Nymphalis carmen: Nympholepsy in Nabokov’s Oeuvre

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Chapter Three: Was Nabokov a Nympholept?
Introduction

Alfred Appel Jr. wrote in the introduction to The Annotated Lolita that Lolita’s rise to fame and Humbert’s obsession with a nymphet: “moved commentators to search for equivalent situations in Nabokov’s earlier work”. (XXXV) Maurice Couturier wrote in Nabokov’s Eros and the Poetics of Desire: “Of all the forms of erotic behavior evoked in Nabokov’s novels, there is one which obviously takes precedence, the love of a mature man, a nympholept, for a special kind of young girl, a nymphet.” (223) And the following dialogue took place between Stephen Smith and Martin Amis in the BBC documentary How Do You Solve a Problem Like Lolita? (2009):

Stephen Smith: “Do you sometimes encounter people who read across from Humbert to Nabokov [and] who are inclined to wonder about his motives and his character?”

Martin Amis: “I’m afraid it becomes unavoidable. In itself Lolita is a fiercely immoral book [...] The little girl stuff comes up in The Enchanter, Lolita, Ada, Transparent Things and the new book [...] The Original of Laura. Now that’s five books and there are traces of it elsewhere [...] I think he’s a very great artist indeed, but this does distort the corpus [...] The reason why this is such a difficult and crucial issue is [...] that no one on earth sees the evil of that more clearly than Nabokov.”

Stephen Smith: “But once you start [...] it does become a bit difficult to look the other away.”
Martin Amis: “It’s an embarrassment. He liked the idea of it too much.”

In this petit volume, I’ve attempted to find all the traces of nympholepsy in Nabokov’s oeuvre and answer the question - Was Nabokov a nympholept? But before mining Nabokov’s oeuvre for nympholepsy, let’s review Nabokov’s slash Humbert Humbert’s (H.H.) definition of a nymphet and nympholept:

Nymphets are between ages of nine and fourteen. [Based on my research, I’ve extended the age of a nymphet to nineteen.] Their true nature is nymphic (i.e., demoniac). However, all girls between nine and fourteen are not nymphets. (16)

Nymphets aren’t necessarily good looking. More importantly, their mysteriousness, fey grace, and their elusive, shifty, soul-shattering, and insidious charm is what separates them from the far more numerous “cute” or “sweet” “human little girls” (i.e., non-nymphets). (17)

As for a nympholept, Nabokov slash H.H. opined that he should be “twice or many times older than” a nymphet (16), he should be “an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison […], and he must possess a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow […] to discern at once […] the little deadly demon among the wholesome children”. (17)

In terms of the age restrictions between a nymphet and nympholept: “there must be a gap of several years, never less than ten […], generally thirty or forty, and as many as ninety in a few known cases, between maiden and man to enable the latter to come under a nymphet’s spell.” (17)
Lastly, before we move to the body of the book, it may be important to discuss the differences between a nympholept and a pedophile.

I wrote in the second edition of *The Allure of Nymphets* that Rutgers’ sexologist Yuri Ohlrichs clarified the clinical definition of pedophilia in the documentary *Are All Men Pedophiles? An Inquiry into Human Sexuality and Its Expression*. Ohlrichs related that for one to be considered a pedophile:

1. He would have to possess a sexual preference for pre-pubertal or early pubertal children.
2. The person would have acted upon those preferences for at least six months or have suffered from distress because of those urges.
3. And the individual must be at least sixteen-years-old and at least five years older than the subject(s) of his desire(s).

Thus, it is a *faux pas* to refer to *Lolita’s* Humbert as a pedophile. Humbert was a hebephile i.e., a man who is attracted to post-pubertal girls who are approximately between the ages of twelve to sixteen-years-old. And he could be referred to as an ephebophile i.e., a man who is attracted to nymphets between the ages of fifteen to nineteen-years-old - but not a pedophile. Thus, unlike popular belief, *Lolita* and Nabokov’s other novels are not about pedophilia but (partly) about hebephilia and\or ephebophilia i.e., nympholepsy.
Chapter One: Novels & Novellas

MASHEN'KA (1926)
[MARY (1970)]

Plot Summary: Lev Glebovich Ganin immigrates to Berlin due to the Russian Revolution and subsequently moves into a boarding house where he learns that one of his house mates is Aleksey Ivanovich Alfyorov. It turns out that Alfyorov is the husband of Mary, Ganin’s first love. Consequently, Ganin breaks up with his current girlfriend, because he’s absorbed with memories of Mary.

Maurice Couturier added in Nabokov’s Eros and the Poetics of Desire: "In Mary, his first novel, Nabokov represented the idyll of two adolescents discovering together the joys of sex and the seductions of love.” (272)

Mary is an anomaly, because the novella doesn’t contain any clear examples of nympholepsy, which shouldn’t be surprising since it was Nabokov’s first book. However, Mary was written and first published when Nabokov was in his late twenties and according to Boyd’s Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years, Mary is based on Valentina (Lyussya) Evgenievnna Shulgin, a fifteen-year-old Russian nymphet. (112)

And in chapter six of Mary: “a student medical orderly at the local military hospital” had a “fifteen-year-old 'sweet and remarkable' girl”. (60)
Plot Summary: Franz moves to Berlin to work in Dreyer's department store. Dreyer is Franz's wealthy relative, but that doesn't prevent Franz from having a love affair with Martha, Dryer’s beautiful wife.

1. During his train ride into Berlin, Franz: “promised himself a lone treat that very night. He bared the shoulders of the woman that had just been sitting by the window, made a quick mental test (did blind Eros react? clumsy Eros did, unsticking its folds in the dark); then, keeping the splendid shoulders, changed the head, substituting for it the face of that seventeen-year-old maid who had vanished with a silver soup ladle almost as big as she before he had had time to declare his love.” (18-19)

2. While scouting rooms to rent in Berlin: “Franz decided to act systematically. At the door of every third or fourth house a small notice board announced rooms for rent. He consulted a newly bought map of the city, checked once again the distance from Uncle’s villa and found he was close enough. A nice, new-looking house with a nice green door to which a white card was affixed attracted him, and he blithely rang the bell. Only after he had pressed it he noticed that the sign said “fresh paint”? But it was too late. A window opened on his right. A bob-haired, bare-shouldered young girl in a black slip, clutching a white kitten to her breast, peered out at Franz. His lips went dry in the arid blast. The girl was enchanting: a simple little seamstress, no doubt, but enchanting,
and let us hope not too expensive. “Whom do you want?” she asked. Franz gulped, smiled foolishly, and said with quite unexpected impudence, by which he himself was at once embarrassed: “Maybe you, eh?” (59-60)

3. Two pictures of interest are mentioned in the novel: “A picture above the bed showed a naked girl leaning forward to wash her breasts in a misty pond.” (61)

And in the room that Franz eventually rents: Over the bed hung a picture. Puzzled, Franz stared at it. A bare-bosomed slave girl on sale was being leered at by three hesitant lechers. It was even more artistic than the bathing September nymph. She must have been in some other room—yes, of course, in the one with the stench.” (66)

The “big-nippled” slave girl is mentioned on three subsequent occasions until she is sold:

I. “They continued their planning when alone in the drab beloved little room, with the still unsold big-nippled slave girl above the bed and a brand-new expensive, unwanted tennis racket in its frame.” (225)
II. “The lewd bidders were appraising the big-nippled bronze-bangled slave girl for the last time.” (279)
III. “In fact, he himself could at any moment turn into a mousetrap, a mouse, an old couch, a slave girl led away by the highest bidder. Such magicians should be made emperors.” (282)
Maurice Couturier wrote in *Nabokov's Eros and the Poetics of Desire* that the slave girl picture may have been an allusion to “The Bath of the Nymph” over Bloom’s bed in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

4. Lastly: "Once a young girl with bouncing breasts, in a short red frock, almost ran into [Franz] [...] and he fancied he recognized in her a janitor's daughter he had longed for many ages ago. (250)
ZASHCHITA LUZHINA (1930)
[THE DEFENSE (1964)]

Plot Summary: With the help of Valentinov, his manipulative manager, Aleksandr Ivanovich Luzhin develops from a chess prodigy into a Grandmaster but becomes mentally unstable along the way.

1. Luzhin’s wife had never met anyone to compare him to but: “Her memory contained a modest dimly lit gallery with a sequence of all the people who had in any way caught her fancy. Here were her school reminiscences — the girls' school in St. Petersburg, with an unusual bit of ivy on its frontage that ran along a short, dusty, tramless street, and the geography teacher — who also taught in a boys' school — a large-eyed man with a very white forehead and tousled hair [...] in love — they said — with one of the upper-form girls, a niece of the white-haired, blue-eyed headmistress”. (88)

   Thus, not only did her geography teacher, who was further described “as an extraordinarily amusing person”, catch “her fancy” but it was rumored that he was in love with one of the “upper-form” nymphets as well.

2. Valentinov requests that Luzhin be an extra in a film: “I wrote the script. Imagine, dear boy, a young girl, beautiful and passionate, in the compartment of an express train. At one of the stations a young man gets in. From a good family. Night descends on the train. She falls asleep and in her sleep spreads her limbs. A glorious young creature. The young man [...] begins literally to lose his head.
In a kind of trance he hurls himself upon her.' [...] 'He feels her perfume, her lace underwear, her glorious young body... She wakes up, throws him off, calls out' [...] 'the conductor and some passengers run in. [...] The point is that from the very first moment — there, in the express — she has fallen in love with him, is seething with passion, and he, because of her — you see, that's where the conflict is — because of her he is being condemned to hard labor.” (247-248)

Interestingly, the male is described as a “young man” but the female is a “young girl” - “a glorious young creature” with a “glorious young body”. 
Here’s part of Amazon’s plot summary for *The Eye*:

“Nabokov’s protagonist, Smurov, is a lovelorn, excruciatingly self-conscious Russian émigré living in prewar Berlin, who commits suicide after being humiliated by a jealous husband, only to suffer even greater indignities in the afterlife.”

1. In the introduction, Nabokov provides some background information about the novella. He shared that the story is set in 1924-5 Berlin and that the Russian expatriates in the book “range from paupers to successful businessmen”. He elaborated that Kashmarin, an elderly businessman, “judiciously directs the London branch of a German firm, and keeps a dancing girl.”

   In addition, Nabokov subjectively shared in the introduction of *The Eye* that his books have “a total lack of social significance” and that: “It is unlikely that even the most credulous peruser of this twinkling tale will take long to realize who Smurov is. I tried it on […] the twelve-year-old child of a neighbor. The child was the quickest, the neighbor, the slowest.”

   One cannot infer that Nabokov had an affair with the nymphet next door, but who knew that he solicited literary feedback from a nymphet. And with how many other nymphets did he confer?

