

## Annotations to *Ada* (25)

### Part I: Chapter 43

April 2017

#### The Kyoto Reading Circle

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### Part I Chapter 43

**322.2: Alexis Avenue:** Lexington Avenue in Manhattan, New York where the New York Public Library is located.

**322.2-3: Malbrook castle:** According to Dieter E. Zimmer in *The Geography of Antiterra* (<http://www.dezimmer.net/ReAda/AntiterraGeography.htm>, April 4, 2017), Malbrook is the castle in Mayne where Cordula usually spends her summer (See *Ada*, Part III Chapter 2, 458.15).

**322.7: psychotechnician:** One of VN's jokes on Freud—bringing down psychology to the level of a technician's job.

**322.10: extensive study of Mexican spas and spices:** Demon is probably playing around with “spicy” Mexican women in spas. The word “extensive” suggests an emphasis on Demon’s womanizing. The reference to “spas” is picked up when Cordula takes her bath (see our note 323.2-3).

**322.12: English movies:** Glossed later as “every jest” (322.14) and therefore most

probably comedies before the age of technicolor. Ealing Studios in the U.K. produced many light comedies: for example, --“Kind Hearts and Coronets” (1949) starred by Alec Guinness or “Whiskey Galore” (1949).

**322.12: Varangian:** Vikings. Scandinavian invaders of many countries including Russia and Ukrania in the eighth to eleventh centuries. In the context of “movies,” the tragic “Varangian” could be Ingmar Bergman who produced “Sawdust and Tinsel” (1953). The only other place where “Varangian” is mentioned is p. 437, 29 in which Andrey Vineland is “scion” of the “great Varangians.”

**322.15-17. the azure-pure iris of her festively painted eyes to which indigo-black thick lashes, lengthening and up-curving at the outer canthus.** Her eyes would probably look somewhat like this:



<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/564x/2b/e2/6e/2be26e679d5dd89637b6fc0d8116e6ea.jpg>



<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/01/92/16/019216f9174669b3322a4453b5cf7831.jpg>

**322.18: “harlequin slant”:** Curved downwards at the end like a harlequin's hat.



“Harlequin” by Paul Cezanne

<http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/Harlequin/Cezanne-Harlequin>

**323.1: oddly unfamiliar sight:** Unlike Cordula, Ada seldom uses a bath.

**323.2-3: Van, “in the nude ” (as his new sweetheart drolly genteelized “naked”):**

“Genteelizing” “naked” into “nude” suggests nudes in visual art. That a 'nude' is an artistic form opposed to 'naked' is the thesis of Kenneth Clark's 1956 book *The Nude: a study in ideal form*. The whole scene contains motifs scattered throughout the episode of Demon's duel with Baron d'Onsky in Part I, Chapter 2 (13-15), where Marina is in the bath and has a dorophone. Marina's affair with the baron, her confession and consequent duel is told with references to a “naked” girl with a peach-like apple (12.32) and a Roman spa (14.18-9). Demon's duel begins the action of Part I while Van's duel ends it.

**323.14-5: a deep hollow voice which he thought was a man's wanted Cordula:** Since Ada's "jingle" (324.1-4) boasts, "I've parodied / Every veranda and room," we can assume that this voice is Ada's. Therefore, Cordula knows about the parting between Van and Ada and her story about Vanda Broom is fictional.

**323.20: Vanda Broom:** Vanda (with links to Van and Ada, Vaniada) is the name of a species of orchid, found mostly in India and southeast Asia. The name "Vanda" is derived from the Sanskrit name for the species *Vanda tessellata*. (See note for 296.34 for implications of the word "tessellate." For the orchid called "Vanda," see <http://https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanda>, April 4, 2017)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanda#/media/File:Wanda\\_blau.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanda#/media/File:Wanda_blau.JPG)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanda#/media/File:Vanda\\_denisoniana\\_2.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanda#/media/File:Vanda_denisoniana_2.jpg)

**323.21: a regular *tribadka*:** a term invented by Cordula. “Tribade” in French and “tribada” in Russian means “lesbian” and “-ka” is added in Russian to turn it into a feminine diminutive. The three letters of Ada’s name can be found in the word.

