

Nabokov's American Gut

Author: Beci Carver

*Affiliation: University of
Exeter*

Email:

b.carver2@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract

Edmund Wilson wrote to Nabokov on January 14th 1946: 'I hear from people who have seen you that you are becoming stout, optimistic and genial – in other words, Americanized.' The rumour was true: Nabokov's relocation to America in the 1940s seemed to act in conspiracy with the swelling of his gut, such that by the time he achieved international fame as an anglophone American writer, his silhouette was permanently voluptuous. I will propose in this article that Nabokov's discomfort at his expansion is linked to his ambivalence about becoming American. When Wilson accused him of becoming Americanly stout in 1946, he squirmed: 'Thanks for your remarks (though I did not understand the one about my "americanization.")' It is my argument here that, in the middle years of the twentieth century, Nabokov underwent what Lauren Berlant has described in an essay on American obesity as a 'crisis of choosing and antiwill', and that this crisis reverberates through his accounts of food and fatness.

Edmund Wilson wrote to Nabokov on January 14th 1946, six years after the Russian-born anglophone writer had moved to America, to relay a rumour: 'I hear from people who have seen you that you are becoming stout, optimistic and genial – in other words, Americanized.'¹ Affecting bemusement, Nabokov replied on February 1st: 'Thanks for your remarks (though I did not understand the one about my "americanization")'.² In this article, I will follow Wilson's example in attempting to marry Nabokov's 'stout[ness]' with his 'Americaniz[ation]', while also acknowledging Nabokov's radical opposition to their union. I want to propose that what Nabokov referred to as his 'tremendous fat[ness]' in another letter to Wilson brought into focus his worry not only about becoming fat and becoming American, but about the miserable dietary determinism whereby one seemed to entail the other.³ In *Memoirs of Hecate Country* – which Nabokov claimed to have read 'in one gulp' (*d'un trait*) in 1946⁴ – Wilson writes of the ability of 'Russian émigré intellectuals' to 'act[...] the part of

guest [...] brilliantly’,⁵ and I will venture here that Nabokov’s ‘brilliant’ imitation of a happy guest in mid-century America was fraudulent. In protesting to Wilson: ‘I did not understand the [remark] about my “americanization”, Nabokov reveals his distaste for a form of identity expressed as flab.

Nabokov once joked that his gut was American. In an interview of January 1964 for *Playboy*, he writes that, in the 1940s, ‘my weight went up from my usual 140 [lb] to a monumental and cheerful 200 [lb]’, and that as a result, ‘I am one-third American.’⁶ He went on to say at the time that this ‘good American flesh ke[pt] me warm and safe’,⁷ and perhaps it seemed to him then, snug in the luxurious Montreaux Palace Hotel in Switzerland with the Alps wrapped around him, that fatness (for he remained ‘stout’) meant security. But in the 1940s themselves, he was ‘profoundly ambivalent about his adopted nation’ – as Will Norman puts it in an influential essay⁸ – and this ‘ambivalence’ often angled itself towards the phenomenon of his bulk and the food that kept him round. In his Russian fiction of the 1930s, characters embark on bad diets without seeming to suffer any ill-consequence. In *Despair*, Hermann’s mother spends every ‘hot summer day’ on the balcony ‘munching chocolate’, without either detracting from her ability to continue ‘munching chocolate’ or melting the chocolate.⁹ In *Glory*, a cake shop’s suspiciously lurid pastry (‘bright-red’, ‘purplish-blue’, ‘glossy-black’) may be eaten indefinitely: ‘One went on devouring cake after cake till one’s innards got glued together, in the ever-present hope of at last discovering something good.’¹⁰ In this scenario, digestion is as bullet-proof as eternal hope. However, in the 1940s, Nabokov changed his tune about eating.

In this essay, I will propose that Nabokov’s American writing on food and fatness is an attempt to make conscious a slow process of acclimatisation to American habits of consumption that seemed to him subtly toxic. Lauren Berlant writes of a ‘slow death’ in American everyday life whereby a ‘crisis of choosing and antiwill’ has led to a national problem of obesity.¹¹ Nabokov was not obese, and I do not want to credit him with having anticipated a twenty-first-century crisis, much as he would have enjoyed the compliment. But what Berlant describes as an endemic ‘self-suspension’ or ‘numbness’ is at least dimly foreshadowed in his accounts of the helplessly fat, the candy-addicted, the food-poisoned, and the food-bribed.¹² For Berlant and others, eating habits are a symptom of our submission to a state regime, and dramatise the extent to which the state shapes our existence on a granular level.

This idea goes back to Foucault, who coined the word ‘bio-politics’ in 1978 to describe the trick by which modern governments have transformed ‘the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live’ into a ‘power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death [his italics].’¹³ One way of resisting this slow oppression would be to stop eating. Jason D. Price borrows Foucault’s word ‘biopolitical’ to explain the strategic vegetarianism of post-apartheid South Africans protesting the naturalisation of violence.¹⁴ But in my reading of Nabokov, resistance takes on the quieter and more polite form of irony. Nabokov kept eating and got rounder, and kept writing about American eaters who eat cluelessly.

There is a danger in finding too much disgruntlement under the veil of Nabokov’s irony, as if there were no irony there to disguise it. On the other hand, in taking his pro-Americanness at its word we risk underestimating him. In reading *Lolita* as a book about ‘the quintessential narcissistic girl-consumer’, I would suggest that we forgive consumerism for too much.¹⁵ In my reading of the novel, Nabokov plants a bitter irony in Lolita’s candy-addiction when he makes her seducer the dispenser of her sweets. In a trashy girl’s magazine that Lolita reads with Humbert next to her, the following warning is a vivid omen: ‘Would sex crimes be reduced if children obeyed a few don’ts [...] Don’t take candy from strangers.’¹⁶ Later on, Lolita writes from camp to her mother and their lodger: ‘DEAR MUMMY AND HUMMY, Hope you are fine. Thank you very much for the candy.’¹⁷ It would be simplistic to blame Lolita’s fate on her sweet tooth, but Nabokov does enough here to make candy sinister. In another self-conscious meditation on American culture in his critical study of 1944, *Nikolai Gogol*, the American equivalent of *poshlost* – or vulgar sentimentality – is configured as a scattering of razors in a gift of candy. Nabokov writes of the American convention of sending parcels to soldiers: ‘Kind people send our [fellow American] lonely soldiers silk hosed dummy legs modeled on those of Hollywood lovelies and stuffed with candies and safety razor blades – at least I have seen a picture of a person preparing such a leg in a certain periodical which is a world-famous purveyor of *poshlost*.’¹⁸ It is hard to tell whether the candy itself or the ‘poshlost’ is knife-edged in this account, but either way the razors aren’t ‘safe[...]’, and the soldiers biting down on sugar are in for a shock.

