokov. In order to describe the beauty of his daughter, whose name is, precisely, Bel, he uses a pictorial reference as a palliative to the failure of words:

> The general type and bone structure of her pubescent radiance cannot be treated, however, with a crack player's brio and chalk-biting serve. I am reduced—a sad confession!—to something I have also used before, and even in this book—the well-known method of degrading one species of art by appealing to another. I am thinking of Serov's *Five-petaled Lilac*, oil, which depicts a tawny-haired girl of twelve or so sitting at a sun-flecked table and manipulating a raceme of lilac in search of that lucky token. (*LATH!* 688)

Vadim does not establish a dialogue or an interaction between the two arts, but lets one dominate the other through a process of degradation. Moreover, he explains that the young girl who modeled for Serov's painting was one of his cousins, Ada Bredow, with whom he used to flirt at the time the canvas was painted (*LATH!* 688-689). Consequently, the canvas does not provide an opening to the realm of art, but rather closes the perspective by going back to Vadim's "reality", and his desire. Nevertheless, fiction retaliates against the narrator, as the painting he evokes *does not exist*: this painting, which Vadim sees as an easy descriptive trick to evoke Bel's indescribable beauty was in fact invented by Nabokov, and was probably inspired by two canvases by Serov, *Maiden with Peaches*[8] and *Portrait of Adelaida Simonovich*.***[9]*** One should add that Valentin Serov (1865-1911) was a renowned Russian painter, and that the Nabokov family owned one of his paintings. The young ladies in both paintings are reading—and girl in the second painting is named Ada. The name itself is a hint at Nabokov's novel *Ada*, a work in which intertextual allusions are as overwhelming as pictorial references. Fiction and reality thus subtly merge. Moreover, this pictorial reference in *Look at the Harlequins!* is *in absentia* from many points of view. Firstly, the canvas is completely *in absentia*, since it does not even exist. Secondly, in the story, Bel has escaped from her father's house, and Vadim is trying to re-present her beauty, to make her beauty present again despite her absence. Finally, the canvas mentioned by the narrator is also absent from the text—it is not reproduced in it—and it pictures a maiden who is also absent—the narrator's lost cousin. Many absent presences are thus embedded here thanks to the ekphrasis. This shows that, for Nabokov, such a device is more than a means of conjuring up an absent presence.

Indeed, texts that cross language and image are not only haunted by an absence, but are also underlied by a further paradox. As I stated in the introduction, ekphrasis can be seen as the paradigm for texts in which another semiotic code is introduced. As such, it epitomises the tension born from the juxtaposition of two modes of representation, one of linear perception that develops through time, the other of direct perception, as if abstracted from temporality. As narration describes, it seems to acquire the temporal suspension of images, without being able to shed fully its linear nature. Gérard Genette explains: "descriptions have to modulate in temporal succession the representation of objects that are simultaneous and juxtaposed in space: narrative language would thus be distinguished because of the temporal coincidence it achieves with its object—a coincidence of which descriptive language would be irremediably deprived" (60).[10] The "would be" Genette uses is significant:

the effect of temporal suspension in descriptions is but an illusion, for descriptions are inherently undermined by the conflict between their stable appearance (description of a scene or a person) and their dynamic nature (they develop through unfolding sentences). Any description quivers from its uncomfortable position between stasis and movement. The representation of maidens, repeatedly marked by the desire to stop the metamorphosis of their bodies—"Never grow up," implores Humbert (*Lo*, 21)—thus aptly duplicates this tension.

Similarly, ekphrasis, like all textual images, is between "the ideal poles of absolute kinesis and absolute stasis," as Christopher Collins states (127). Nabokov's short story "La Veneziana" offers the most spectacular example of ekphrasis in his work. The scene takes place in the country house of a colonel, who also is an art collector. The colonel has invited his friend McGore to stay. The latter is an art critic who just sold a superb painting by Sebastiano Luciani del Piombo to him. McGore has come with his young wife, Maureen, who looks strikingly like the maiden of the portrait, a possession in which the colonel takes great pride. Frank, a painter and the colonel's son, is also there, and the reader soon gathers that some adulterous relationship binds Maureen to the young man. The short story ends as the two lovers elope, and the bad trick played on the colonel by Frank and McGore is revealed: the painting is a fake, forged by Frank for whom Maureen modeled.