2. The novel *Ariane, Jeune Fille Russe* appeared twice in *The Eye*. Matilda persuaded Smurov to read the novel (5) and the novel appeared “spread-eagled and prone” next to a bowl of raisins and
nutes. (58) Interestingly, Ariane is seventeen, and the IMDb plot summary for the 1932 film adaption of the novella states: “Arianne, a young Russian maid living in France, meets a man twice her age [whom] she falls in love with.”

3. Smurov was wounded during an exchange with the Reds. While “bleeding to death”, he made it to Yalta where he hid in the house of a good friend. Smurov related that his friend had a young daughter who nursed him “tenderly”. He didn’t elaborate, but he ended the vignette by stating elusively, “—but that’s another story.” (47)

4. Uncle Pasha, an eighty-year-old “old goat”, recalled how he used to place Vanya, his niece, across: “his knee and spank her.” (61) “Imagine,” Uncle Pasha had said, “the baby girl blossomed into a genuine rose. I’m an expert in roses […] But it really gives me a kick to think that there was a time when I used to give that lassie a good spanking on her bare little buttocks and now there she is, a bride. (63) “[…] we’ve had our fling, now let the others have theirs […]” (64) Uncle Pasha hadn’t seen Vanya in a long time. But when it was exclaimed: “Oh my goodness! It’s your niece!” “So it is, so it is,” said Uncle Pasha and added something outrageous about cheeks and peaches.” (66)

5. Lastly, Smurov: “[…] set his sights on the Khrushchovs’ maid, a girl of 18, whose special attraction was the sleepy cast of her eyes. She herself was anything but sleepy. It is amusing to think what depraved devices of love play this modest-looking girl-named
Gretchen or Hilda [...] would think up when the door was locked [...]” Smurov shared that the “indecent” events took place after he: “[...] would reach her room by the back stairs, and stay with her a long time.” (72)
Here’s the Goodreads plot summary for *Glory*:

*Glory* is the wryly ironic story of Martin Edelweiss, a twenty-two-year-old Russian émigré of no account, who is in love with a girl who refuses to marry him. Convinced that his life is about to be wasted and hoping to impress his love, he embarks on a "perilous, daredevil project"—an illegal attempt to re-enter the Soviet Union, from which he and his mother had fled in 1919. He succeeds—but at a terrible cost.

1. The very first sentence reveals that after Martin’s grandfather, “a robust Swiss with a fluffy mustache”, immigrated to Russia, he got a job as a tutor and married his youngest tutee. (1)

2. A “despondent” middle-aged ship passenger said in reference to Alla, a twenty-five-year-old poetess, “not bad, that broad”. Alla married at eighteen but didn’t remain faithful to her husband for more than two years. (29) “A Grand Duc languished because of her; [and] Rasputin pestered her for a month with telephone calls.” (30) But, despite the age-gap between Alla and her suiters, she’s not a nymphet; however, she gave Martin a copy of “[…] Pierre Louÿs’s *Les Chansons de Bilitis* in the cheap edition illustrated with the naked forms of adolescents, from which she would read to him, meaningfully pronouncing the French […].” (30)
Les Chansons de Bilitis (1894) [English: The Songs of Bilitis] is a collection of erotic lesbian poetry. Unsurprisingly, nymphet lipstick lesbians are featured. For example, in "The Accommodating Friend" (46):

The storm had lasted all night. Selenis of the lovely hair had come to spin with me. She stayed for fear of the mud, and, pressed tightly each to each, we filled my tiny bed.

When young girls sleep together sleep itself remains outside the door, "Bilitis, tell me, tell me whom you love." She slipped her thigh across my own to warm me sweetly.

And she whispered into my mouth: "I know, Bilitis, whom you love. Close your eyes, I am Lykas." I answered, touching her, "Can't I tell that you are just a girl? Your joke's a clumsy one."

But she went on: "Truly I am Lykas if you close your lids. Here are his arms, here are his hands" ... and tenderly, in the silence, she flushed my dreaming with a stranger dream.

3. “In the mornings, Marie, the niece of the old chambermaid, would come to help with the household chores. She was seventeen, very quiet and comely with cheeks of a dark-pink hue and yellow pigtails tightly wound about her head. Sometimes, while Martin would be in the garden, she would throw open an upstairs window, shake out her dustcloth, and remain motionless, gazing [...] Martin would go up to the bedrooms, determine from the drafts where the cleaning was going on, and would find Marie kneeling in meditation amidst the gloss of wet floorboards; he would see her from behind, with her black wool stockings and her green polka-dot dress. She never looked at Martin, except once—and what an event that was!
[...] He resolutely vowed to start a conversation with her, and to give her a furtive hug.” (45-46)

4. “On evening after dinner, Martin sat in the drawing room with the piazza’s door open while candles burned in the chandeliers and read "a small volume" of Guy De Maupassant’s Bel Ami.”48)

Bel Ami is about Georges Duroy, a journalist, who seduces women and a nymphet to obtain an influential position in Paris. For example, he convinces Susan, the young daughter of the owner and chief editor of Vie Francaise, to inform her parents that she desires to marry Duroy.

"[...] The thing must come from you and not from me. You are a spoilt child; they let you say whatever you like [...]" (432)

"[...] If you are determined, very determined [...] to be my wife, my dear, dear little Susan - I will - run away with you." (433)

"If the little girl had a little courage, he was going to succeed at last. For three months he had been enveloping her in the irresistible net of his love. He was seducing, captivating, conquering her. He had made himself loved by her, as he knew how to make himself loved. He had captured her childish soul without difficulty." (434)

5. Martin met a prostitute: “A girl under an umbrella [...]” After they entered a dark taxicab: “She covered her face with her hands, giggling”. And before they began their transaction, Martin “[...]
gazed lovingly at her bare, childish shoulders and blond bob […]” (55)

Nabokov doesn’t reveal the prostitute’s age, but the fact that she was referred to as a “girl”, she “giggled” and had “childish shoulders” is revealing.

6. “During the civil war, in Southern Russia, Irina, then a quiet, plump, normal though melancholy girl of fourteen, was on a train with her mother: they had had to be content with a bench in a freight car crammed with all sorts of riffraff, and during the long journey two rowdies, ignoring the protests of some of their pals, palpated, pinched, and tickled the child, saying monstrous obscenities to her. Mrs. Pavlov, wearing the smile of helpless horror, and doing her best to protect her, kept repeating, “Never mind, Irochka, never mind—oh please leave the child alone, you should be ashamed of yourselves—never mind, Irochka——” (149-150)

7. After Martin checked his bag and purchased a ticket for the evening train, he got a seat in the station’s café where he ate fried eggs and read a “vicious review of Bubnov’s latest book Caravella.” After he ate and lit a cigarette, he noticed: “[a] young girl at the nearest table [who] sat writing, and wiping her tears. She looked at him for an instant with dim wet eyes, pressing her pencil against her lips, and, having found the word she sought, scribbled again, holding her pencil the way children do […] He paid for his meal and, planning to follow her, began waiting for her to get up […] She remained sitting for a long time while somewhere beyond the
windowpanes trains were leaving, and Martin, who had to get to the Latvian consulate before closing time, decided to give her just five minutes more, and go. The five minutes passed. “All I would do would be to ask her to meet me for a drink in the afternoon—only that,” […] Another minute passed. “All right, forget it,” said Martin, and, throwing his raincoat over his shoulder in the English manner, made for the exit.” (184-185)

8. While seated in a leather armchair in a hotel’s lobby, Martin noticed “two mulatto girls with unusually thing legs”. Suddenly, Darwin, “with throaty ejaculations, slapped” Martin on the shoulder. “You scoundrel,” mumbled Martin happily, “you scoundrel, I’ve been looking for you since morning.” Martin and Darwin didn’t discuss the girls because they: “[…] felt embarrassed and could not find a subject of conversation; [but] they kept poking each other, grinning and rumbling.” (197)
KAMERA OBSKURA (1933)  
[LAUGHTER IN THE DARK (1938)]

Plot Summary: Albinus, a Berlin based art critic, is captivated by Margot Peters, a sixteen-year-old cinema usher. After Albinus and Margot begin their sexual affair, Albinus introduces Margot to Axel Rex, a New York City based painter. Unbeknownst to Albinus, Margot and Rex were once an item. Subsequently, Margot and Rex reignite their age-gap love affair to the demise of Albinus.

1. Here is the opening sentence of Laughter in the Dark: “Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was a rich, respectable, happy; one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster.” (7)

2. Interestingly, Elisabeth, Albinus' dear wife: "as a small girl, had been secretly in love with an old actor who used to visit her father [...]" (69-70)

3. Here are some details about Margot:

A. "When she was barely sixteen [...] she learned to dance, and now and then went with the shopgirl to the "Paradise" dance hall where elderly men made extremely frank proposals [...]" (27)

B. Margot was introduced to Rex via Frau Levandovsky. Margot initially declined: "Oh, there's no need for that yet. I'm only sixteen, aren't I? [...]" (31) "Fool," repeated Frau Levandovsky. "He is thirty,
clean-shaven, distinguished, with a silk tie and a gold cigarette case holder." (31) Ultimately, Margot lost her virginity to Rex.

C. Margot was so distressed after Rex abandoned her that she spent the night with two Japanese "gentlemen". They gave her 350 marks for her services. (38) The nymphet only asked for 200.

D. Margot met "a fat old man with a nose like an overripe pear ". After he paid for her room until November and gave her enough money to purchase a fur coat: "she allowed him to stay for the night". However, he died shortly after they met. (38-39)

Subsequently, Margot met Albinus, eventually was reintroduced to Rex at one of Albinus' parties, where the chit and Rex reunited to the ultimate dismay of Albinus.

_Laughter in the Dark_ was adapted into a 1969 film. Here's the IMDb plot summary: "A married middle-aged art critic and 16-year-old Margot [played by 19-year-old Anna Karina] begin an affair and develop a troublesome mutually parasitic relationship."
OTCHAYANIE (1934)
[DESPAIR (1965)]

Plot summary: In Despair, Hermann Karlovich, a businessman and aspiring writer, meets Felix whom he opines is his doppelgänger. Plotting to collect insurance money, Hermann kills Felix, but his murder plot turns out to be imperfect.

Hermann, who is the narrator, shared: “At school I used, invariably, to get the lowest mark for Russian composition [...] when rendering ‘in my own words’ the plot of Othello (which was, mind you, perfectly familiar to me) I made the Moor skeptical and Desdemona unfaithful.” (54-56)

As a reminder, Shakespeare’s Othello is about an age-discrepant marriage between Othello, a North African general of the armies of Venice, and Desdemona, the "exquisitely beautiful" young daughter of Brabantio, a Venetian senator.

Shakespeare doesn't give the exact ages of Othello and Desdemona, but Othello is described by Iago, the villain of the play, as an "old black ram" while Desdemona is described as a "little white lamb [with] beautiful skin, whiter than snow and smooth as the finest marble."