Nabokov was not the only ‘Russian émigré intellectual’ who understood American food in biopolitical terms. In Vladimir Pozner’s polemic of 1938, *The*

Disunited States, typically American foodstuffs like ‘orangeade and malted milk’ or ‘bean soup that strip[s] your bowels’ are thick with narratives of capitalist opportunism and economic disadvantage.¹⁹ On the surface, Pozner and Nabokov’s politics were dramatically different in temperature, Pozner being a passionate Marxist and Nabokov an ‘old-fashioned liberal’ with a deep fear of political extremism of any stripe.²⁰ Wilson seems to have enjoyed imagining the two men with their tusks locked when they both won Guggenheim fellowships in 1943. He wrote to Nabokov on April 1st: ‘you may not like sharing [the Guggenheim] with Vladimir Pozner, who also got it.’²¹ Nabokov joked in reply that he was ‘delicately spreading the rumour’ that “Vladimir Pozner” is my pen-name’, expecting Wilson to grin at the mischief of the mismatch.²² Nevertheless, I would argue that Nabokov shared with the Marxist Pozner his conception of American food as a kind of politically flavoured poison. In a letter of June 6th 1944 to Wilson, he compares his reaction to a bad ham sandwich with territorial usurpation. When the Allies invaded France, it seemed to Nabokov (in a whimsical mood) that American ‘bacilli’ had ‘mistaken my innards for a beachhead.’²³ This was a form of Americanisation against which his whole body rebelled.

Part of the problem with American food was its foreignness. Nabokov’s stomach troubles are a metonym for his more profound geographic disorientation, both as a Russian émigré and a European immigrant in America: he was at once nationally and continentally adrift. When he regurgitated the ‘invasion’ story for his wife Véra on June 7th, he struggled to account for how he had arrived home: ‘Exactly at 2.30, I suddenly felt an urge to vomit, had barely time to run outside – and there it began: an absolutely Homeric retching, bloody diarrhoea, spasms, weakness. I don’t know how I got home [...]’²⁴ The ‘home’ in question was in Cambridge Massachusetts, but there was also a sense in which he had lost his bearings on a macrogeographic scale. Similarly in Nabokov’s *Invitation to a Beheading*, when the Russian-born American professor is overtaken by an ‘eerie feeling’ which makes him suspicious of his last sandwich (‘Was it [...] that pickle with the ham?’),²⁵ he is in the middle of nowhere: ‘he [had] turned into an alley of chestnut and oak, which the bus driver had curtly told him led back to the railway station.’²⁶ And in *Pale Fire*, the assassin figure Gradus is at an airport in the fictional (and thus doubly obscure) small American town of New Wye, when the map he is reading suddenly ‘resemble[s] a writhing stomach’,

and he finds himself tormented throughout his plane ride by ‘urgent qualms.’²⁷ ‘Qualms’ is a pun here, pointing to Gradus’s lack of remorse by providing his stomach with a kind of migratory conscience; but this idea of linguistic wandering also links up with the uncertain etymological origin of the word,²⁸ and with Gradus’s own uncertain origin and ability to be tracked. Charles Kinbote abandons precise coordinates for him in favour of metaphysical guesswork: ‘Gradus is now much nearer to us in space and time than he was in the preceding cantos.’²⁹ Gradus is somehow intrinsically foreign, and the result is a heightened vulnerability to American food. Not only is he American in his diet, he is *Americanised* by his diet, and the result is a ‘writhing’ gut. In this case, the offending substance seems to be milk. Gradus ‘dr[inks] two papercupfuls of nice cold milk from a dispenser’, and is immediately unwell.³⁰ Nabokov’s word ‘papercupful’ here may get its inspiration from James Joyce’s ‘milkcup’ and ‘milkjug’ in *Ulysses*, but the actual contents of the milk dispenser could derive from anywhere. There are certainly no cows in sight.

In a recent essay on Nabokov’s relationship with food, Lara Delage-Toriel writes that ‘no substantial case has been made in favour of [the author’s] gustatory pleasures’,³¹ and to my knowledge, even less has been said about his gustatory qualms. In an essay on Nabokov’s self-diagnosed ‘obesity’, David Galef writes of the author’s disgust at his growing bulk, but says little about his diet.³² Yet Delage-Toriel and Galef anticipate my own line of argument in noting Nabokov’s ingestive passivity. Delage-Toriel jokes that he could not even soft-boil an egg himself,³³ and he seems to have approached eating in general with the fatefulness of a naif. In the 1940s, he gave up smoking and chain-ate molasses-candy instead, watching his gut expand in helpless gloom. Brian Boyd quotes him as having said he ‘inhaled’ the sweets.³⁴ And when he and Véra were living apart, his letters filled up with accounts of ingestive misfortune, as if the absence of his wife’s cooking made him an enemy of contingency. He writes of a sandwich bursting with ‘little ants’,³⁵ or of a cook’s ominous pledge to ‘put some fat on the bones of that man’,³⁶ or of a mysterious sense of ‘having had something weighing on my stomach’ all day.³⁷ When the American ham sandwich that almost killed him had been purged from his body by a team of American medics, he told Véra he had gobbled up a hospital meal of ‘pineapple juice, thick soup, rissotto [sic] (if I spell it right), bacon (bacon!) and canned pears floating in canned cream.’³⁸ As if hypnotised by a ‘crisis of choosing and antiwill’, he found himself eating pig after he

had been poisoned by it, along with a gloopy sea of yellow that must have reminded him of his vomit. In the meantime, he claims that his blood was ‘oozing [...] into the bedpan’,³⁹ adding another liquid to the list, but this time with a morbid inflection. Could American food kill him? The question seems to have been on his mind, and behind it the darker thought that his Americanisation might be deadly.

