

The Nabokovian



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CONTENTS

News	3
by Stephen Jan Parker	
Notes and Brief Commentaries	5
by Priscilla Meyer	
“Nabokov and Bret Harte: An Overlooked Allusion in <i>Lolita</i> ”	5
Gary Scharnhorst	
“Duality and Harmony: The Critical Role of the Variants in <i>Pale Fire</i> ”	6
James Maguire	
“Adakisme, Dolikisme: The Kirkaldy Connection”	14
Victor Fet	
“Frost and Shade, and Questions of Design”	19
Anna Morlan	
“Ods Bod(t)kins!”	27
Alexander Dolinin	

As I am reasonably sure that I
 Shall wake at six tomorrow, on July
 The twenty-second, nineteen fifty-nine,
 And that the day will probably be fine (974-82).

Shade does not achieve the understanding of the other world which he struggles for throughout the variants, nor does he run from that world, as he does in his final poem. Instead, he finds a middle point between these extremes in which he can live. He cannot know the answers to his questions, but he can be "reasonably certain" of the artistic and rational harmony of the universe. Through equanimity, where his "private universe scans right," he can find a degree of peace within the larger world. He stands between his former agnostic belief that nothing can be known—"a hereafter none can verify" (222) and Kinbote's fanciful invented—and therefore invalid—answer. In this synthesis, Shade finds the truth. It does not matter that his last prediction is mistaken, or even that the others might be; he has found a way to live, and therein lies his apotheosis. His death by gunshot confutes TS Eliot: the world does not end in a whimper, but with a bang.

—James Maguire, Harvard University

ADAKISME, DOLIKISME; THE KIRKALDY CONNECTION

There is a playful but enigmatic passage at a very important point in *Ada*, 1.22: 141.14-16: "There was a well-known microlepidopterist who, having run out of Latin and Greek names, created such nomenclatorial items as Marykisme, Adakisme, Ohkisme. She did."

No specific interpretation was given to this sentence by any of the commentators. Brian Boyd ("Annotations to *Ada*", *The Nabokovian*, 2004, 52: 62-63) notes that it is a play on "-

kiss me," and that taxonomic names indeed do not have to be based on strictly Latin terms.

However, these three "nomenclatorial items" do have a direct, hidden source. This story, or rather an Edwardian entomological pun, still circulates on the fringes of the taxonomic crowd (see, for example, May R. Berenbaum, *Buzzwords: A Scientist Muses on Sex, Bugs, and Rock 'n' Roll*, National Academies Press, 2000, 159).

The story is that, in 1904, the renowned British-American entomologist named George Willis Kirkaldy (1873-1910) who worked on so-called true bugs, order Hemiptera, created a series of generic names for his beloved bugs, among them: *Ochisme*, *Dolichisme*, *Elachisme*, *Florichisme*, *Isachisme*, *Marichisme*, *Nanichisme*, *Peggichisme*, and *Polychisme*. "-chisme" of course is pronounced "KISS-me."

Kirkaldy died in 1910 in San Francisco, aged only 36. In 1912, he was posthumously criticized for frivolity by the Zoological Society of London. "Presumably, eight years elapsed before anyone in the Zoological Society actually pronounced these names out loud and realized that the series provided a plea for osculatory adventures" (Berenbaum, 2000). All these bug names, however, were, and are, perfectly available according to zoological nomenclature, although some of them were synonymized since 1904.

I do not know where in his entomological career Nabokov picked up George Kirkaldy's precious pun. It has been known to many; it is still around, now mostly on the trivia websites. However, the original Kirkaldy paper, "Bibliographical and nomenclatorial notes on the Hemiptera. No. 3," appeared in the famous British journal, *The Entomologist* (1904, 37: 279-283). Nabokov's own first publication in English, "A Few Notes on Crimean Lepidoptera" (1920), appeared in the same journal, one of his favorites, as Johnson and Coates remind us in their wonderful *Nabokov's Blues* (McGraw-Hill, 2001). Nabokov read this journal for decades: he wrote to his wife from Prague in 1930 how he "...gnawed into old numbers of *The Entomologist*" (Boyd & Pyle, *Nabokov's Butterflies*, Beacon Press, 2000);

those were "lovingly stacked ... on the table beside his bed" by his mother (Johnson & Coates). Nabokov published two more papers in *The Entomologist*, in 1931 and 1948.