Othello and Desdemona feared that, due to Othello's race and age, they wouldn't get the blessing of her father; thus, they eloped. Roderigo, a young jealous admirer of Desdemona informed her father, "but in the wee hours of the morning your daughter left your house [...] to go into the rough embrace of a lustful Moor."
Thus, it was assumed that Othello seduced Desdemona. It was unconscionable that the marriage was Desdemona’s idea. Desdemona's father even suggested that Othello used magic, trickery and/or drugs to seduce Desdemona. He said, "Are there magic spells that can lead young virgins astray? It's obvious to everyone that you've tricked her, drugged her, or kidnapped her."

And Brabantio asked: "And you want me to believe that despite her young age and proper upbringing she fell in love with a man she'd be afraid to look at?" Iago opined, "To keep things hot, she'll need someone with a handsome face, someone close to her in age, someone who looks and acts like her."

After Desdemona convinced her father that it was her idea to marry Othello, he was forced to give their marriage his blessing; however, that didn't prevent Iago and Roderigo from doing everything within their power to end the age-discrepant marriage.

Brabantio, Roderigo and Iago, would have really been shocked by Desdemona’s assertiveness if Shakespeare would have followed Hermann’s rendering and made Desdemona an “unfaithful” nymphet so soon after she lost her virginity to the Black general.
Here’s part of Amazon’s plot summary for *Invitation to a Beheading*:

“[…] *Invitation to a Beheading* embodies a vision of a bizarre and irrational world. In an unnamed dream country, the young man Cincinnatus C. [a thirty-year-old teacher] is condemned to death by beheading for "gnostical turpitude," an imaginary crime that defies definition. Cincinnatus spends his last days in an absurd jail, where he is visited by chimerical jailers, an executioner who masquerades as a fellow prisoner, and by his in-laws, who lug their furniture with them into his cell. When Cincinnatus is led out to be executed, he simply wills his executioners out of existence: they disappear, along with the whole world they inhabit.”

1. The plot summary failed to mention Emmie, the “silky-blonde” twelve-year-old daughter of Rodrig Ivanovich, the prison director, who would hide in Cincinnatus’ cell. At the abrupt end of her first visit, the nymphet: “[…] on the threshold, she abruptly stopped […] perhaps blowing a kiss, or perhaps concluding a pact of silence – looked over her shoulder at Cincinnatus […]” (43)

2. Cincinnatus’ lawyer entered the cell “ruffled and sweaty”: “I lost a cufflink,” he exclaimed, panting rapidly like a dog. “Must have – rushed against some – when I was with sweet little Emmie – she’s always full of mischief […]” (29)

3. Subsequently: “At one spot, where an unexpected and inexplicable sunbeam fell from above and glowed mistily as it broke
on the eroded flagstones, Emmie, the director’s daughter, in a bright checkered frock and checkered socks—a mere child, but with the marble calves of a little ballerina—was bouncing a ball, rhythmically against the wall. She turned, brushing a blond lock from her cheek with the fourth and fifth fingers of her hand, and followed the brief little procession with her eyes. Rodion gave a playful jingle with his keys as he passed; the lawyer lightly stroked her glowing hair; but she was staring at Cincinnatus, who gave her a frightened smile. Upon reaching the next bend of the passage, all three glanced back […]” (36)

Couturier wrote in *Nabokov’s Eros and the Poetics of Desire* that Cincinnatus was “sexually aroused” by the marble calves of Emmie - the “little ballerina”. (178)

4. During a follow-up visit by Emmie to Cincinnatus’ cell (153-154):
Cincinnatus stroked her warm head, trying to raise it. She snatched his fingers and began pressing them to her quick lips.

“What a snuggling pet you are,” said Cincinnatus drowsily. “That will do, enough now. Tell me … [when will I be executed]”

But she was seized by an outburst of childish boisterousness. The muscular child rolled Cincinnatus about like a puppy. “Stop it!” cried Cincinnatus. “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

“Tomorrow,” she said suddenly, squeezing him and gazing at him between the eyes.

“Tomorrow I’ll die?” asked Cincinnatus.
“No, I’ll rescue you,” Emmie said pensively (she was seated astride him).

“That’s very nice indeed,” said Cincinnatus. “Saviors from all sides! This ought to have happened sooner—I’m nearly insane. Please get off, you are heavy and hot.”

“We’ll run away, and you’ll marry me.”

“Maybe when you are a little older; only I already have one wife.”

5. Emmie “darted out” to Cincinnatus “firmly grasping him by the hand, dragged him [into the director’s apartment] after her. All her movements betrayed excitement, rapturous haste.” (173)

“Pfui, you naughty child!” said the director’s wife to Emmie with a slight German accent. (174)

M’sieur Pierre, who was stirring his tea, demurely lowered his eyes. (174) [...] “Emmie sat down at the table [...] and brushing her neighbor with her elbow. Her neighbor [M’sieur Pierre] continued to sip his tea, holding the spoon protruding from it between second and third fingers, but inconspicuously, reached under the table with his left hand. “Eek!” cried Emmie as she gave a ticklish start, without, however, taking her mouth from the melon.” (175)

6. Cincinnatus’ father was an “unknown transient” (16) who had impregnated Cecilia C., Cincinnatus’ mother: “one night at the Ponds when she was still in her teens” (16). During a cell visit, Cincinnatus asked his mother to tell him the “legend” about his father. Cecilia implored: “It’s true, I don’t know who he was – a tramp, a fugitive, anything is possible...But why can’t you
understand…yes, it was a holiday, it was dark in the park, and I was still a child, but that’s beside the point.” (136)
Plot Summary: After the Bolshevik Revolution, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyn'tsev and his family immigrate to Berlin where he develops as a writer and develops a love affair with fellow émigré Zina Mertz.

1. In *The Gift*, after Fyodor would spend the greater part of the day on an indigo beach in the public garden, a book in his long tanned fingers” he would “go to give a lesson – to a businessman with sandy eyelashes, who looked at him with a dull gaze of malevolent perplexity as Fyodor unconcernedly read him Shakespeare; or to a schoolgirl in a black jumper, whom he sometimes felt like kissing on her bent yellowish nape”. (60)

2. When Fyodor’s mother extended him some spending money, he had contemplated procuring a young German prostitute: "‘I have a suggestion to make,’ said his mother gaily as they parted. ‘I have about seventy marks left which are quite useless to me, and you must eat better. I can’t look at you, you’re so thin. Here, take them.’ ‘*Avec joie,*’ he replied, instantly envisioning a year’s pass to the state library, milk chocolate and some mercenary young German girl whom, in his baser moments, he kept planning to get for himself.” (96)

3. "[...] *Othello* with the famous black tragedian Aldriged [was staged]."
4. Fyodor moved in with the Shchyogolevs after he eyed a “very short” dress on a “little table”. “Here’s my [step] daughter’s room,” [Shchyogolev] said, pointing to two doors on the left and right […] Fyodor passed his eyes over the table, a bowl of nuts, a sideboard…By the far window, near a bamboo table, stood a high-backed armchair: across its arms there lay in airy repose a gauze dress, pale bluish and very short”. (144)

5. Eventually, Fyodor secretly met with Zina Mertz, the step-daughter of Shchyogolev and the daughter of Marianna Nikolavna, and she shared with Fyodor that she met her fiancé: “when she was sixteen, three years before, he being twelve years older than she”. (184)

6. And: “Once, when [Boris Ivanovich] had noticed some written-up sheets of paper on Fyodor’s desk, he said, adopting a new heartfelt tone of voice: “Ah, if only I had a tick or two, what a novel I’d whip off! From real life. Imagine this kind of thing: an old dog—but still in his prime, fiery, thirsting for happiness—gets to know a widow, and she has a daughter, still quite a little girl—you know what I mean—when nothing is formed yet but already she has a way of walking that drives you out of your mind—A slip of a girl, very fair, pale, with blue under the eyes—and of course she doesn’t even look at the old goat. What to do? Well, not long thinking, he ups and marries the widow. Okay. They settle down the three of them. Here you can go on indefinitely—the temptation, the eternal torment, the itch, the mad hopes.” (186)
Plot Summary: Arthur, a middle-aged writer, is enticed by Maria, a twelve-year-old nymphet. Arthur strategically marries Maria’s ill mother and after the mother dies, Arthur takes his nymphet on a road trip where, to their utter dismay, he displays his phallus.

Nabokov wrote in a letter to Walter Minton, the president of G.P. Putnam’s Sons, that Volshebnik was: “a kind of pre-Lolita novella [written] in the autumn of 1939 in Paris.” Nabokov thought the he had destroyed the novella, but he found it when he was: "collecting material to give to the Library of Congress." (15)

The setting and time period isn't clear, but Nabokov mentioned in the author's notes that the protagonist: “was a central European, the anonymous nymphet was French, and the loci were Paris and Provence.” (12)

1. The forty-year-old protagonist was picky about his nymphants. He wasn't attracted to school girls who were husky, skinny, had acne or wore glasses. (23) He was attracted to: "[a] violet-clad girl of twelve [...] [with] russet curls (recently trimmed) [...] large, slightly vacuous [light gray] eyes [...] warm complexion [...] pink mouth [...] [and] summery tint" (27) whom he noticed while he sat on a Paris park bench.

2. Subsequently, using the seduction technique of stalking that Soren Kierkegaard exemplified in The Seducer's Diary: "[t]he day after, and the days that followed, he sat in the same place" (33) to
be near the nymphet whom he "would have given a sack of rubies, a bucket of blood, anything he was asked" (37) to be with.

3. When the nymphet's mother demanded: "Off the bed! What's the meaning of this?" Hurriedly concealing the soft skin of her underside and the tiny wedge of her taut panties, she rolled off (oh, the liberties I would allow her! he thought).” (37-38)

4. Interestingly, Nabokov wrote then when the nymphet gave a "vigorous toss" to "her brown curls", she was displaying “flirtatiousness” (51), which is what professional pickup artists would consider to be an Indicator of Interest (IOI).

5. But that wasn't the only IOI that the protagonist received. The nubile maiden: "in front of everyone, touched his shaven cheek with her cool, unhurried lips: once over the champagne glass to congratulate him [upon becoming her step-father], and then at the door, as she was saying good-bye." And as he was: “arranging his things in her former room where, in a bottom drawer, he found a little rag of hers that told him far more than those two incomplete kisses.” (54)
THE REAL LIFE OF SEBASTIAN KNIGHT (1941)

Plot Summary from Amazon: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is [...] about the mysterious life of a famous writer. Many people knew things about Sebastian Knight as a distinguished novelist, but probably fewer than a dozen knew of the two love affairs that so profoundly influenced his career, the second one in such a disastrous way. After Knight's death, his half brother [V.] sets out to penetrate the enigma of his life, starting with a few scanty clues in the novelist's private papers. His search proves to be a story as intriguing as any of his subject's own novels, as baffling, and, in the end, as uniquely rewarding.