Mid-century American dining relied to an unusual degree on the unquestioningness of consumers. With the invention of fast food in the late 1940s, and the growing reliance in domestic cooking on factory-produced staples (Nabokov wrote of an Atlanta ‘dinner prepared from cans’ on October 5th 1942),⁴⁰ American eaters became habitualised to trusting culinary fate. In *The Disunited States*, Pozner locates the essence of Americanness in the ability to act without adequate knowledge of one’s situation; he explains: ‘It’s as if at the train station, everyone has agreed to get on without asking where the trains are going. I’m like that myself. It is the very basis of American life.’⁴¹ It is tempting to read this analogy as the germ of Pnin’s first misadventure: his ending up on the ‘wrong train.’⁴² Nabokov writes, disrupting the flow of Pnin’s reverie: ‘All of which does not alter the fact that Pnin was on the wrong train’, and later: ‘he still did not know that he was on the wrong train.’⁴³ Towards the middle of the novel, Pnin’s obliviousness about his course of travel also receives oblique treatment when Nabokov writes of an awkward meeting between him and his ex-lover’s son: ‘[Pnin] said nothing. In silence he ate his vanilla ice-cream, which contained no vanilla and was not made of cream.’⁴⁴ Pnin is, at this point in the relationship with his would-be stepson, interrogating Victor about his ‘love[...] of football’,⁴⁵ and Victor’s disappointing reply, ‘I hate football’,⁴⁶ is metaphorically akin to the ice cream in its lack of an anticipated content. Yet Nabokov’s suggestion seems to be that Pnin is conscious of Victor’s missing affirmative, *but unconscious* of the contentlessness of his ice cream. Pnin belongs to Pozner’s hypothetical crowd of under-informed Americans, eating blindly. He becomes American by demonstrating his ignorance. On the other hand, because Pnin’s ignorance is not native but an acquired skill (as it were), he is still unused to the results, and approaches the future with the hysterical dread of a man orientating himself in the dark. Nabokov writes that Pnin is ‘persistently on the look-out for diabolical pitfalls, [...] painfully alert lest his erratic surroundings (unpredictable America) inveigle him into some bit of preposterous oversight.’⁴⁷ The Americanised Pnin is ‘alert’ without directional

purpose: he is diffusedly alert, contradictorily so, with nothing to show for his attentiveness but panic.

Nabokov seems not to have been as ignorant as Pnin about ‘unpredictable America’, at least with regard to food. In November 1942 in Valdosta, Georgia, he spent a dull evening listening to a Floridian sugar manufacturer ‘telling me [...] all about his sugar business in Florida, his reasons for coming to Valdosta (to hire colored laborers) and lots of extravagant particularities about his factory. My whole body felt like one big yawn.’⁴⁸ Nabokov’s boredom here is not quite a symptom of protest, although his distaste for the man’s unsought company is clear: there is a neat equivalence between the ‘extravagan[ce]’ of his examples and the overambitious dimensions of Nabokov’s yawn. But the comment on ‘colored laborers’ may subsequently have provided Nabokov with the resources for what Carl Plasa has described as a ‘saccharography’⁴⁹ – or in other words, an inscription of the history of American sugar with an acknowledgement of the industry’s fundamental debt to black labour. Plasa writes that ‘sugar is not [...] anything like as innocent as it appears to be, but indissolubly linked to the history of slavery in the Caribbean.’⁵⁰ In Plasa’s account, this history may inscribe itself either into the literary treatment of sugar or into acts of sugar-eating, as an uneasy consciousness that the object on display conceals – whitens out – its origins.

Slavery had long been abolished in America by the time Nabokov arrived, but the cogs of the machine were still visible, especially in the South – where Nabokov happened to find himself on a lecturing tour in the autumn of 1942. In a letter of October 2-3 1942, postmarked Hartsville, South Carolina, he writes to Véra of another major Southern industry – cotton:

It is hard to convey the bliss of roaming through the strange bluish grass, between blossoming bushes (one bush here in bright berries, as if dyed in a cheap Easter purple – an utterly shocking hue, but the main tree in the area is some tender pine). To the west, cotton plantations [...] It is picking time now – and the ‘*darkies*’ (an expression that jars on me, reminding me distantly of the patriarchal ‘Yid’ of western Russian landowners) pick out in the fields, getting a dollar for a hundred ‘*bushels*’ – I am recording this interesting data because it struck mechanically in my ears.⁵¹

Here was another industry that relied for its very existence on a steady supply of ‘colored labour’, and another source of Southern profit about which Nabokov had

already heard too much ('I am recording this interesting data because it struck mechanically in my ears.') Moreover, in this case, Nabokov's recognition of the racist fundamentals of the industry is revealed unambiguously, albeit on an aesthetic level, through his aural recoil from the word "*darkies*" (which 'jars on me'), and his implicit visual recoil from the quantity of colour in *both* directions. The 'shocking hue' is present twice – which is to say, wherever Nabokov looks – like a motif extending from east to west, although, in the east, its density is diluted by white pine. There is more justice in nature than in cotton.

One of the most vivid points of overlap between the American cotton and sugar industries was their mass-production of a substance whose whiteness could be perceived as an effacement of black labour. In the sugar industry, this symbolic effacement was reinforced by a process of so-called 'refinement' whereby sugar crystals were extracted from dark brown molasses, and then whitened, granulated, and purified, while the gunk of molasses was repurposed as cheap, though bitter, sugar. This factory-floor sugar was then consumed in bulk, first by African-American slaves and later by the sugar industry's poorest paid employees – its (mostly) 'coloured laborers' – whether in pure, medicinally acrid doses, or scooped over cornbread and cake, or as a brown candy glaze on roasted meat and sweet potatoes, or in the form of rum.⁵² Marcie Cohen Ferris writes that in the era of slavery, 'racial power established a divided and contradictory southern cuisine of privilege, utility, and deprivation',⁵³ and one of the symptoms of this split was the pervasiveness of molasses in Southern African-American cooking. The molasses-candy that Nabokov 'inhaled' in the 1940s was a remnant of racial subjugation.

In the first half of the twentieth century, when Nabokov embarked on his love-hate relationship with American candy, the effort to rebrand molasses as a kitchen-cupboard essential for white middle-class Americans led to a romantic fixation on the syrup's culinary past. The market-leading molasses manufacturer Penick & Ford invented 'Aunt Dinah' – a brightly scarved black mammy – while the Louisiana company *Trixy* decorated their tins with the image of a wild-haired and thick-lipped African-American boy.⁵⁴ In the year that *Lolita* was first published – 1955 – the first film exclusively about molasses, *Six Ways to Use Unsulphured Molasses*, introduced housewives to a version of molasses that had not been treated with sulfur dioxide, and was therefore – or so the theory goes – more directly and authentically reminiscent of its plantation origins.⁵⁵ History seemed to matter suddenly, although only as a

marketing tool and only when stripped of negative implication. We could say that commercial molasses was reimagined in terms of a sentimentalised saccharography. But whatever the case, the effect was to alert Nabokov to sugar's history.