Would it be too much to assume that Nabokov had in fact seen the original Kirkaldy publication in his young years in Russia? Already by 1910, he was "voraciously reading entomological periodicals, especially English and Russian ones" (*Speak, Memory*, 6.2), among which the English "were then the best in the world" (*Drugie berega*, 6.2, in Russian). In a 1962 interview, Nabokov said "In my early boyhood all the notes I made on the butterflies I collected were in English, with various terms borrowed from that most delightful magazine *The Entomologist*" (*Strong Opinions*, 5).

Nabokov used three names in *Ada*: one is Adakisme; two others, Ohkisme and Marykisme, are original Kirkaldy names, *Ochisme* and *Marichisme*. What is a Mary doing in *Ada*? Is it another eruption of the "marigold" (marybud) motif, or also a reference to Nabokov's own first novel and first love, "Mary"?

Among the original Kirkaldy names not present in *Ada*, on the same page as *Ochisme* and *Marichisme*, is *Dolichisme*, and Dolly is Lolita, referenced in *Ada* many times. *Ada* of course plays "Dolores, a dancing girl" in *Don Juan's Last Fling*. One has indeed to solve the puzzle of Kirkaldy, and jump back to the 1904 pages of *The Entomologist* to see the 1955 "Dolly" once again, reflected in Ardis of 1884. (Note that "chisme" also means "gossip" in Spanish, a strange coincidence? Do we hear also a tinge of "kismet" here?).

Kirkaldy created many other whimsical generic names such as *Apache*, *Geisha*, *Nirvana*, *Peregrinator*, and *Texas*; one of his 1902 names even honored the Hawaiian king, *Kamehameha*. Amazingly, in 1906 Kirkaldy also authored the hemipteran name *Lucinda* (!). I am tempted to think that, of all people, Nabokov would check his *Nomenclator Zoologicus* (Neave, 1939), the standard reference list of all generic names in zoology, for Lucette's full name: too many coincidences. Quite incidentally, "Neave" and "Veen" make a nice phonetic palindrome. Sheffield Airey Neave (1879-1961) was a famous

British entomologist, and several butterfly species are named by him and after him.

In addition, long before Neave (1939) became available, one of the standard reference books in zoology was an earlier *Nomenclator Zoologicus* authored by Scudder (1882). Samuel Hubbard Scudder (1837-1911) was the most famous American lepidopterist, whose *Butterflies of the Eastern United States and Canada, with Special Reference to New England* (1889) Nabokov read as a child and called "stupendous" (*Speak, Memory*). Scudder worked in the same Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, where also all Scudder's collections are deposited. Among many other insect species, *Lycaeides scudderi* (now *Plebejas idas scudderi*) (Lycaenidae) was named after Scudder, as well as the famous Karner Blue, *Lycaeides* (now *Plebejus*) *melissa samuelis* Nabokov, 1943; its holotype was collected by Scudder. The story of Karner Blue is told in Zimmer's *A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths* and detailed in Johnson & Coates' *Nabokov's Blues*.

The fact that in *Ada* Nabokov ascribes Kirkaldy-style names to "a well-known microlepidopterist" (while Kirkaldy was a well-known *hemipterist*) appears to be an intentional hoax, designed to confuse a future Nabokovian who would search in vain for these names among Microlepidoptera (the suborder of Lepidoptera that includes small moths), and after not finding any would shrug these names off as another unexplained quirk of Nabokov's ebullient fantasy. Indeed, by the time of *Ada*'s writing, the multitude of lepidopteran motifs in Nabokov's *oeuvre* was already so well-known and overinterpreted that planting a *fake* lepidopteran reference among many real ones seems very much fitting in *Ada*'s deceptive antiworld.