1. V went through Sabastian’s books that: “were numerous, untidy and miscellaneous.” (44) In addition to an Anglo-Persian Dictionary, one of the books on the shelf was *Alice in Wonderland*.

   I related in *The Allure of Nymphets* that Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, who went by the pseudonym Lewis Carroll and who was the famous author of *Alice in Wonderland*, allegedly wanted to marry eleven-year-old Alice Liddell. (53)

2. After dinner, Sebastian would go back to his room or “to the little cinema [...] where a Wild Wild West film would be shown, or a Charlie Chaplin stiffly trotting away from the big wicked man and skidding on the street corner.” (51)
I related in *The Allure of Nymphets* from Joyce Milton's *Tramp: The Life of Charlie Chaplin* that Charlie Chaplin developed a crush on twelve-year-old Maybelle Fournier, he met Mildred Harris when she was fourteen-years-old and impregnated her when she was sixteen. Furthermore, he was smitten with fifteen-year-old Hetty Kelly and impregnated Lita Grey when she was fifteen-years-old. (24)

3. In an effort to track down the last woman whom Sabastian had a love affair with, V. visits Pahl Palich Rechnoy, who said of Mme de Rechnoy, his ex-wife and an eccentric and flamboyant teen:

“I knew she was another fellow's mistress and all that, but I did not care. Her idea of life was drinking cocktails, and eating a large supper at four o'clock in the morning, and dancing the shimmy or whatever it was called, and inspecting brothels because that was fashionable among Parisian snobs, and buying expensive clothes, and raising hell in hotels when she thought the maid had stolen her small change which she afterwards found in the bathroom.... Oh, and all the rest of it — you may find her in any cheap novel, she's a type, a type. And she loved inventing some rare illness and going to some famous kurort, and...” (168)

Later, Mme Nina Lecerf self-described Mme de Rechnoy as “still very young” (179) and “a mere slip of a girl” when she married Pahl Palich Rechnoy and that the only man Mme de Rechnoy: “[...] really loved was a married man and that was before her marriage [...]” (180) [Emphasis mine.]
4. By the time V. meets Mme Nina Lecerf (Mme de Rechnoy), she is under twenty-eight (180) but her husband is a “middle-aged rather common-looking Frenchman” (189) and after Mme Nina Lecerf (Mme de Rechnoy) asked V.: “How do you like my husband?” He replied that her husband must be “[…] much older than she.” (190)

5. And in Sebastain’s, The Doubtful Asphodel, his last novel and masterpiece: “An old man sobs and is soothed by a soft-lipped girl in mourning. [And] [p]rofessor Nussbaum, a Swiss scientist, shoots his young mistress and himself dead in a hotel room at half past three in the morning.” (202)
Speak, Memory, Nabokov’s autobiography, was initially published in 1951, but it was revised, extended and republished in 1966.

1. While discussing the lineage of his German great-grandmother, Baron Ferdinand von Korff, Nabokov shared:

Antoinette’s mother, Elisabeth née Fischer (born 1760), was the daughter of Regina born Hartung (1732–1805), daughter of Johann Heinrich Hartung (1699–1765), head of a well-known publishing house in Königsberg. Elisabeth was a celebrated beauty. After divorcing her first husband, Justizrat Graun, the composer’s son, in 1795, she married the minor poet Christian August von Stägemann, and was the “motherly friend,” as my German source puts it, of a much better-known writer, Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), who, at thirty-three, had fallen passionately in love with her twelve-year-old daughter Hedwig Marie (later von Olfers). (54)

2. Nabokov’s humble drawing master was a: “quiet, bearded gentleman with a stoop, old-fashioned”. Nabokov used to synchronize his drawing master’s age with the ages of his: “granduncles and old family servants”. Nabokov learned twenty-five years later that his drawing master “had married a young Estonian girl”. (93)
3. Nabokov’s father, Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, wrote *Sbornik statey po uГОлOвному праву* (1904). Almost sixty years after it was published, Andrew Field bought a copy of the “collection of articles on criminal law” in a used bookstore in Russia. In “Carnal Crimes” (1902), Nabokov’s: “father discusses, rather prophetically in a certain odd sense, cases (in London) of little girls à l’âge le plus tendre (v nezhneyshem vozraste), i.e., from eight to twelve years, being sacrificed to lechers (slastolyubtsam).” (178)

4. Alex Beam related in *The Feud: Vladimir Nabokov, Edmund Wilson, and the End of a Beautiful Friendship* that “Confession Sexuelle d’un Russe du Sud” was published in the appendix of volume six of Havelock Ellis’ *Studies of Sexual Psychology* and is deemed to be the authentic memoir of the narrator who was a: “wealthy Ukrainian who lost his virginity at the age of twelve, having been seduced by girls his age and by older women.” Subsequently, after earning an engineering degree, the narrator is introduced to Italian nymphet prostitutes while on a business trip in Naples.

"Confession Sexuelle d'un Russe du Sud" was translated into *Secret Lolita: The Confessions of Victor X* by Donald Rayfield, an emeritus professor of Russian and Georgian at Queen Mary University of London. Here's a conservative excerpt that describes two of the Italian pre-teen prostitutes:

I was sent with some colleagues to Naples by my firm’s management, to look into the planned installation of an electrical factory, and plans for harnessing hydraulic power from the mountains around. I made my first visit there - the most pleasure-loving city of all Europe, not forgetting Munich, Paris and Berlin. One thing Naples is noted for is an enormous traffic in little boys
and girls, and openly too. If you buy something in a shop, the shopkeeper, who may look quite respectable, will offer to show you a little girl of twelve, ten or eight. Pimps accost strangers in the street offering them little girls or little boys. Families who are not badly off and who have some standing - petty shopkeepers, clerks, tailors, cobblers ¼ also traffic in their prepubescent girls.

For the reasonable price of twenty, thirty, forty francs you are just allowed to have fun or to play with them. If you want to deflower one, that costs more - hundreds or a thousand francs, depending on the family’s social status. At the right price you can sometimes find this pleasure even in families that seem to be quite ‘comme il faut’. You admire an elegant young girl at the theater, surrounded by her family in her box. The person next to you in the stalls notices your enthusiasm. He tells you that the lady is yours at quite a moderate price and offers to help by introducing you. The Neapolitans are a very practical lot indeed. They make money every way they can except by working. Work is a source of income that does not appeal to them. The big San Carlo theater has a large ballet which operates independently of the opera. Several hundred children of both sexes form part of the ballet and it is just a great center for prostitution.

The two little girls were both as expert as each other. They told me all sorts of things about pederasty and lesbianism in this city. They went in for the latter with each other and with girlfriends. They had watched specially arranged copulations ¼ among others, a woman having intercourse with a dog, a man with a duck whose throat he cut during the act (that was an Englishman too), pyramid coitus which combined several people. They had posed for obscene photographs.

They were very sensual but, oddly enough, the younger one was even more so than her sister - she had violent orgasms when she looked like someone in death-throes, and secreted copiously. She adored obscene talk, photographs and reading, and used her erotic talents enthusiastically. When I came to the house, her face beamed with joy. I remember the deeply heartbroken, unhappy look she had one day when, to save money, I said I would make do with just the older girl. When afterwards I came out of the bedroom after that session, I saw the younger girl sitting on a chair by the door
listening, her face sallow with vexation, trembling all over with frustration. She was overjoyed the next time when it was her turn to be asked for. She started dancing.

My sexual intoxication worsened from day to day. I soon got to know other ‘honorable’ family with little girls of ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen who were likewise virgins and as expert as the first two and, just like them. At our first conversation they offered to do ‘69’ (far il sessanta nove) with me - they used a lot of other terms as well as that technical one. They told me about their homosexual lovemaking and the erotic scenes they had watched. I never had vaginal intercourse with any of them.

Beam related that Edmund Wilson was confident that Lolita was inspired by “Confession Sexuelle d’un Russe du Sud”, which was gifted to Nabokov by Wilson in June of 1948. (The cover of my translated edition has the blurb: “A sex masterpiece!” – Edmund Wilson.) Wilson felt that he had an, although, indirect yet strong influence on Lolita. In a letter to Nabokov, Wilson wrote that "Confession Sexuelle d'un Russe du Sud" “no doubt inspired Lolita”. Even if Wilson’s claim can’t be proven, Beam wrote: “We know that Nabokov read the Ellis’ tale (i.e., "Confession Sexuelle d'un Russe du Sud") closely, because he referred to it twice, once in Speak, Memory and a second time, and in greater detail, when he translated and re-edited Speak, Memory as Drugiye Berega into Russian.

Our innocence seems to me now almost monstrous in light of various “sexual confessions” (to be found in Havelock Ellis and elsewhere), which involve tiny tots mating like mad. (Speak, Memory, 203)
Our innocence seems to me now almost monstrous in the light of various confessions dating from the same years and cited by Havelock Ellis, which speak of tiny tots of every imaginable sex, who practice every Graeco-Roman sin, constantly and everywhere, from Anglo-Saxon industrial centers to the Ukraine (from where an especially lascivious report by a landowner is available). *(Drugie berega*, 184.)

In addition to "Confession Sexuelle d'un Russe du Sud", Alexander Dolinin wrote in "Nabokov and Third-Rate Literature (On a Source of LOLITA)" that Valentin Samsonov’s “A Fairy-Tale Princess” may have been an additional source for *Lolita*.

The short story is about Oleg Prostov, an insatiable nympholept, who confessed: “I am convinced that only with a girl not older than fifteen I can experience delight and it is worth giving my life for.”

Subsequently, Oleg kidnaps and rapes Ira, a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl. Consequently: “Oleg is arrested and sentenced to long-term imprisonment for kidnapping.” In prison he tells the narrator: "[...] that he is happy; Ira, meanwhile, is sad and dreams of meeting him again.”

Dolinin noted some possible references in *Lolita* to “A Fairy-Tale Princess”:

1. Oleg Sherva is listed as one of Lolita’s classmates
2. And referring to the list, Humbert states passionately: “[...] “Haze, Dolores” (she!) in its special bower of names, with its bodyguard of roses - a fairy princess between her two maids of honor.” (52)
LOLITA (1955)

Lolita’s plot summary: Humbert Humbert (H.H.), a middle-aged literature professor, is enticed by Dolores “Lolita” Haze, a twelve-year-old nymphet. Humbert strategically marries Lolita’s mother and after the mother dies, Humbert takes his nymphet on a road trip where they begin a sexual affair, but Lolita’s secret sexual affair with Quilty, a playwright and fellow nympholept, ends badly for Humbert and Quilty.