Nabokov was interested enough in contemporary trends in American housewifery to include the condiment form of molasses in *Lolita*, as opposed to the molasses candy he himself binge-ate. However, the novel's particular version of molasses differs from that with which American cooks were familiar in its magical ability to disappear. Nabokov writes of the moment when Humbert secretly ejaculates with Lolita on his lap:

I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done. The conjurer had poured milk, molasses, foaming champagne into a lady's white purse; and lo, the purse was intact.⁵⁶

'Impairing' is a pun, connecting the ideas of injury (*impairing*) and coupling (pairing) to provide a metaphorical instance of how unwitnessed masturbation may leave no historical trace. Humbert and Lolita are un(im)paired: Humbert doesn't damage her because he doesn't couple with her. Yet, at the same time, the anomalous brown molasses *in between* the milk and champagne upsets this optimism, either by proposing a counternarrative in which Humbert's crime shows dark against a white background, or by invoking the sacchorographic story of how blackness (in both senses) was tipped out of the history of white sugar. The 'lady's white purse' only remains 'intact' if we whiten the molasses, and to do so is to erase history. In Nabokov's account, the guilt of paedophilic predation and that of the American sugar manufacturer are linked by their mutual whitening-out from history. Nabokov's brown anomaly partially reverses this absence.

Nabokov's slant on what he terms the 'Negro problem' in a letter of October 11th 1942 to Véra may be explained by his sensitivity to Véra's own plight as a Jew in an increasingly antisemitic climate. But it may also have struck closer to the nerve, depending on Nabokov's familiarity with the history of American immigration. In a lecture he gave in Atlanta in 1942 at the newly chartered college for African-American women, Spelman College – a rogue jazz scale within the South's usual monotone of 'Uncle Tomism' – he argued that 'mankind is at its very best when human races are able to freely mix', and offered as the ultimate example of this basic

truth, Alexander Pushkin's African blood.⁵⁷ Perhaps he knew that if he had arrived in America twenty years earlier his own Russian DNA would have been thought genetically inferior to that of Americans. At the very least, I would propose that he did not consider himself immune to racially motivated hostility in America. His Russian blood retained the ability to make him vulnerable.

Americanisation in the legal sense has behind it a history of government-sanctioned American racism. Although the verb 'Americanise' originates from the seventeenth century, it gets much of its texture from the early twentieth, when, as Gary Gerstle writes, the conflation of 'civic and racial [ideals]' in American immigration policy led to a suspicion of eastern European immigrants as potential contaminants of American blood. The immigration acts of 1917, 1918, 1921, and 1924 emerged out of and helped consolidate this suspicion by 'virtually cut[ing] off immigration from southern and eastern Europe, [and so] stigmatizing people from these regions as dangerously [...] inferior to the "races" of northern and western Europe.'⁵⁸ It is striking that, if Nabokov had applied to an American university to do his degree in 1919 – rather than to Cambridge University – he might not have been admitted across the American border to matriculate for his course. This relatively new strain of institutionalised racism against the supposed 'anarchist' type generated its own forms of biopolitics, whereby incoming immigrants could be said – to borrow Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze's gloss of the term 'biopolitics' – to 'hand [their] li[ves] over to the apparatuses of governmentality.'⁵⁹ Gerstle writes of a law of 1903 which allowed the state to deport new immigrants: 'this was the first time the federal government had made political ideas legitimate grounds for expulsion.'⁶⁰ Immigrants' very bodies were re-appropriated under this new law, with the result that 'the apparatuses of governmentality' could seem sinisterly present everywhere. Long after America's Russian immigrants had ceased to be sabotaged by stigma, Nabokov would write in his short story, 'Time and Ebb', of a 'Global War poster' on the wall of an American drugstore, in which 'Uncle Sam' stares with 'Rooseveltian tired blue eyes' in an attitude of constant vigilance.⁶¹

As it happened, it was easy enough for Nabokov to enter America as a Russian immigrant in 1940, whereas the same endeavour in Germany and France in the 1920s and 1930s had proved wearisome. Folder Thirteen of his archives at the Library of Congress bears witness to the seemingly endless bureaucracy involved in crossing European borders in the prewar years, when, as Nabokov writes in his short

story of 1944, “*That in Aleppo Once ...*”, Russian immigrants found themselves ‘prob[ing] the innermost viscera of all visas.’⁶² Probing viscera is the job of entomologists, and like entomologists, it seemed to Nabokov that he and his émigré friends could become so expert in attending to small print that they almost *saw inside it* – as if making out the microscopically minute inscription of ‘-cer-’ within ‘visa.’ Border-crossing is presented as a mode of entomological labour without the payoff of an advance in knowledge.

Yet it was also possible to find in the thoroughness of French and German border control a reassuring confirmation of one’s status and rights in a new environment. To discover the word ‘cera’ in the guts of ‘visa’ was to receive proof of a given visa’s substantiality and authority. ‘Cēra’ in Latin means ‘wax’, and when visas were displayed for identificatory purposes in the nineteenth century they were stamped with a wax seal by way of authentication. Andreas Fahrmeir writes that ‘as soon as one left a linguistic area, the text [the passport], usually only in the national language of the issuing country, became indecipherable to most passport officials’, with the result that symbols of authority became crucial; he adds: ‘wax seals were treated with considerable awe.’⁶³ By the twentieth century, wax seals had long been replaced by rubber stamps at customs, but the figurative meaning of wax as an instrument of certainty remained active.