**323.22-3: Vanda used to make constant passes at her and at—at another girl:** Cordula's hesitation betrays the fact that this girl was Ada. The story about Ada's possible lesbian admirer is a convenient cover-up for Ada's liaisons with other men, in which Cordula has played the accomplice.

**324.1: In the old manor:** In Ada and Cordula’s school, Brownhill. In Chapter 27, Cordula told Van about lesbianism in their school (see 165.29-166.5). It may also be a pun on “In the old manner” meaning “In the old style.”

**324.1: I’ve parodied:** Ada can draw exact images of flowers but can also “parody” or paint a flower out of fantasy.

**324.2: veranda and room:** Another word-play on “Van-Ada” and “Vanda Broom” (323.20). “Bloom” in the fourth line may also be a near homophone for “Broom.”.

**324.3: jacarandas at Arrowhead:** Lake Arrowhead is near Los Angeles where jacarandas line many streets. They were VN's favorite flowers while he was in Hollywood. “Ardis” means “Arrowhead” in French.

**324.5: Destroy and forget:** Words said by Ada (290.9) when he pointed to his own heart after the revelations of Blanche's note found in his breastpocket.

**324.6: the Park:** Central Park, New York City.

**324.15: defloration:** The flower motif of this chapter is punned with ‘deflower,’—to take a woman’s virginity. However, at the end of the chapter Van is “pregnant.”

**324.16: the first wasp:** See 75.20—“Tower,” she answered, and the wasp (drowned in the honey).

**325.4: his authors:** Van has been annotating Rattner.

**325.5: haze of stars:** “Stars” in Nabokov's works often suggest being caught in illusion or imprisoned in some way. In *Lolita*, “Haze” is Lolita's last name and she longs to become a star. Humbert always gazes (“stares”?) at Dolores Haze through the “haze” of his nympholepsy. “Stars” are linked to the many “starling” references in *Ada*: “Bless the starling and damn the stardust!” (74:9-10)—and the fireflies motif which suggest dissimulation (71:31-32, 173:29). Gray Star, Alaska, is where Lolita dies. Johnny Starling (389 and 430) is the name of Ada's ex-lover (according to Lucette), a budding star. Starling resembles Stalin, who is referred to as Uncle Joe in Part 5, Chapter 6 of *Ada*. The star motif in *Ada* develops into implications of incest by word-play in *Look at the Harlequins!* Don Barton Johnson points out that Count Starov has many “star” children who form incestuous relationships. VV's three wives are linked to Starov by a maze (rhyming, incidentally, with “haze”) of references and anagrams to “stars” (Starov, tears, asterisks, astronomist, starry-eyed American gal, star-dusted sky, I made water into a sizzle of asters), implying they are half-sisters of VV (*Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985, 137-138).

The bird starling is mentioned by Nabokov in his *Lectures on Literature* on Austen's *Mansfield Park* (26) and Dickens' *Bleak House* (74). The birdcage motif expresses the difficulty of attaining freedom. Nabokov mentions the birdcage which keeps the bird from flying in Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. The same cage motif is found in the cage of “the poor creature” (an ape) in *Lolita*'s “Afterword” (311). The starling in *Lolita* also cannot get out (255). Van is “severely restricting” himself to his projected book and away from thoughts of Ada.

**325.6-7: the first tramcar jangled and screeched in the dawning abyss of the city:** The open, free space of the “haze of stars” becomes “restricted” by the repression of his love for Ada so that the images and sounds are discomfiting and end in an “abyss”—a hellish image.

**325.9: he was pregnant:** A parody of the ending of Part 1 of *Madame Bovary*. Vivian Darkbloom notes that this paragraph imitates “a famous Tolstoyan ending” (601), in *Anna Karenina* and that Van is playing the role of Kitty Lyovin. *Ada*'s Chapter I opens with a parody of *Anna Karenina*'s opening but ends with a parody of *Madame Bovary*'s ending, which Darkbloom does not mention. The similar ending is at the end of Part 1 of *Madame Bovary*. The map, the languages as well as the literary subtexts of Antiterra reflect a mixture of what VN esteemed as the greatest Russian and French novels. Van's “pregnancy” indicates both emasculation and his budding career as a writer and thinker.

It recalls the very beginning of *Ada* where Darkbloom's first note (591) mentions the "absurd masculine ending" of the name Anna Arkadievna's patronymic, which begins the theme of Van's emasculation and the theme of gender ambiguity.