In a Rookie magazine article for teens, “Older Men: Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Them, and Weren’t at All Afraid to Ask.”, Amy Rose Spiegel misleadingly wrote that Lolita, a novel that Spiegel “romanticized” as a nymphet, was a: “[...] story about an adult man kidnapping, molesting, and raping an adolescent girl”. However, novelist Robertson Davies' assessment of the book as: “[...] not [about] the corruption of an innocent child by a cunning adult, but [about] the exploitation of a weak adult by a corrupt child” is more accurate.

1. Nabokov stated in a 1967 Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature (vol. III, no. 2) interview with Alfred Appel that of all his novels, he held the greatest affection for Lolita and, unsurprisingly, the nympholepsy motif appears almost immediately.

The beginning of the third sentence: “Lo-lee-ta […]” gives the readers their first allusion to nympholepsy. (9) Alfred Appel Jr, wrote in the notes to The Annotated Lolita: “[...] the middle syllable alludes to [Poe’s] “Annabel Lee” (1949) […]” (328)
Interestingly, Poe is alluded to over twenty times in the novel. And that the apparent connections between Humbert and Poe are their “child brides”. (330) Nabokov elaborated on page forty-three: “Virginia was not quite fourteen when Harry Edgar possessed her. He gave her lessons in algebra. Je m’imagine cela. They spent their honeymoon at Petersburg, Fla.”

Appel noted that Poe was twenty-seven when he married, à la Jerry Lee Lewis, Virginia Clemm, his thirteen-year-old cousin. (357)

2. H.H. lists some historical points to support nympholepsy. He begins by giving a brief history of the age of consent laws:

“Let me remind my reader that in England, with the passage of the Children and Young Person Act in 1933, the term “girl-child” is defined as “a girl who is over eight but under fourteen years” (after that, from fourteen to seventeen, the statutory definition is “young person”). In Massachusetts, U.S., on the other hand, a “wayward child” is, technically, one “between seven and seventeen years of age” (who, moreover, habitually associates with vicious or immoral persons).” (19)

Appel noted that: “the Act actually reads: “‘Child’ means a person under the age of fourteen years […] ‘Young Person’ means a person who has attained the age of fourteen years and is under the age of seventeen years” (341)
3. H.H. wrote that: “Hugh Broughton [an English theologian] [...] proved that Rahab was a harlot at ten years of age.” (19) Appel noted that the allusion is to Broughton’s *A Consent on Scripture* (1588) in which he wrote that Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute in the Book of Joshua (2:1-21), was a nymphet.

Consequently, H.H. couldn’t understand why a sixteen-year-old nymphet is legal (in some states e.g., New Jersey), but a twelve-year-old is illegal. “[...] I found myself maturing amid a civilization which allows a man of twenty-five to court a girl of sixteen but not a girl of twelve.” (18)

4. H.H. describes some pictures. One of nymphets singing, which may be a reference to two stanzas from Virgil's *Eclogues* that reads:

“Who could the Nymphets sing? Who strew the ground \ With blooming plants, or mantle o'er the springs”.

And a wall painting of “pre-nubile” nude Neferneferure and Neferneferuaten – two daughters of King Akhnaten and Queen Nefertiti and ten-year-old brides straddling fascinum (i.e., ivory dildos):

“Here is Virgil who could the nymphet sing in single tone [...] Here are two of King Akhnaten’s and Queen Nefertiti’s pre-nubile Nile daughters (that royal couple had a litter of six), wearing nothing but many necklaces of bright beads, relaxed on cushions, intact after three thousand years, with their soft brown puppybodies, cropped hair and long ebony eyes. Here are some brides of ten compelled
to seat themselves on the fascinum, the virile ivory in the temples of classical scholarship.” (19)

5. H.H. related that: “Marriage and cohabitation before the age of puberty are still not uncommon in certain East Indian provinces. Lepcha old men of eighty copulate with girls of eight, and nobody minds.” (19)

Appel confirms that this is true and that Nabokov’s reference was Ellis’ *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. (342)

6. According to Appel (342), Petrach was twenty-three when he: “fell madly in love with his Laureen, she was a fair-haired nymphet of twelve running in the wind, in the pollen and dust, a flower in flight, in the beautiful plain as descried from the hills of Vaucluse.” (19)

7. H.H. wrote that a judge would consider his initial reaction to seeing Lolita as: “mummery on the part of a madman with a gross liking for the *fruit vert*.” (40)

Appel noted from Nabokov that *fruit vert* (French for green fruit) is: “French (dated) slang for ‘‘unripe’ females attractive to ripe gentlemen” (356)

8. Here’s another allusion to Poe and Virginia:
“The median age of pubescence for girls has been found to be thirteen years and nine months in New York and Chicago. The age varies for individuals from ten, or earlier, to seventeen. Virginia was not quite fourteen when Harry Edgar possessed her. He gave her lessons in algebra. Je m’imagine cela. [French: I can imagine that.] They spent their honeymoon at Petersburg, Fla. “Monsieur Poe-poe,” as that boy in one of Monsieur Humbert Humbert’s classes in Paris called the poet-poet.” (43)

In addition to the French translation, Appel noted that “Monsieur Poe-poe” is an allusion to “popo”, which is French argot for posterior. (358)

9. “My pillow smelled of her hair. I moved toward by glimmering darling, stopping and retreating every time I thought she stirred or was about to stir. A breeze of wonderland had begun to affect my thought […]”

Appel noted the following about “A breeze from wonderland”:

There are several references to Alice in Wonderland (1865) by Lewis Carroll, the pseudonym of Charles L. Dodgson (1832-1898), English writer, mathematician, and nympholept […]

“I always call him Lewis Carroll Carroll,” said Nabokov, “because he was the first Humbert Humbert.”
Again, Appel referenced Nabokov’s *Wisconsin Studies* interview where Nabokov stated in reference to Carroll\Dodgson: “He got away with it, as so many other Victorians got away with pederasty and nympholepsy. His were scrawny little nymphets, bedraggled and half-undressed, or rather semi-undraped, as if participating in some dusty and dreadful charade.” (381-382)

In another reference to Carroll’s book, H.H. wrote: “[…] I used to recollect, with anguished amusement, the times in my trustful, predolorian past when I would be misled by a jewel-bright window opposite wherein my lurking eye, the ever alert periscope of my shameful vice, would make out from afar a half-naked nymphet stilled in the act of combing her Alice-in-Wonderland hair.” (264)

10. H.H. described himself: “I have all the characteristics which, according to writers on the sex interests of children, start the responses stirring in a little girl: clean-cut jaw, muscular hand, deep sonorous voice, broad shoulder. Moreover, I am said to resemble some crooner or actor chap on whom Lo has a crush.” (43)

The “crooner or actor chap” is an allusion to Clare Quilty (358) and H.H. made a revealing point that a nymphet can have a “crush” on a middle-aged man. For example, I related in *The Allure of Nymphets* that according to Guralnick and Jorgensen’s *Elvis: Day by Day*, twenty-four-year-old Elvis met fourteen-year-old Priscilla on September 13, 1959. *Everything Elvis* by Helen Clutton related that Elvis met the nymphet at a party at his home in Germany while he was in the military. Interestingly, Suzanne Finstad related in *Child*
Bride: The Untold Story of Priscilla Beaulieu Presley that fourteen-year-old Priscilla had sex with Curry Grant, a twenty-seven-year-old friend of Elvis, in exchange for being introduced to the singer. Hence, Priscilla (allegedly) initiated the age-gap relationship. Thus, H.H.’s statements that: “[…] the Haze woman […] was more afraid of Lo’s deriving some pleasure from me than of me enjoying the Lo.” (56) and that “[…] it was she [referring to Lo] who seduced me” (132) were accurate.

For example, before Lo left for Camp Q, H.H. shared that: “My Lolita, who was half in and about to slam the car door […] looked up and dashed back into the house […] and then she was in my arms, her innocent mouth melting under the ferocious pressure of dark male jaws, my palpitating darling.” (66) After H.H. picked up Lo from camp he asked: “Why do you think I have ceased caring for you, Lo?” She responded: “Well, you haven’t kissed me yet, have you?” (112) And before they had sex for the first time: “Okay,” said Lolita, “here is where we start?” (133)

11. Before Lolita rested her legs on Hubert’s lap, she showed him a picture in a magazine: “[…] a surrealist painter relaxing, supine, on a beach, and near him, likewise supine, a plaster replica of the Venus di Milo, half-buried in sand. Picture of the Week, said the legend. (58)

Maurice Couturier wrote in Nabokov’s Eros and the Poetics of Desire: “The whole scene, rather the photo itself, may point towards another painting, L’Impromptu de Versailles, painted by Magritte in 1933 to illustrate a book entitled Violette Nozière: it shows a grown-
up man sitting on a chair and holding a young girl on his knees whom he strokes under her dress; facing him, there is another man with a solemn face, a top hat, holding a leather briefcase under his arm who looks like a syncretic representation of Freud and the painter.” (270)

_Violette Nozière_ is about eighteen-year-old Violette Nozière who poisoned her parents, because her father had been allegedly molesting her since she was twelve. The 1978 film adaptation of the 1933 true-crime portrayed Nozière as a teleiophile who had a number of affairs with older men.

12. “Then, with all possible caution, on mental tiptoe so to speak, I conjured up Charlotte as a possible mate. By God, I could make myself bring her that economically halved grapefruit, that sugarless breakfast.” (70)

Appel noted that Charlotte is a reference to Goethe’s _The Sorrows of Young Werther_ (1774) where, to his detriment, Werther falls in love with Charlotte, a young girl, who is engaged to Albert – a man eleven years her senior.

13. H.H. exclaimed: “We [i.e., nympholepts] are not sex fiends! We do not rape as good soldiers do.” (88)

Appel didn’t note an allusion, but this reminded me of a post on the _Daily Mail_ where it was reported on 24 March 2015 that [at least] fifty-four Colombian nymphets were raped between 2003 and 2007 in the town of Melgar by American troops and
contractors. (Some of the rapes were boldly filmed and sold.) In particular, in August of 2007, US sergeant Michael J. Coen and defense contractor Cesar Ruiz [allegedly] drugged and raped a twelve-year-old Colombian maiden. Colombian prosecutors issued arrest warrants for Coen and Ruiz but, per the Daily Mail, they weren't detained due to diplomatic immunity.

15. H.H. related, correctly, that the “old link between the adult world and the child world has been [recently and] completely severed” (124):

“We are not surrounded in our enlightened era by little slave flowers that can be casually plucked between business and bath as they used to be in the days of the Romans; and we do not, as dignified Orientals did in still more luxurious times, use tiny entertainer’s fore and aft between the mutton and the rose sherbet. The whole point is that the old link between the adult world and the child world has been completely severed nowadays by new customs and new laws. Despite my having dabbled in psychiatry and social work, I really knew very little about children.” (124)

I wrote in The Allure of Nymphets that Neil Postman related in The Disappearance of Childhood that as recent as two hundred years ago, the concept of childhood did not exist, there was no distinction between “children” and adults, and that the separation originated during the Renaissance when the printing press was invented. Additionally, celebrating a child's birthday or even paying attention to birth dates is a relatively recent custom.
Postman purported that the disappearance of literacy, education, and shame that occurred during the Dark and Middle ages in Europe lead to the disappearance of childhood with the loss of literacy being attributed to three factors: the difficult to read elaborate and disguised letters of the alphabet, the scarcity of papyrus and parchment, and the desire of the Roman Church to use illiteracy as a form of control.