No such confirmation seems to be necessary in the America of “*That in Aleppo Once ...*”, when the narrator and his wife cross from Marseilles to New York – just as Nabokov and Véra had done in June 1940. The equivalent of European ‘cēra’ is a bewildering American serum; the narrator recalls: ‘I emerged from a dark and hot office with a couple of plump *visas de sortie* cupped in my trembling hands. Into these the U. S. A. serum was duly injected.’⁶⁴ The word ‘serum’ again comes from Latin, though in this case, the Latin fails to identify a specific substance: anything may be watered down into a serum. In gaining access to America, Nabokov’s proxy is (dimly) conscious of a lack of meaningful sanction for his new American identity. Busybody-ness stands in for explanation; the serum, whatever it consists of – presumably an inked seal? – is ‘duly injected’, or staunchly applied, and he dutifully makes his way to the ferry in Marseilles. The remainder of the story then recounts how he gradually ceases to believe in the existence of his wife, the owner of the second ‘plump’ *visa de sortie*. There are numerous ways of interpreting this anomaly, and Nabokov encourages conjecture (the narrator half-confides: ‘Somewhere, somehow, I have made some fatal

mistake'),⁶⁵ but my contribution to the text's penumbra of rumour would be to suggest that the serum with which her personified ('plump') visa is injected is laced with poison by the 'apparatuses of governmentality.' By a piquant irony, the system designed to grant her identity renders her extinct.

The 'viscera' of a visa might be a metaphor for its comprehensibility, while a merely plump visa reveals nothing: we never find out what goes on in the (metaphorical) guts of the narrator's wife in "*That in Aleppo Once ...*" There was of course an advantage to the simplicity of the American 'way of settling things.' Nabokov claims to remember having had a 'wonderful time becoming an American citizen', and revelling in the comedy by which '[t]his rather prim Russian who wants to be very serious' came to terms with 'this easy-going American way of settling things.'⁶⁶ But the idea of an efficient yet opaque 'serum' haunts his compliments to the bureaucratic facilitators of American immigration. What was it that one absorbed, inherited, agreed to, when one become American? What did the serum *contain*? The goo compares to the ice cream in *Invitation of a Small Creature* 'which contained no vanilla, and is not made of cream', or the spilt molasses in *Lolita* that somehow turns white, in raising questions not just about its ingredients, but about what might be involved in metabolising a mystery substance.

The process of becoming American could seem both mysterious and nauseating to Nabokov. In a story of 1945, entitled 'Double Talk' – or 'Conversation Piece, 1945', when it was republished in 1958 – Nabokov writes of two Russians with the same name who move to America from Europe and set out to Americanise themselves. In Europe, their nominal sameness poses legal complications; the narrator's 'namesake' commits bigamy, smashes a 'triptych' of restaurant mirrors, and crosses a French border 'without a permit', under their shared name, with the result that eventually a 'fat dossier' is produced: a kind of accidentally mutual criminal record.⁶⁷ Here is another fat identificatory document, but this time the guts are searchable: 'I caught a glimpse of my namesake's face.' In Europe, the immense bureaucracy of personal identification makes life as a man whose nominal identity is shared keenly susceptible to false accusation and misdirected anger. On the other hand, America's 'easy-going [...] way of settling things' promises a different outcome. When the narrator arrives in the US and proceeds to Americanise himself, he hopes to 'shak[e] off my absurd shadow',⁶⁸ since names seem to matter less in this world. He proves right in supposing Americans to be less careful in tracking names. The name-

confusion that results in his mistaken invitation to an American soirée is trivial by comparison with his European legal troubles. However, the trouble that ensues from his decision to attend the party itself then generates a crisis.

We are encouraged by the emphasis on double identity at the beginning of 'Double Talk' to expect the story's climax to arrive with the exposure of the narrator (who, wittily, is never named) as an identity thief. However, the man with whom he becomes preoccupied with being confused is not his namesake but a Dr Shoe: a 'German [...] of pure Bavarian stock' who describes himself as 'a loyal citizen this country [America].' The memory of the man with whom he shares an unnamed name recedes behind the spectacle of the man with whom he shares a borrowed national identity. The climactic event to which the narrative then builds up is double: Shoe launches into an antisemitic rant with whose sentiment everyone in the room seems to be in agreement, and then perches at the piano and sings the American national anthem. At this point, the narrator is overcome with a violent nausea and compelled to leave the room. Nabokov writes disjointedly, as if imitating a reeling body: 'Feeling that this was more than I could stand – in fact, having reached a point where I was beginning to feel physically sick – I got up and hurriedly left the room.'⁶⁹ The narrator distances himself from a double for the second time in the story by leaving the room, but this time the motivation is not legal but moral: his gut becomes the secret agent of his conscience, rejecting that which he may not openly disavow.

In a recent article on 'Conversation Piece, 1945', Tim Conley has argued that the narrator's disgust at Shoe's antisemitism should be taken with a pinch of salt, since, if the 'political thrust' of the story consists in 'an affirmation of platitudes – [that] the Nazis committed atrocities [and that] those who deny such truths are wretches', it is unworthy of a writer of Nabokov's calibre.⁷⁰ Conley proposes instead that the narrator is himself the villain of the piece, secretly to be blamed for all the wrongs he attributes to others. However, I would argue that the narrator's 'physical[...] sick[ness]' at the mere idea of his assumed complicity in Shoe's antisemitism is far from being presented as a 'platitude' in the context, since it does not normalise him but exclude him from a norm he deems vile. By removing himself from Shoe and the others' company, he attempts to de-Americanise himself. It becomes impossible to join Shoe singing the American national anthem because to do so is an antisemitic act.

Wilson remembers in *Memoirs of Hecate Country* that, during ‘the years after the succession of Hitler’, ‘We [Americans] had specimens, often very distinguished, of all the principal European nationalities to examine and converse with at leisure on our own ground and in our own light.’⁷¹ Wilson’s emphasis here falls on the way he himself and his countrymen enjoyed a version of travel without movement in the postwar years, whereby Europe’s distance was cancelled to make available the continent’s best minds. But he also suggests that this multicultural conversation is itself in a sense American, in that it requires the hospitable provision of ‘*our own ground* and [...] *our own light*.’ The result is what we might call cosmopolitanism – or as Timothy Brennan defines it, the discourse of ‘normative projection’ by which disparate thinkers imagine themselves to understand one another.⁷² In Nazism’s heyday in the 1930s and 1940s, the effects of this polite consensus were more likely to be toxic to American public opinion as an organism – or at least this is Nabokov’s suggestion. Shoe’s parting shot, when he leaves the narrator’s threshold without his hat, is: ‘Thank God we live in a great country, where everybody can speak his mind without being insulted for expressing a private opinion.’⁷³ The ‘opinion’ in question is Shoe’s denial of the Holocaust, whose invocation as an instance of his American right to free speech sends a bolt of vitriol through the narrator; Nabokov writes: ‘Before I could decide where to hit him, he had glided out. I was trembling all over.’⁷⁴ Cosmopolitanism operates in the story as an eschewal of conflict at the expense of decency. In neither quite protesting nor allowing himself to become Americanised through complicit talk, the narrator attempts to define a middle position between being American and not being American – a zone of ambivalence.