For a few pages, the story slides into the fantastic, as Simpson, Frank's young friend, manages to penetrate the two-dimensional world of the fascinating painting. So doing he realises one of Nabokov's oldest dreams, when as a child sick in bed Nabokov's imagination would wander into the meandering paths of the picture hanging on his bedroom wall. Through the ekphrastic technique, which introduces the temporal and linear nature of writing into painting, Nabokov's text initiates a similar movement from two to three dimensions.

Moreover, the Del Piombo described in "La Veneziana" offers an idealised image of female beauty, typical of the Renaissance, which in fact traverses centuries, since the model is Maureen, a maiden of our present time. This fake Del Piombo is an interesting variation on the theme of forgery,[11] as the painting revealed to be a fake in the fictional world does exist in reality—its actual title is "Giovana Romana, La Dorotea." Here we have a reversed reflection of the painting by Serov mentioned by Vadim, since the latter claimed an invented canvas to be real. Such a reversal recalls how fascinated Nabokov was by the relations between truth and lies, between the original and the imitation, from an artistic as well as scientific point of view.[12]

"La Veneziana" offers a typical illustration of Nabokov's use of the ekphrastic *topos*. On the surface, the ekphrasis is used to force the confrontation of art and reality, and, more importantly, to foreground the concept of representation—in this case, the representation of a beautiful maiden. The story is structured according to the parallels drawn between Maureen and the Renaissance painting; descriptions of the

canvas and the girl follow and echo each other throughout the pages, until the two images finally merge in the revelation of the trick: it is no wonder that the girl on the painting resembles Maureen, for she modeled for it.

From the start, the picture is announced as a *paragon* of beauty: the colonel tells Simpson "Prepare to be showered with beauty" (*Stories* 93) . The permanent confusion that is maintained as to the nature of that beauty (the canvas itself or the maiden it depicts) is central to the story, as it is a work that questions beauty in its relationship to art and reality. The ekphrastic passage both provides a description of Del Piombo's (real) painting and a portrait in words of the character of Maureen, whose likeness to the painting is noticed and established right after the first evocation of the picture:

> Luciani had portrayed the Venetian beauty in half-profile, standing against a warm, black background. Rose-tinted cloth revealed her prominent, dark-hued neck, with extraordinary tender folds beneath the ear, and the gray lynx fur with which her cherry-red mantlet was trimmed was slipping off her left shoulder. With the elongated fingers of her right hand spread in pairs, she seemed to have been on the point of adjusting the falling fur but to have frozen motionless, her hazel, uniformly dark eyes gazing fixedly, languidly from the canvas. Her left hand, with white ripples of cambric encircling the wrist, was holding a basket of yellow fruit; the narrow crown of her headdress glowed atop her dark-chestnut hair. On the left the black was interrupted by a large-angled opening straight into the twilight air and the bluish-green chasm of the cloudy evening.
>
> . . . Tilting his head slightly to one side and blushing instantly, [Simpson] said, "God, how she resembles¾"
>
> "My wife," finished McGore in a bored voice . . . (*Stories* 94)

Nabokov's description of the Del Piombo perfectly respects the rules of the ekphrastic genre: isolated in its paragraph, it can almost be detached from the rest of the story (*ek* means "out of," "apart from" in Greek). It rehearses each element of the painting in turn, pauses on details, and provides the exact colour nuances—a nabokovian chromatic characteristic. The *ekphrasis* also underscores the paradoxical conjunction of stasis and movement in the canvas, in which the gesture of the maiden holding the fur sliding down her shoulder seems to have been petrified. The recurrence of verbs in the gerund form throughout the description reflects this paradox. The fur, which introduces movement, life, or even narrative into the image, is also the element Nabokov uses to draw the parallels between Maureen and the picture. She wears a similar fur at dinner, as she is sitting next to Simpson:

> he was sitting next to her, sensing the warmth of her cheek and of her shoulder, from which, as in the painting, the gray fur was slipping, and . . . she seemed to pull it up . . . , extending and twining her slender, elongated fingers . (*Stories*99)