With no literacy in the Middle Ages, what we consider today to be childhood ended at age seven, which was when most humans had a command over speech and were considered adults. There were schools in the Middle Ages, but instead of teaching reading and writing the students underwent “on-the-job-training” in classrooms with other students whose ages ranged from ten to adults of all ages. Even at ten-years-old, the students lived away from their parents in what could be described as dorms. Consequently, since there was no social distinction between “children” and adults, the “children” were exposed to everything.

However, the invention of the printing press initiated the distinction between children and adults and the bridge from childhood to adulthood was only crossed by learning how to read. As a result, a new form of schooling was required. Children were no longer placed in mix-aged classrooms to learn a trade. Children were placed in classes with other children close to their own ages and taught a curriculum that emphasized literacy. Sound familiar?

Just like Postman, Richard Farson’s research in Birthrights lead him to the conclusion that children were invented in the 16th century in Europe during the Reformation and Renaissance.
periods. That was when children were no longer thought of as little people but as fragile potential adults (i.e., children) who needed to be protected and educated. However, it still took another two-hundred years before “children” began to be separated by age in school.

Farson wrote that prior to the seventeenth century children were not considered innocent, were not segregated, and were not prevented from participating in adult conversations where salacious topics like sex were discussed. There were no children’s stories or books, and it was common for girls to get married at the age of thirteen.

In New York State, anyone under eighteen-years-old must show an employment certificate before he or she may begin work, but prior to the 16th century, people began working, especially the poor, at the age of eight to help the family financially. Only seven percent of fourteen through seventeen-year-olds were enrolled in school while the other 93% worked – some of them worked more than twelve hours per day. And the hardships children endured during the European and North American Industrial Revolutions are well known.

*New York* magazine had an April 8, 2013 cover story on "Childhood in New York" and printed Jennifer Senior's article "Little Grown-ups and Their Progeny". Senior's report was consistent with the research that I related in *The Allure of Nymphets* about childhood being a relatively recent invention.

Senior related that up until the end of the WWII, children were expected to contribute to the family financially. Particular to New York City, newsboys were rampant, but delivering
newspapers wasn’t their only source of income. They "blackened boots, scavenged for junk, and shuttled messages and goods.” But “child poverty, child abuse, and exploitative labor practices” lead to an effort by reformers and the government (e.g. Children’s Bureau) to protect children.

However, Steven Mintz, the author of *Huck’s Raft: A History of Childhood in America*, said: “They [reformers and the government] viewed kids smoking at 10 and 12 and having independent money and walking into bars as the worst thing in the world. It reminds you that "child" is a label, not a reality.”

Clearly, prior to the end the WW II and before the American economy prospered, young people (i.e., children) were expected to behave as adults in terms of earning a living wage. And their adult behavior, in terms of vices, was condoned. One could even possess a ten-year-old prostitute in New York City.

However, as Postman related, things have [almost] gone full circle. Today, “children” behave more like adults. For example, they drink, smoke, take drugs, have sex, and are (virtual) teen strippers. The Internet has broken the barrier that the invention of the printing press once erected.

In “Porn Before Puberty?”, a 2012 ABC News feature, Winnifred Bonjean Alpart shared that when she was in eighth grade: "[...] boys mostly, were watching porn during school [...] during independent reading, they would do that." In addition, the feature related that nine out of ten children between the ages of eight and sixteen have viewed pornography on the Internet. However, high school and age of consent laws continue to keep (most) "children" and adults separated.
"Why You Truly Never Leave High School" was printed in the January 20, 2013 issue of *New York* magazine. The article is about how high school is a sadistic institution and how new research suggests that high school may be worst possible place for a vulnerable sixteen-year-old mind. Here's an excerpt:

Until the Great Depression, the majority of American adolescents didn’t even graduate from high school. Once kids hit their teen years, they did a variety of things: farmed, helped run the home, earned a regular wage. Before the banning of child labor, they worked in factories and textile mills and mines. All were different roads to adulthood; many were undesirable, if not outright Dickensian. But these disparate paths did arguably have one virtue in common: They placed adolescent children alongside adults. They were not sequestered as they matured. Now teens live in a biosphere of their own. In their recent book *Escaping the Endless Adolescence*, psychologists Joseph and Claudia Worrell Allen noted that teenagers today spend just sixteen hours per week interacting with adults and sixty with their cohort. One century ago, it was almost exactly the reverse.

Something happens when children spend so much time apart from adult company. They start to generate a culture with independent values and priorities. James Coleman, a renowned mid-century sociologist, was among the first to analyze that culture in his seminal 1961 work, *The Adolescent Society*, and he wasn’t very impressed. “Our society has within its midst a set of small teen-age societies,” he wrote, “which focus teen-age interests and attitudes on things far removed from adult responsibilities.”

Lastly on this topic, I related in *The Allure of Nymphets* from Mary E. Odem’s *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* that until 1897 the age of consent in California and most states was ten. That’s correct, ten-years-old. It was twelve in seven states and even more shocking, it
was seven in Delaware. How did the ages get so low? Our early age of consent laws originated over the pond. How did the age of consent go from ten, in most states, to seventeen? Feminists are to blame.

Odem related that after the 19th century, young women started working outside of the house and consequently became more promiscuous. Feminists blamed the raunchy behavior of young women on "dirty old men," and successfully lobbied to have the age of consent raised. However, it backfired, and young women became even more licentious. Consequently, feminists realized that issues like abuse, education, and poverty had more to do with the erratic behavior of nymphets than older men, but it was too late. The damage had already been done. The age of consent laws had been changed.

However, there were two unsuccessful attempts to lower the age of consent. There was an effort in 1889 in Kansas to lower the age to twelve. And in 1890, New Yorkers attempted to lower the age to fourteen. Interestingly, the age of consent is still low in most of countries across the pond. For example, it's fourteen in Germany, it's fifteen in France, and it's thirteen in Spain.

15. The only thing a nympholept likes more than a nymphet are two nymphets. We learned that Lolita was “debauched” by a pre-teen lipstick lesbian:

At the hotel, H.H. suspected that Lo had been taught to kiss by a little [lipstick] lesbian:
“Her kiss, to my delirious embarrassment, had some rather comical refinements of flutter and probe which made me conclude she had been coached at an early age by a little lesbian. No Charlie boy could have taught her that.” (133)

H.H. confirmed his suspicions when Lo shared how she had been debauched:

“She told me the way she had been debauched [...]. Her astounding tale started with an introductory mention of her tent-mate of the previous summer, at another camp, a “very select” one as she put it. That tent-mate (“quite a derelict character,” “half-crazy,” but a “swell kid”) instructed her in various manipulations. At first, loyal Lo refused to tell me her name [...]”

“Well,” she said. “They are pretty bad, some of that school bunch, but not that bad. If you have to know, her name was Elizabeth Talbot, she goes now to a swanky private school, her father is an executive.”

“I recalled with a funny pang the frequency with which poor Charlotte used to introduce into party chat such elegant tidbits as “when my daughter was out hiking last year with the Talbot girl.”

I wanted to know if either mother learned of those sapphic diversions?
“Gosh no,” exhaled limp Lo mimicking dread and relief, pressing a falsely fluttering hand to her chest. (136)

16. H.H. wrote: “The reader knows what importance I attached to having a bevy of page girls, consolation prize nymphets, around my Lolita. For a while, I endeavored to interest my senses in Mona Dahl who was a good deal around […].” And H.H. learned via an “urgent and well-paid request really incredible details concerning an affair that Mona had had with a marine at the seaside.” (191)

While Lolita was out playing, H.H. entertained Mona who was coming to practice a scene from *The Taming of the Shrew*. Mona shared with a concerned H.H.: “Well, sir, the fact is Dolly is not much concerned with mere boys. Fact is, we are rivals. She and I have a crush on the Reverend Rigger.” (191)

Rigger was mention previously: “All this noise about boys gags me, “she had scrawled on the inside of a schoolbook, and underneath, in Mona’s hand […] there was a sly quip: “What about Rigger?”

And in: *The Taming of the Shrew*, Bianca Minola, the modest young sister of Katherine, is courted by Gremio, a “greybeard” elderly suitor.

17. Lolita described to H.H. the “things” that Quilty wanted her to do: “Oh, weird, fancy things. I mean, he had two girls and two boys, and three or four men, and the idea was for all of us to tangle in the nude while an old woman took movie pictures.” After which, H.H. noted: (Sade’s Justine was twelve at the start.) (276)
Appel noted that “Sade’s Justine” is a reference to Justine, or, The Misfortunes of Virtue (1791) by the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) and that Justine was: “an extraordinarily resilient young girl who exists solely for the pleasures of an infinite succession of sadistic libertines. She undergoes and array of rapes, beatings, and tortures […].” (442)

And Quilty shared with H.H.: “[…] I am a playwright. I have written tragedies, comedies, fantasies. I have made private movies out of Justine and other eighteenth century sexcapades.” (298)

Justine wasn’t the only nymphet who was abused in Justine, or, The Misfortunes of Virtue (1791). There were others. Here’s an excerpt that will serve as a fitting example: “Hardly have we taken up our post when Rodin enters, leading a fourteen-year-old girl, blond and as pretty as Love; the poor creature is sobbing away, all too unhappily aware of what awaits her […].” (536)

18. For Lolita’s birthday, H.H. gifted her a bicycle and a copy of History of Modern American Painting. H.H. admitted that the way that Lolita mounted and straddled the bicycle: “[…] afforded me supreme pleasure; but my attempt to refine her pictorial taste was a failure; she wanted to know if the guy noon-napping on Doris Lee’s hay was the father of the pseudo-voluptuous hoyden in the foreground […].” (199)

Appel noted that the Doris Lee painting is a reference to “Noon”, which depicts a man asleep with his hat covering his face.
upon a haystack as a hoyden (i.e., a boisterous girl) and a man make love in the foreground. (403)
Charles Poore, in his *New York Times* review of *Pnin*, summarized the book by writing:

“The central character is our old friend, the absentminded professor [...] an émigré of the old Russian school. He is tremendously proud of his American citizenship, enchanted with the glittering gadgetry of our culture, lonely, loquacious and heroic. He teaches classic Russian literature at Waindell [...] After ten years among the cliques and cards at Waindell, Pnin has a heady feeling that he has finally achieved security of sorts. His genially acerb colleagues lampoon him mercilessly, but he finds in their own folklore grounds for a measure of hilarity. Naturally, he looks mainly to the past for the substance of his stature as a man of learning. Yet each time he changes his place of residence he acquires new insights to the ways of the not quite inscrutable New World.”