The story ends not with a fight between the narrator and Shoe, but with a stern letter from the narrator’s double, who threatens him with prosecution for his fraudulent appearance at Mrs Hall’s: ‘I could have you jailed as an impostor’, and demands payment ‘by way of indemnity.’⁷⁵ The narrator is finally confronted with a situation in which ill-considered speech is illegal in America (namely, slander), and he agrees to pay up. His namesake thus apparently returns to the story simply to claim his fee. But in doing so, I would suggest, he prompts a comparison between himself and Shoe that reinforces Nabokov’s gloomy take on the complicities involved in becoming Americanised. In a sense, the identity that the narrator shares with his namesake is a mode of self-negation, since they are both anonymous in the text, and since their ability to accuse one another of the crimes they themselves commit reduces

them both to constructs: they are works of fiction, plausible or implausible on the basis of their credibility at any given moment. Like statements framed as double negatives, they have the option, always, of being cancelled out. On the other hand, in confusing himself with Shoe by taking his hat when his nausea compels him to leave the party (which also carries the misidentifying label ‘Werner Bros. Chicago’),⁷⁶ in listening quietly to his antisemitic conversation, and in failing to hit him when he claims to be entitled to his ‘opinion’, the narrator risks becoming one with a version of Americanness he loathes. Nausea is his only out.

The publication of Nabokov’s ‘Conversation Piece, 1945’ as ‘Double Talk’ in *The New Yorker* in 1945 was preceded by the rejection of another story of his, on the grounds that its ‘satire’ on American life was old hat by the mid-1940s. The rejected piece, ‘Time and Ebb’, is less explicitly critical of American life than ‘Conversation Piece, 1945.’ Yet, as Olga Voronina has shown in a compelling article, the editor Mrs White was perennially torn between humouring the author she had poached from *The Atlantic* and criticising what she understood to be his faults, and the survival of ‘Double Talk’ may have been a concession to the former priority.⁷⁷ Whatever the case, White’s comment on ‘Time and Ebb’ provides an insight into the tone of the earlier story, as well as into the larger satirical discourse on American culinary culture to which it contributed, regardless of Nabokov’s protestation: ‘there is not the faintest trace of satire in my story.’⁷⁸

The following extract from ‘Time and Ebb’ belongs to a sequence of reminiscences by a ninety-year-old from the year 2024, who is an American immigrant like Nabokov, but French-born. Below, he remembers back to a 1940s milk bar:

We imbibed our humble mixtures [...] in an atmosphere of gloomy greed. I remember the shallow enchantment and the minor poetry of the proceedings: the copious froth engendered above the sunken lump of frozen synthetic cream, or the liquid brown mud of ‘fudge’ sauce poured over its polar pate. Brass and glass surfaces, sterile reflections of electric lamps, the whirr and shimmer of a caged propeller, a Global War poster depicting Uncle Sam and his Rooseveltian tired blue eyes or else a dapper uniformed girl with a hypertrophied nether lip (that pout, that sullen kiss-trap, that transient fashion in feminine charm – 1939-1950) and the unforgettable tonality of mixed traffic noises coming from the street – these patterns and melodic figures, for the conscious analysis of which time alone is responsible, somehow connected the “drugstore” with a world where men tormented metals and metals hit back.⁷⁹

The attempt to ‘connect’ the “drugstore” – a purveyor of ice cream as well as drugs⁸⁰ – to the ‘world where men tormented metals’, as well as to the misnomer “drugstore”, is symptomatic of a more general anxiety in this passage about the relation between the café’s ‘copious’ offerings and their sources. This is a site of ‘shallow enchantment’, with ‘sterile reflections’ on its polished surfaces; and yet, somehow, ‘copious froth’ is ‘engendered’ among the ‘synthetic cream’, like a rogue bacteria, activating the Latin root of ‘engender’ (‘ingenerāre’/’to beget’) simply in order to breed. The froth obeys a similar principle to the ‘hypertrophied nether lip’, bursting from nowhere in an otherwise sparse environment, having been overnourished (‘hyper’/‘trophia’) backstage with unknown materials. The giant lip mirrors (in another instance of ‘sterile reflection’) the ice cream sundae, with its overburdened ‘polar pate’, while both lip and sundae are also linked through their positioning at two extremes: ‘nether’ and ‘polar’ are synonyms. Moreover, in constructing a purely conceptual polar region, peopled by obscurely nourished objects, and decorated with the image of a synthetic president (‘Uncle Sam [with] his Rooseveltian tired blue eyes’), Nabokov draws attention to the absence of physical spaces in the text that are felt to be real. The “drugstore” is reduced to a hypothesis by its encirclement in wry quotation marks, and the scene as a whole is an ‘atmosphere’ rather than a place; it is liminal, rootless. In a sense, the result is *more* than a satire on American life, since it not only mocks American existential norms but extends that mockery into a profound agnosticism about the possibility of feeling at home – at least on a culinary level – in America. To be at home in this ‘atmosphere’ is to acclimatise oneself to being fed untrustworthy food while Roosevelt watches.

The use of hypertrophy as a thematic device returns later in Nabokov’s mid-century work. In *Bend Sinister*, the novel he was writing alongside his stories of the 1940s – and the first he wrote in America – there is a character who is never named, but who is introduced repeatedly as a ‘fat soldier.’⁸¹ The consistency of this mode of introduction is such that the epithet acquires the specificity of a proper noun: it would be impossible for anyone else to be introduced in exactly this way without confusion. However, at the same time that the significance of the phrase is enhanced through its repeated reference to one character, the emphasis it places on his fatness seems increasingly arbitrary. It is as if the descriptive faculty of the word were allowed to grow uncontrollably, while the phrase as a whole (‘fat soldier’) is repurposed as a

proper noun, with the result that the word becomes fat in its own right: a hypertrophy within the grammar of the text itself, produced by the soldier's literal overnourishment.