We can notice many echoes between the two portraits: –ing verbs follow each other, allowing the text to prolong the sensations (especially the perception of warmth and texture), just as the description of the canvas had sensually dwelled upon the folds of the girl's neck and upon the languidly sliding fur—a sliding move that seems to duplicate the shift from art to reality. In addition, the picture serves to reveal Maureen's beauty to Simpson: "the remarkable thing was that the Veneziana's face . . . clarified for him the real beauty of that other Maureen who kept laughing, narrowing her eyes, shifting her pupils in a constant struggle with the sunlight" (*Stories* 95). Maureen is characterised by movement and instability: this is a clear indication that she is more an incarnated beauty, a beauty in motion, than an abstract, ideal one. Paradoxically, Simpson is more attracted by the beauty on the canvas than by Maureen, even if it is the latter's warmth that seems to have been transferred to the painted figure when he enters the canvas:[13]

> The Venetian girl stood half-facing him, alive and three-dimensional. Her dark eyes gazed into his without the sparkle, the rosy fabric of her blouse set off with an unhabitual warmth the dark-hued beauty of her neck and the delicate creases under her ear. A gently mocking smile was frozen at the right corner of her expectantly joined lips. Her long fingers, spread in twos, stretched toward her shoulder, from which the fur and velvet were about to fall. (*Stories* 110)

By passing into three dimensions Nabokov again underlines the same sensual details, and adds to these the detail of the lips, mockingly smiling. This smile foretells the end of Simpson's delusion: after having seen the girl move and hand a lemon to him, he realises he is a prisoner of the two-dimensional *trompe-l'oeil*; he can feel his body turning into paint and drying on the canvas surface, thus severing him for ever from the "live, terrestrial air" (*Stories* 111). Ekphrasis is used here to enable Nabokov to dwell upon the false nature of images on several levels. At the level of the plot, he conveys this by the various deceptions through which the characters are taken: McGore is betrayed by his wife, the Colonel is deceived by his son and McGore, and Simpson is lured by the painting. At an authorial level, the foregrounding of the fallacious nature of images is achieved through the deceptive nature of the story, since the fake Del Piombo forged by Frank is an authentic Renaissance painting, whose title has been altered.

Moreover, one can observe here what Roland Barthes defines as "the idea of an aesthetic purpose to language" (84),[14] as opposed to a language dedicated to realism. Realism is indeed parodied in Nabokov's use of ekphrasis, when he presents fake paintings as real ones, and *vice versa*. At the level of the story itself, the ekphrastic technique thus permits Nabokov to underline the deceptive nature of images, but on a metatextual or meta-artistic level[15] the vertigo of reality and semblance that dominates nabokovian ekphrases enables the writer to underline the tensions between the real and the fictional, and to remind us of how relative truth is in creation. By describing paintings that do not exist or by turning real canvases into forged works, Nabokov creates a dizzying spiral of true and false that invites the

reader to take part in the construction of the image. Indeed, the reader's role in deciphering the ekphrasis should be underscored: it is he who has to perceive the *trompe-l'œil* in words, navigate between text and image, and replace the canvases within their correct frames of reality or fiction.

Resorting to ekphrasis enables the writer to foreground the act of creation itself: it provides a representation designated as a representation, especially when the work described does not exist, as is the case in the majority of Nabokov's uses of the technique. But ekphrases also produce what Liliane Louvel calls an "overcoding," which makes the ekphrastic passage a place where meaning is reinforced, or even a place of "aesthetic saturation" (78).[16] Instead of seeing Nabokov's use of ekphrasis in terms of saturation, I see those passages as texts in which the part of the signifier is strengthened: for me, it is the working on the signifier that constitutes the very medium for image and word cross-breeding.

John Hollander, in his book entitled *The Gazer's Spirit*, distinguished "notional ecphrases," such as the fake Serov, from "actual ecphrases" (4),[17] which refer to real paintings. The short story "La Veneziana" offers an illustration of "actual ecphrasis," but a paradoxical one, as the very existence of such a Renaissance painting is denied and its title has been changed. Nabokov's famous novel *Ada or Ardor, A Family Chronicle*, offers a gallery of fake canvases, notably an invented erotic Caravaggio (*Ada* 113-114), and a Parmigianino sketch that pleases Demon Veen, a character who "collects old masters and young mistresses" (*Ada* 10), because of its likeness with his lover, the young actress Marina.