1. In *Phantom of Fact: A Guide to Nabokov’s Pnin*, Gennadi Barabtarlo noted at least three references to Ivan Bunin in *Pnin*. For example, while Pnin was waiting to give a lecture:

A. “In the middle of the front row of seats he saw one of his Baltic aunts, wearing the pearls and the lace and the blond wig she had worn at all the performances given by the great ham actor Khodotov [...]” (27) Barabtarlo wrote: “The wry phrase “the great ham actor” can be traced back to Ivan Bunin’s *The Life of Arsen’ev* (1930) [...]” (85)

B. Vladimir Vladimirovich, *Pnin’s* narrator, related that Bunin could be found “swarming all over” The Pines with other Russian: “[...] liberals and intellectuals who had left Russia around 1920 [...]”. (117)
C. And Vladimirovich related that Konstatin Ivanich shared a villa in Grasses, southern France, “with several other Russian expatriates.” (125) Barabtarlo wrote: “Ivan Bunin, who lived in Grasse in the twenties and thirties, was one of them.” (206)

Unsurprisingly, Boyd related in *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* that Nabokov “cherished” Bunin. (94) And Maxim D. Shrayer related in “Vladimir Nabokov and Ivan Bunin: A Reconstruction” that:

> “Marina Turkevich Naumann [the author of *Blue Evenings in Berlin: Nabokov's Short Stories of the 1920s*] lists Bunin among Nabokov’s major Russian influences.” And that: “Several émigré critics, including, Gleb Struve, Jurij Ivask, Aleksndr Savel’ev, Michail Cetlin, Vladimir Vekdle pointed out affinities between the two writers [e.g., Nabokov and Bunin],” (396)

While Nabokov and Bunin eventually fell out of favor and Bunin’s *Dark Avenues* was driven, according to Shrayer, by a desire to reclaim his status over Nabokov as the foremost Russian writer (394), it’s worth taking a stroll through *Dark Avenues*.

Oleg Mikhailov wrote in *The Works by I.A. Bunin* that *Dark Avenues* is "the only book in the history of Russian literature devoted entirely to the concept of love" and that the classic of Russian literature is considered to be Bunin's magnum opus.

According Alma Classics, *Dark Avenues*, if not the most read, is one of the most read volumes of short stories in Russia. And in a blurb, Nabokov said of Bunin in reference to *Dark
Avenues”: “A most powerful ‘connoisseur of colours’. One could write an entire dissertation of his colour schemes.”

Here’s the opening of Bunin's “Tanya”:

“She was working as a housemaid in the house of his relation Madame Kazakov, who owned a small estate. She was just seventeen years old; her tiny figure was especially noticeable when she walked barefoot, her skirt swaying gently from side to side and her little breasts moving under her blouse [...] her simple little face could be called pleasing, and her grey peasant eyes had no beauty other than that of youth.” (97) And Tanya, an orphan, was described as a “half-childish girl” with an “intoxicating scent of something rural and virginal”. (99)

Petrusha, on his way back to Moscow, had stopped to visit Kazakova in the country. In the middle of the night “He lit a match and caught sight of her asleep. She was lying on her back on a wooden bed, in a blouse and cotton skirt - her little breasts showed roundness through her blouse, her legs were bare to the knees [...] The match went out. He stood there – and gently approached the bed [...]” (99)

“He moved her legs apart in their tender warmth [...]” “[...] and he began to kiss her neck, her breast, inhaling that intoxicating scent of something rural and virginal. And she, through her tears, suddenly gave a spontaneous feminine response – strongly, and it seemed gratefully, embracing him and pressing his head to her breast.” (100)

After subsequent sexual conquests with the nymphet, to Tanya's utter dismay, Petrusha left the country never to visit again.

“Tanya” is just one of a number of short stories in Dark Avenues that contains nympholepsy.
2. There is no clear indication that Pnin was an acting ephebophile: “Like so many aging college people, Pnin had long ceased to notice the existence of students on campus […] except for a girl’s comely nape here and there, he saw nobody in the Reading Room.” (61)

But that didn’t stop Avon Books from publishing *Pnin* (1957) with Pnin on the cover, a phallic cane in one hand and his portful in the other, ogling three college coeds.

3. While Pnin was inspecting the house where he would rent a room, he “peered” into Isabel’s room, the daughter of the homeowners, and: “inspected Hoecker’s “Girl with a Cat” above the bed, and Hunt’s “The Belated Kid” above the bookshelf.” (34)

Eric Naiman wrote in *Nabokov, Perversely* that Hoecker's “Girl with a Cat” may have been a reference to Balthus' "Jeune Fille au Chat", which is one of Balthus’ most controversial paintings out of many of his revealing paintings and Polaroids of nymphets. In the oil on wood, a nymphet is reclining with her hands behind her head with her left foot resting on the chair, which causes her panties to be exposed below her schoolgirl skirt.

William Morris Hunt's “The Belated Kid” is on view in the Penny and Jeff Vinik Gallery in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Here's a summary of the description of the painting from the museum's website:

Hunt began this monumental image of a peasant girl and her rescued kid about 1854 […] It proved so popular when exhibited
in the United States that Boston collector Peter Chardon Brooks [...] commissioned a replica.

The painting clearly was inspired by Millet’s pictures of peasant children [17.1484], especially those depicting young girls diligently watching over one or two cows or sheep. In Hunt’s version of the subject, a kid that strayed and was found again is carried home by a pretty barefoot shepherdess [...] While Hunt’s image echoes Millet’s images of rural labor, it is considerably more romantic in its presentation of the innocence and goodness of these hardworking peasant children.

And who was one of Nabokov’s favorite painters? Based on my leading question, you may have been able to guess that it is none other than Balthasar Klossowski de Rola or simply Balthus. Nabokov shared in Strong Opinions, "The aspects of Picasso that I emphatically dislike are the sloppy products of his old age. I also loathe old Matisse. A contemporary artist I do admire very much, though not only because he paints Lolita-like creatures, is Balthus." (167) And Balthus shared, translated into English, in the documentary Balthus the Painter (1996), referring to Nabokov: “I think we feel the same thing in the presence of young girls.”

4. Pnin attended a program at New Hall:

“The first part of the program, three ancient movie shorts, bored our friend: that cane, that bowler, that white face, those black, arched eyebrows, those twitchy nostrils meant nothing to him. Whether the incomparable comedian danced in the sun with chapleted nymphs near a waiting cactus, or was a prehistoric man (the supple cane now a supple club), or was glared at by burly Mack Swain at a hectic night club, old-fashioned, humorless Pnin
remained indifferent. “Clown,” he snorted to himself. “Even Glupishkin and Max Linder used to be more comical.” (80)

I would imagine that most readers immediately noticed the allusion to Charlie Chaplin. Specifically, Barabtarlo noted that the passage is alluding to Chapin’s *Sunnyside* (1919), *His Prehsitoric Past* (1914), and *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914). And Barabtarlo related: “In an interview with Alfred Appel, Nabokov admitted that he, unlike Pnin: “enjoyed tremendously American comedy – Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and Chaplin.” (142)

I related in *The Allure of Nymphets* that Charlie Chaplin confessed that he had a violent crush on a specific nymphet and generally loved young girls. And that Joyce Milton shared in her book, *Tramp: The Life of Charlie Chaplin*, that Chaplin acknowledged: “I had a violent crush on a girl only ten or twelve. I have always been in love with young girls [...]” (23)

And author and ephebophile J.D. Salinger was livid after Chaplin married Oona O'Neill. Salinger and O'Neill began an affair when O'Neill was sixteen-years-old, but after Salinger joined the Army, eighteen-year-old O'Neill moved to Los Angeles and married fifty-five-year-old Chaplin. (54-55)

Interestingly, Barbara Wyllie wrote in "*My Age of Innocence Girl* - Humbert, Chaplin, Lita and Lo" about the influence that Chaplin had on Nabokov. For example, there's an additional reference to Chaplin's toothbrush mustache in *Lolita* and Chaplin appeared on a movie poster in Nabokov’s short story “Easter Rain” (1925). (10)
In addition, Wyllie wrote that: "[..] it could be argued that the particular nature of Chaplin’s incarnation in Lolita is linked to Nabokov’s 1928 poem, “Lilith,” via The Kid, Chaplin’s silent feature of 1921." (12) And that: “of his later novels – Luzhin's collapse in The Defense (1930), the surreal pantomine of Invitation to a Beheading (1938) […] Meanwhile, Chaplin's most famous on-screen persona steps into the worlds of The Gift, The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, and Pnin (1957).” (10)

In The Kid (1921), a nymphet in wings, played by Chaplin's twelve-year-old future wife Lillita McMurray, who wrote a tell-all book about their marriage, is told by Sin (i.e., The Devil) to "vamp" (i.e., seduce) the Tramp (Chaplin). The winged nymphet and the Tramp kissed before her Sweetheart arrived. She and her Sweetheart, who was played by a man who appeared to be a lot older than even thirty-two-year-old Chaplin, kissed before he allowed the nymphet and the Tramp to embrace and kiss again. However, after the nymphet refused to release her embrace of the Tramp, her Sweetheart became jealous and pummeled the Tramp.
PALE FIRE (1962)

_Pale Fire_ is in three parts: A foreword by Charles Kinbote, John Shade's poem "Pale Fire", and Kinbote's commentary.