Nabokov is likely to have derived his inspiration for *Bend Sinister*'s 'fat soldier' from Nikolai Gogol's novel of 1842, *Dead Souls*, although Gogol's fat man is much less gloomily presented than Nabokov's soldier. Gogol's 'watermelon', as he is nicknamed,⁸² first emerges in the text when his entanglement in a fishing net leads him to scream out. His body-size and shape matter in this context because they prevent him from gaining a purchase on the water – he merely spins, like a planet – with the result that his predicament threatens to become either infinite or fatal. As with Nabokov's 'fat soldier', descriptions of his body are used in lieu of a name to identify him – although the absence of a name in Gogol's novel suggests an unwillingness to grant significance to a man whose claim on the narrator's attention is an accident unnaturally prolonged by his odd shape. Gogol's 'watermelon' embodies a comic interlude, which is concluded with the abrupt announcement: 'The fat man had disappeared', whereas Nabokov's hypertrophic objects – both in *Bend Sinister* and 'Time and Ebb' – are strange growths in a new and surreal climate: they belong, grotesque as they are, to the terrain.

In his monograph *Nikolai Gogol*, Nabokov becomes interested in another of Gogol's fat men in *Dead Souls*, who is also in the middle of drowning. In this case, the drowner is rendered comic by his failure to keep himself afloat; he 'catches at the smallest chip of wood' as a raft, though he 'weighs almost a hundred and fifty pounds if not a good two hundred.'⁸³ Nabokov must have spotted his own weight measurements here; he had told *Playboy* that, when he arrived in America, 'my weight went up from my usual 140 to a monumental and cheerful 200.' He was also perhaps predisposed to sympathise with Gogol's doomed fat man (rather than the buoyant 'watermelon') because the latter goes on to be instrumentalised by Gogol as a metaphor for the unreasonableness of all fat drowning men. Nabokov asks: 'Who is that unfortunate bather, steadily and uncannily drowning, adding weight, fattening himself on the marrow of a metaphor?'⁸⁴ Nabokov's point is that Gogol introduces the bather into the novel purely to fatten and kill him, while in the process, exploiting him as a vehicle of signification. The fat man grows on Gogol's terms, eating only 'the marrow of a metaphor', and his fatness transforms him into a signifier, just as Nabokov's fatness transformed him into a signifier; Wilson wrote in 1946: 'you [...] are becoming

stout [and], *in other words* [my italics], Americanized.’ Gogol’s second fat man is of course not American, but he pinpoints the state of crisis in which Nabokov found himself in the mid-1940s: halfway between statelessness and a vaguely sinister ‘Americanness’, wondering at the size of his silhouette.

At the same time that Gogol’s bather loses control over his fatness, his transformation into a metaphor robs him of a meaningful relationship with his own substance. In a grammatical sense, the verb ‘fattening’ in Gogol’s formulation ‘fattening himself on the marrow of metaphor’ is active, but it is not the bather’s intention to fatten himself, so the action of ‘fattening himself’ is at once a form of agency and a mode of disempowerment – like the action of Americanising oneself, which is always to subordinate oneself to someone else’s verb. In *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* – which Nabokov wrote after he had left America – the idea that time may only be described in metaphorical language (i.e. in terms of space) troubles Van Veen because metaphors by their nature insert a gap between referent and signifier, abandoning mimesis in favour of conceptual resemblance. To say that time is a sequence (from the Greek for a ‘succession of notes sung on the last syllable of the Alleluia’),⁸⁵ or that a metaphor is a marrow, is to leave behind the referent and accept a proxy in its place. In becoming a metaphor, Gogol’s bather thus bids adieu to any notion of himself as a real entity, and in becoming ‘*only* [my italics] a metaphor’, the embodied experience of time in *Ada* risks devolving into a myth.⁸⁶ Nabokov’s Van Veen fights the derealisation of time by insisting that his own understanding of the phenomenon is different from everyone else’s; he reflects: ‘I delight sensually in Time, in its stuff and spread, in the fall of its folds, in the very impalpability of its grayish gauze, in the coolness of its continuum.’⁸⁷ Van’s time is a kind of voluptuousness whose ‘spread’ and ‘folds’ he knows intimately; it is a fatness that he ‘delight[s]’ in, nourished by all the whimsicality at his disposal. And, at the other extreme, stands Gogol’s bather’s grim diet of marrow-bones and his expansion into a deadly metaphor. Van’s voluptuous time could be a happily fat Nabokov, while the marrow-fat bather is an image of him at his most uneasy about the Americanisation of his gut. In Mary Ronald’s classic American cookbook of 1895, *The Century Cook Book*, there is only one recipe under the heading ‘Marrow-Bones’, following a comparatively lengthy list of suggestions for hash, namely: ‘Corned Beef Hash’, ‘Hash’, and ‘Brown Hash.’⁸⁸ The marrow-bones recipe itself then seems so simple as not to warrant inscription; the bones may either be cut and boiled or not cut and boiled, and the end of the story

either way is a serving of bones on toast with a light seasoning.⁸⁹ Gogol thus arguably condemns his bather not just to fatness but to the misery of being constructed, calorie by calorie, out of a substance he may not choose, which even cooks may not redeem from banality.

During the early 1940s, when Nabokov was cooking up and writing *Nikolai Gogol*, *Bend Sinister*, ‘Conversation Piece, 1945’, “*That in Aleppo Once ...*”, and ‘Time and Ebb’ and collecting anecdotes and incidental detail for the stuffing of *Lolita*, *Pnin*, and *Pale Fire*, he was also acquiring a habit of turning down invitations to the most American of culinary rituals: Thanksgiving. In 1941, he had accepted Wilson’s invite to join him in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, on November 20th, and had marked the occasion somewhat peculiarly, by wandering downstairs in the middle of the night and composing a poem about the refrigerator. A couple of days later, he wrote to Wilson to explain himself: ‘I hope you did not take my “Refrigerator” as implying that I spent a bad night at your house. I did not. I really cannot tell you [...] how much I enjoyed my stay.’⁹⁰ However, the proof of this protestation was in the pudding, since Nabokov would proceed to respond to Wilson’s invitations of 1942 and 1943 with excuses – though Wilson became pleading in 1943: ‘Do try to make it’ (November 1st 1943), ‘We are absolutely counting on you for Thanksgiving’ (November 10th 1943), ‘All these matters will absolutely necessitate your coming here for Thanksgiving’ (November 12th 1943).⁹¹ Understandably, in November 1944, no invitation was forthcoming, and it wasn’t until 1947, when Wilson had remarried and Nabokov was keen to show his support for the new couple, that the two men met to eat turkey, and maybe marrow-bones, together. I don’t want to propose, in concluding this article, that Nabokov was passionately determined not to dine with Wilson in the early 1940s, but rather that the biopolitical dimension of the annual feast irked him. Thanksgiving, after all, was a symbolic enactment of one’s assimilation into American society. If anything could be accused of Americanising one’s gut, Thanksgiving could. In the poem that Nabokov wrote in the dark after a heavy meal on November 23rd 1941, ‘The Refrigerator Awakes’, the contents of the refrigerator are made appealing precisely by their luminous remoteness, as if the light were a fortress. Nabokov writes of ‘bright fruit, and a ham, and some chocolate cream/and three bottles of milk, all contained in the gleam/of that wide-open white god.’⁹² Nabokov’s paean to Thanksgiving is a poem about not eating.