Brian Boyd, one of the leading specialists on Nabokov, identified the possible sources of that sketch ("Annotations" 26). He saw it as a mix of three works by Parmigianino: the two paintings of Adam and Eve in the Santa Maria della Steccata church in Parma [Figures 2 and 3], and a preparatory sketch for this very Adam, whose posture is exactly identical to that described in the novel. The sketch is kept by the Uffizi Museum, but I did not manage to find a copy of it.

Figure 2. Parmigianino. *Eve*, circa 1531-1539
Santa Maria della Steccata Church, Parma

Courtesy Santa Maria della Steccata Church

Figure 3. Parmigianino. Adam*, circa 1531-1539*
Santa Maria della Steccata Church, Parma
Courtesy Santa Maria della Steccata Church

The following ekphrastic description provides a typical example of Nabokov's treatment of nudity:

> It showed a naked girl with a peach-like apple cupped in her half-raised hand sitting sideways on a convolvulus-garlanded support, and had for its discoverer the additional appeal of recalling Marina when, rung out of a hotel bathroom by the phone, and perched on the arm of a chair, she muffled the receiver while asking her lover something that he could not make out because the bath's voice drowned her whisper. (*Ada* 15)

Nudity is mentioned, but left undescribed: details of the setting are given, the body's posture is defined, but the maiden's flesh is not described. Thus, the ekphrastic description of Parmigianino's sketch leaves the undressed body of the young girl in the blanks between the words, outside the descriptive frame. The reader has to wait

for the Baron D'Onsky to lay his lustful eyes on the sketch for the most troubling parts of the body to be evoked:

> D'Onsky had the reputation of not showing one sign of esthetic emotion in the presence of the loveliest masterpiece; this time, nonetheless, he laid his magnifier aside as he would a mask, and allowed his undisguised gaze to caress the velvety apple and the nude's dimpled and mossed parts with a smile of bemused pleasure. (*Ada* 15)

The verb "caress", which Nabokov preferred to "linger on," as the manuscripts show,[18] recalls the sensual nature of any contemplation of a work of art—what Barthes termed the haptic function of gaze. In addition, in the last quote, the image is literally *incarnated* in the metonymies—"dimpled and mossed parts"—which remind the Baron of similarly fleshy charms in Marina. Indeed, she betrayed Demon with the Baron, who in turn started a rumour about the sketch and its resemblance with Marina. Hence, the work of art becomes a plot prop which confirms Demon's doubts; Marina's infidelity is revealed to him when a lady comments her entrance: "Curious how that appalling actress resembles 'Eve on the Clepsydrophone' in Parmigianino's famous picture" (*Ada* 16). It is as if Parmigianino's actual work loses its identity once likened to Marina, as if it has been contaminated by the fictive reality of the novel.

The fact that Nabokov developed several strategies to affiliate his maidens to visual works of art seems to indicate that beauty is not a disincarnated ideal for the author, but that the writer expects the reader to experience beauty in a sensual and sensorial encounter. Synaesthesia has not yet been mentioned in this paper, but it is an essential aspect of Nabokov's descriptions, and especially of his ekphrastic descriptions. Himself a synaesthete, Nabokov loved to appeal to all senses in his evocations. That is why Simpson, in "La Veneziana," falls victim to his desire of reaching an ideal beauty (Shrayer 47), which by nature cannot be attained—it is "the utterly unattainable beauty" (*Stories* 97). As for McGore, who confesses to be in love with Renaissance Madonnas (101), he is similarly punished: due to his preference for beauties on canvases over his young and charming wife, she elopes with the painter of the story, the one who prefers the flesh-and-blood model to the painting he made of her. It is worth noticing that it is the artist figure that chooses incarnated beauty over its ideal form.