Otherwise, one has to assume that Nabokov used Kirkaldy's names following a second-hand entomological rumor without even checking their source or taxonomy, and indeed thought that the "-chisme" names were authored by a microlepidopterist. This strikes me as impossible, especially since *Ochisme* and

Marichisme are easily found in the alphabetical listing of Neave (1939), and checking a generic name and its author is a routine procedure, which, however, Nabokov failed to do at least once. In 1945, he created the generic name *Pseudothecla*, not realizing that this name was already used by Embrik Strand in 1910 for another taxon; and Strand's name is indeed listed in Neave (1939, 3: 1007). This error led Francis Hemming in 1960 to approach Nabokov and suggest a valid "replacement name" *Nabokovia* (Zimmer, *A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths*, 204, 246).

I have no doubt that Nabokov's names listed in *Ada* have a Kirkaldy origin. So far it is not clear, however, whether Nabokov had indeed seen the original Kirkaldy (1904) paper, or whether he checked Kirkaldy's names (including the hidden *Dolichisme*) against Neave (1939) or other available sources when writing *Ada*. I think that at least the latter was quite possible, especially after the Hemming incident.

The final rewarding discovery awaits the ardent researcher who notices which taxonomic group (family) of Hemiptera Kirkaldy's names belong to. At least two of them, *Ochisme* and *Dolichisme*, are proud members of Cimicidae, the bedbug family, which includes that most infamous creature, the bedbug (*Cimex lectularius*). The cimicids are ectoparasites that feed on the blood of mammals and birds. It is beyond this note to explore the rich bedbug motif in Russian literature (not even mentioning Mayakovsky's play *The Bedbug*); it ranges from the roadside hotels where *klopy da blohi zasnut' minuty ne dayut* ("bedbugs and fleas don't give one a minute's sleep") (*Eugene Onegin*, 7, XXXIV, Nabokov's translation) to a "mature bedbug" that pre-tortures the hero of "Cloud, castle, lake." Even some places in Ardis (the shooting gallery) "crawled with bedbugs" (1.34: 212.11). It is, however, a mild shock to discover the "kiss" motif crossing the "blood" motif so prominent in *Ada* (Chateaubriand's mosquito, etc.) in the image of that classical synanthrope.

Kirkaldy's tradition was recently revived by the American entomologist Neal Evenhuis who named a new genus and

species of a fossil fly from amber *Carmenelectra shechisme* (*Zootaxa*, 2002, 100: 1-15). The description says: "The genus-group name is named for television, film, and magazine personality, Carmen Elektra [*sic*]. Both namesakes exemplify splendid somal structure for their respective taxa. The species-group epithet is an arbitrary combination of letters (13)." The species-group epithet of course is none of that. An extra pun on the pop celebrity's (Carmen Electra) pseudonym is not lost on amber researchers, who often incorporate "electro-" (signifying amber in Greek) into new taxonomic names.

I thank Dr. Brian Boyd for his suggestions on this note, and Dr. Neal Evenhuis for his help.

—Victor Fet, Department of Biological Sciences, Marshall University

FROST AND SHADE, AND QUESTIONS OF DESIGN

In his article in the July 1, 2005 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), Abraham P. Socher brings long overdue attention to the poem that forms the core of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Although the novel itself has been analyzed often and extensively, few have focused on the poem "Pale Fire," composed by John Shade, except to dismiss the fictional poet with the words of his own verses as being an "oozy footstep" behind Robert Frost. Even fewer venture to analyze the relationship between the two poets. I propose that the poem "Pale Fire" is Nabokov's homage to Frost and also his take on some of the issues raised by Robert Frost throughout the volume of his poetry. The poems I find to be the most important to this discourse between Frost and Shade, which I shall analyze below, are "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Birches," and "Design." I will also address Robert Frost's "Questioning Faces" as it relates to Abraham Socher's argument about the Frostian source for "Pale Fire."