-
- ¹ Wilson, *Dear Bunny/Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1971*, ed. Simon Karlinsky (University of California Press, 2001), 181.
- ² Nabokov, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 182.
- ³ Nabokov, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 173.
- ⁴ Nabokov wrote on March 8th 1946: 'I have read you book *d'un trait*.' *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 188.
- ⁵ Wilson, *Memoirs of Hecate Country* (W. H. Allen, 1951), 345.
- ⁶ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (Penguin, 2011; first published, 1973), 23.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Norman, 'Nabokov's Dystopia: *Bend Sinister*, America and Mass Culture', *Journal of American Studies*, 43: 1 (April, 2009), 40.
- ⁹ Nabokov, *Despair* (Penguin, 2010), 2.
- ¹⁰ Nabokov, *Glory* (Vintage, 1971), 102.
- ¹¹ Berlant, 'Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)', *Critical Inquiry*, 33: 4 (Summer, 2007), 758.
- ¹² Berlant, 779 & 780.
- ¹³ Foucault, 'Right of Death and Power Over Life', *Biopolitics: A Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell & Adam Sitze (Duke University Press, 2013). 43.
- ¹⁴ Jason D. Price, *Animals and Desire in South African Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 121.
- ¹⁵ Bowlby, 'Lolita and the Poetry of Advertising', *Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A Casebook*, ed. Ellen Pifer (Oxford University Press, 2003), 176.
- ¹⁶ Nabokov, *Lolita*, 81.
- ¹⁷ Nabokov, *Lolita* (Penguin, 2015; first published, 1955), 165.
- ¹⁸ Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (Penguin, 2011), 56.
- ¹⁹ Pozner, *The Disunited States* (Seven Stories Press, 2009), 98 & 289.
- ²⁰ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 96.
- ²¹ Wilson, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 108.
- ²² Wilson, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 110.
- ²³ Wilson, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 146.
- ²⁴ Nabokov, *Letters to Vera*, trans. & ed. Olga Voronina & Brian Boyd (Penguin, 2016), 488.
- ²⁵ Nabokov, *Pnin* (Penguin, 2010), 12.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*

-
- ²⁷ Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (Penguin, 2010), 220.
- ²⁸ *OED*, online edition.
- ²⁹ Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 218.
- ³⁰ Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 220.
- ³¹ Delage-Toriel, 'Some Foodnotes on Nabokov's Works', *Nabokov Upside Down*, ed. Brian Boyd & Marijeta Bozovic (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 69.
- ³² Galef, 'Nabokov in Fat City', *Nabokov Studies*, 6 (2000/2001) 52.
- ³³ Delage-Toriel, 70.
- ³⁴ Boyd, *Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 88.
- ³⁵ Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 477.
- ³⁶ Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 446.
- ³⁷ Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 441.
- ³⁸ Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 488.
- ³⁹ Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 477.
- ⁴⁰ Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 269.
- ⁴¹ Pozner, 115.
- ⁴² Nabokov, *Phin*, 6.
- ⁴³ Nabokov, *Phin*, 6-7.
- ⁴⁴ Nabokov, *Phin*, 91.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ Nabokov, *Phin*, 6.
- ⁴⁸ Nabokov, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 97.
- ⁴⁹ Plasa, 'Saccharographies', *Commodifying (Post)colonialism: Othering, Reification, Commodification and the New Literatures and Cultures in English*, ed. Rainer Emig & Oliver Lindner (Rodopi, 2010), 43.
- ⁵⁰ Plasa, 42.
- ⁵¹ Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 465.
- ⁵² David. A. Davies & Tara Powell, 'Reading Southern Food', *Writing in the Kitchen: Essays in Southern Literature and Foodways* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014), online edition.
- ⁵³ Ferris, *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 12.
- ⁵⁴ Deborah Jean Warner, *Sweet Stuff: An American History of Sweeteners from Sugar to Sucralose* (Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2011), 40.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ Nabokov, *Lolita*, 62.

-
- 57 Boyd, 50.
- 58 Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 94.
- 59 Campbell & Sitze ed., *Biopolitics: A Reader* (Duke University Press, 2013), 23.
- 60 Gerstle, 55.
- 61 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (Vintage, 2008), 583.
- 62 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 565.
- 63 Fahrmeir, 'Governments and Forgers: Passports in Nineteenth-Century Europe', *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton University Press, 2001), 232.
- 64 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 566.
- 65 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 568.
- 66 Quoted in Boyd, 87.
- 67 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 588.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 595.
- 70 Conley, 'History and Denial in Nabokov's 'Conversation Piece, 1945'', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 45 (Autumn, 2005), online edition.
- 71 Wilson, *Memoirs of Hecate Country*, 346.
- 72 Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 1.
- 73 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 596.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 597.
- 76 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 595.
- 77 Voronina, 'Vladimir Nabokov's Correspondence with *The New Yorker* regarding 'Signs and Symbols', 1946-1948', in *Anatomy of a Short Story: Nabokov's Puzzles, Codes, 'Signs and Symbols'*, ed. Yuri Leving & John Banville (Continuum, 2012), 42-43.
- 78 Quoted in Ben Yagoda, *About Town: The New Yorker and the World it Made* (Scribner, 2000), 224.
- 79 Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, 583.
- 80 *OED*.
- 81 Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (Penguin, 2010), 7, 12 & 13.
- 82 Gogol, *Dead Souls*, trans. Anthony Briggs (Wordsworth Editions, 2010), 317.
- 83 Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, 68.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 *OED*.
- 86 Nabokov, *Ada* (Penguin, 2000), 424.
- 87 Nabokov, *Ada*, 420.

⁸⁸ Ronald, *The Century Cook Book* (The Century co., 1899), 159.

⁸⁹ Ronald, 158-159.

⁹⁰ Nabokov, *Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 59.

⁹¹ Nabokov, *Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, 59.

⁹² Nabokov, *Collected Poems*, ed. Thomas Karshan (Penguin, 2012), 132-133.