Depictions of maidens seem to have the power of expanding the threshold between image and language. Because maidens are in-between creatures, child-women both innocent and tempting, they offer an ideal object for representation, as representation is itself an in-between. Moreover, the fact that nabokovian narrators repeatedly resort to preexisting images to try to capture the maiden's metamorphic beauty underlines the idea that only mediations, or detours (whether around and through texts, canvases, or representation itself) can attain the ever-escaping object, since the gap between the object and its representation, or the gap between the

signified and the signifier, is irreducible. In fact, if an artist favours the detour, the oblique way to things, it is because he prefers opening the signifier to closing it. Nabokov's text strikes me with its refusal to close meaning, and with its delectation of the infinite possibilities of the signifier. By again and again representing girl-figures who innately escape representation, Nabokov chooses to go back to the surface of signs, thus taking the reader away from what is being said and focusing the attention on *how* it is being said, in order to celebrate the beauty of language. Inviting painting into writing amounts to an exposure of the surface of writing, an exhibition of its signifiers. Nabokov thus illustrates the irreducible link between language and image that has been similarly highlighted by Michel Foucault: "the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. . . . You can always try to say what you see, what you see will never fit in what you say"(25).[19]

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[1] “I think I was born a painter—really!—and up to my fourteenth year, perhaps, I used to spend most of the day drawing and painting and I was supposed to become a painter in due time. But I don’t think I had any real talent there.”

[2] Nabokov also was a renowned entomologist, specialised in butterflies (in a genus called The Blues, although they are not all blue). He developed a new and more reliable method of analysing and identifying butterflies by dissecting their thorax. He named several unrecorded butterflies and many species were named in his (or his character’s) honour. For more on the entomological career of Nabokov, see Boyd, Brian & Pyle, Robert M. and Johnson, Kurt & Coates, Steve.

[3] “toute description littéraire est une *vue*. On dirait que l’énonciateur, avant de décrire, se poste à la fenêtre, non tellement pour bien voir, mais pour fonder ce qu’il voit par son cadre même : l’embrasure fait le spectacle” (56 my translation).

[4] In 1926, Nabokov composed a poem in Russian entitled “Ut Pictura Poesis.” He dedicated the poem to Mr V. Dobouzhinsky, an acknowledged painter, a friend of the Nabokov family, and a former drawing instructor of the author. A translation of the poem into English was made by Dmitri Nabokov in 2000, and published in *The Nabokovian* (28-31).

[5] The parallels drawn between the figure in *The Birth of Venus* are part and parcel of the network of motifs associated with the nymphet in the novel: “that tinge of Botticellian pink, that raw rose about the lips” (*Lo* 64), “her narrow Florentine hands” (201), “Venus febriculosa” (198), “her Florentine breasts” (274).

[6] “Représenter la chose, c’est en même temps la sentir échapper irrémédiablement” (my translation).

[7] “Présentifier l’absent” (my translation).

[8] http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Parc/2331/russia/art_images/serovpeadet.html

[9] http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Parc/2331/russia/art_images/serov1889.html

[10] “La description doit moduler dans le successif la représentation d’objets simultanés et juxtaposés dans l’espace : le langage narratif se distinguerait ainsi par

une sorte de coïncidence temporelle avec son objet, dont le langage descriptif serait au contraire irrémédiablement privé" (my translation).

[11] This is a recurrent theme in Nabokov's fiction; see (Raguet 195-196).

[12] Nabokov is especially interested in mimetic phenomena and behaviour; see Alexander (177-213).

[13] See Niqueux, Michel. The author recalls that the motif of entering into a painting is much less frequent than that of the statue or painting coming to life, inherited from the myth of Pygmalion, very common in the gothic, romantic or fantastic genres. He also reminds the reader that this episode echoes the childhood dream Nabokov tells in *Speak, Memory* (478-479).

[14] "L'idée d'une finalité esthétique du langage" (my translation).

[15] Nabokov was especially fond of Van Eyck's paintings in which the presence of the artist on the canvas produces meta-artistic effects. He referred to those works in his fiction; see Shapiro, Gavriel (35-38). One could compare this device to Nabokov's habit of having characters named by an anagram of his own name in his own fiction.

[16] "Sur-codage," "saturation esthétique" (my translation).

[17] "I shall call "notional ecphrasis," the verbal representation of a purely fictional work of art" (4). Note that one of the major original references in terms of ekphrasis, the description of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, is itself a "notional ekphrasis."

[18] New York Public Library, Berg Collection, in Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich, m. b. *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. Holograph draft of novel, unsigned and undated. 1048 index cards in 4 binder boxes.

[19] " Le rapport du langage à la peinture est un *rapport infini*. . . . On a beau dire ce qu'on voit, ce qu'on voit ne loge jamais dans ce qu'on dit" (my translation).