1. “Otar, a pleasant and cultured adeling with a tremendous nose and sparse hair, [who] had his two mistresses with him, eighteen-year-old Fifalda (whom he later married) and seventeen-year-old Fleur”. (105)

2. Kinbote narrates how Griff, a farmer, summoned Garh, his young daughter, to be the King’s escape guide:

“A rude staircase led up to a loft. The farmer placed his gnarled hand on the gnarled balustrade and directed toward the upper darkness a guttural call: “Garh! Garh!” Although given to both sexes, the name is, strictly speaking, a masculine one, and the King expected to see emerge from the loft a bare-kneed mountain lad like a tawny angel. Instead there appeared a disheveled young hussy wearing only a man’s shirt that came down to her pink shins and an oversized pair of brogues. A moment later, as in a transformation act, she reappeared, her yellow hair still hanging lank and loose, but the dirty shirt replaced by a dirty pullover, and her legs sheathed in corduroy pants. She was told to conduct the stranger to a spot from which he could easily reach the pass. A sleepy and sullen expression blurred whatever appeal her snub-nosed round face might have had for the local shepherds; but she complied readily enough with her
father’s wish. His wife was crooning an ancient song as she busied herself with pot and pan. “(141)

“He sank down on the grass near a patch of matted elfin-wood and inhaled the bright air. The panting dog lay down at his feet. Garh smiled for the first time. Zemblan mountain girls are as a rule mere mechanisms of haphazard lust, and Garh was no exception. As soon as she had settled beside him, she bent over and pulled over and off her tousled head the thick gray sweater, revealing her naked back and blanc-mangé breasts, and flooded her embarrassed companion with all the acridity of ungroomed womanhood. She was about to proceed with her stripping but he stopped her with a gesture and got up. He thanked her for all her kindness. He patted the innocent dog; and without turning once, with a springy step, the King started to walk up the turfy incline. (142)

3. On Griff’s mantelpiece was: "a color print representing an elegant guardsman with his bare-shouldered wife—Karl the Beloved, as he was twenty odd years before, and his young queen, an angry young virgin with coal-black hair and ice-blue eyes.” (141)
ADA OR ARDOR: A FAMILY CHRONICLE (1969)

Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle is centered around an explicit incestuous affair between Ada and Van that began when they were twelve and fourteen, respectively. For example, Van and Ada had heterosexual anal sex, and Ada and Lucette, Ada's even younger sister, engaged in lipstick lesbian sex. However, in addition to Ada's affair with her brother and sister, she had age-gap affairs with Dr. Krolik, a contributor to her larvarium, Percy de Prey, her neighbor, and Phillip Rack, her music teacher.

[Note: The page numbers correspond to the 1969 McGraw-Hill edition; however, Brian Boyd informed me on the NABOKV-L listserv that the 1969 edition is "misprint-strewn"; therefore, a subsequent edition of this book will reference the Vintage edition.]

In terms of Dr. Krolik, Boyd annotated on ADAOnline in the afternote to chapter 8 of part 1: "The first caterpillar mentioned as his contribution to her larvarium is a Nymphalis carmen, in allusion to Lolita and the disparity between Humbert’s age and Lolita’s, as between Krolik’s and Ada’s (she is only fourteen when Krolik dies)." And in a May 20, 2016 post on the NABOKV-L listserv, Alexey Sklyarenko shared: "In the summer of 1888, when Ada (b. July 21, 1872) is sixteen, Percy de Prey [...] is twenty-one and Phillip Rack is about thirty."

In addition to Ada's age-gap affairs, Ada's 626 pages are peppered with hebephilia\ephebophilia:
1. Van's maternal grandmother Daria ("Dolly") Durmanov was the daughter of Prince Peter Zemski [...] Dolly, an only child, born in Bras, married in 1840, at the tender and wayward age of fifteen, General Ivan Durmanov, Commander of Yukon Fortress and peaceful country gentleman [...] (3)

2. Demon's [Van and Ada's father.] twofold hobby was collecting old masters and young mistresses. He also liked middle-aged puns. (4)

3. Ada and Van returned to the ground floor—this time all the way down the sumptuous staircase. Of the many ancestors along the wall, she pointed out her favorite, old Prince Vseslav Zemski (1699-1797), friend of Linnaeus and author of Flora Ladorica, who was portrayed in rich oil holding his barely pubescent bride and her blond doll in his satin lap. (46)

   According to Boyd’s annotations, the bride is referring to Princess Sofia Temnosiniy and according to Ada’s family tree, Princess Sofia Temnosiniy was approximately fourteen-years-old when she married seventy-one-year-old Prince Zemski in 1770.

   In addition, the Prince’s son, Peter Zemski, married Mary O’Reilly. Boyd wrote that: “John Rea [NABOKV-L, 30 November 2004] suggests that Mary O’Reilly may also echo Mary Louise O’Murphy (or Marie-Louise or Louison Morfy or O’Morphy, 1737-1814), who became mistress to Louis XVI of France [...] She is said both to have been [Giacomo] Casanova’s mistress first, or to have
been noticed by him, and to have been at fifteen the model for [François] Boucher’s famous painting, *Girl Reclining* [...]

Casanova shared in *Histoire de ma vie* that upon seeing thirteen-year-old O’Murphy in the nude, that he found her so beautiful that he commissioned a nude portrait of the nymphet.

It’s not clear how King Louis XV discovered O’Murphy. One theory is that he saw Casanova’s commission and requested to see the original, and another theory is that she was recruited by Madame de Pompadour, the king’s official chief mistress. Subsequently, King Louis XV impregnated O’Murphy. However, she had a miscarriage at fifteen but gave birth at sixteen to the king’s illegitimate child.

4. “Two other phenomena that she [Ada] had observed even earlier proved ridiculously misleading. She must have been about nine when that elderly gentleman, an eminent painter whom she could not and would not name, came several times to dinner at Ardis Hall [...] the celebrated old rascal who drew his diminutive nudes invariably from behind—fig-picking, peach-buttocked nymphets straining upward, or else rock-climbing girl scouts in bursting shorts—"I know exactly," interrupted Van angrily, "whom you mean, and would like to place on record that even if his delicious talent is in disfavor today, Paul J. Gigment [AKA Nymphobottomus] had every right to paint schoolgirls and poolgirls from any side he pleased. Proceed." (117)

Boyd wrote in *Nabokov’s Ada The Place of Consciousness* that prior to Ada’s affair with Van: "[t]he closet she had come to "sexual
contact" was with an elderly gentleman [Paul J. Gigment], a distinguished painter [...]

From Boyd’s annotations:

A painter named “Paul G-g----,” active in the 1880s and with a keen interest in the female form, and especially the young female form, nevertheless cannot help evoking Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), who in Tahiti in 1891 took the young Teha’amana as his model and, soon, mistress [...] Only Manao Tupapau (The Spirit of the Dead Watches Over Her, 1892) centers on the buttocks of a girl (Teha’amana) prone on a bed [...].

Nancy Mowll Mathews relates in Paul Gauguin: An Erotic Life that thirteen-year-old Teha’amana was offered to Gauguin by her mother, that "[...] Western tourists were commonly offered young girls, usually by the girl's parents, to serve as companions [...]" (179) and that Gauguin had a "[...] genuine delight at having an adolescent lover [...]" (181)

5. “An American, a certain Ivan Ivanov of Yukonsk, described as an: "habitually intoxicated laborer" ("a good definition," said Ada lightly, "of the true artist"), managed somehow to impregnate—in his sleep, it was claimed by him and his huge family — his five-year-old great-granddaughter, Maria Ivanov, and, then, five years later, also got Maria's daughter, Daria, with child, in another fit of somnolence.” (142)

Boyd related in his annotations:

“In England, from the 1880s, the term incest “began to be used primarily to mean sexual relations between close kin, and particularly between fathers and daughters, or brothers and
Reformers now pointed to a more specific and sensitive problem: the sexual abuse of girls in the congested family quarters of the large cities. When Beatrice Webb worked in a sweatshop in 1888, she was shocked to find talk of incest commonplace (perhaps missing the irony of her fellow workers). In her diary she describes a seamstress muttering to her that the girls at the next table were a bad lot. ‘Why bless you, that young woman just behind us has had three babies by her father, and another here has had one by her brother.’ . . . In 1906 an internal Home Office memo summed up the official view in blunt terms: ‘Incest is very common among the working classes in the big towns’

“The whole passage echoes Humbert’s fantasy that “with patience and luck I might have her [Lolita] produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second, who would be eight or nine around 1960, when I would still be dans la force de l’âge; indeed, the telescopy of my mind, or un-mind, was strong enough to distinguish in the remoteness of time a vieillard encore vert—or was it green rot?—bizarre, tender, salivating Dr. Humbert, practicing on supremely lovely Lolita the Third the art of being a granddad.”

“Life imitates Nabokov’s art. In 2009, it came to light the case of the billionaire Antonio Luciano, in Minas Gerais, Brazil, who bought virgins from poor parents to deflower them. He had more than twenty children out of wedlock, two of them later to become his lovers, as also the children they bore incestuously.”

6. “[...] trifles as tape recorders, the favorite toys of his and Ada's grandfathers (Prince Zemski had one for every bed of his harem of schoolgirls) were not manufactured any more, except in Tartary where they had evolved "minirechi" ("talking minarets") of a secret make.” (157)

Boyd wrote in his annotations that this may remind one of Lolita’s Humbert who said: “Idiot, triple idiot! I could have
filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair". (231)

7. “The Zemskis were terrible rakes (razvratniki), one of them [Prince Vseslav Zemski] loved small girls [...]” (247)

8. “In his London studio her husband, an unbalanced, unsuccessful painter (ten years older than his father-in-law whom he envied and despised) shot himself upon receiving the news by cablegram from a village in Normandy called, dreadfully, Deuil.” (368)

9. “To put it bluntly, the boy had sought to solace his first sexual torments by imagining and detailing a project (derived from reading too many erotic works [...] namely, a chain of palatial brothels that his inheritance would allow him to establish [...] ‘Beauty and tenderness, grace and docility’ composed the main qualities required of the girls, aged from fifteen to twenty-five in the case of "slender Nordic dolls," and from ten to twenty in that of ‘opulent Southern charmers.’”” (369-370)

10. “Van's sexual dreams are embarrassing to describe in a family chronicle [...] Aqua impersonating Marina or Marina made-up to look like Aqua, arrives to inform Van, joyfully, that Ada has just been delivered of a girl-child whom he is about to know carnally on a hard garden bench while under a nearby pine [...]” (383-384)

11. “Its new expression in regard to Ada looked sufficiently fervid to make watchful fools suspect that old Demon "slept with his
niece" (actually, he was getting more and more occupied with Spanish girls who were getting more and more youthful every year until by the end of the century, when he was sixty, with hair dyed a mid-night blue, his flame had become a difficult nymphet of ten).” (415)

12. “Thus had Mlle Lariviére's Enfants Maudits (1887) finally degenerated! She had had two adolescents, in a French castle, poison their widowed mother who had seduced a young neighbor, the lover of one of her twins.” (449)

13. “Idle images queued by—Edmund, Edmond, simple Cordula, fantastically intricate Lucette, and, by further mechanical association, a depraved little girl called Lisette, in Cannes, with breasts like lovely abscesses, whose frail favors were handled by a smelly big brother in an old bathing machine.” (501)

14. “The hag demanded certain fantastic sums—which Demon, she said, had not had time to pay, for ‘popping the hymen’—whereupon I had one of our strongest boys throw out vsyu (the entire) kompaniyu.” “Extraordinary,” said Van, “they had been growing younger and younger—I mean the girls, not the strong silent boys. His old Rosalind had a ten-year-old niece, a primed chickabiddy. Soon he would have been poaching them from the hatching chamber.” (555)

15. “[...] left a message for Van, who got it only late at night when he returned from a trip to Sorcière in the Valais, about one hundred
miles east, where he bought a villa for himself *et ma cousine*, and had supper with the former owner, a banker’s widow, amiable Mme Scarlet and her blond, pimply but pretty, daughter Eveline, both of whom seemed erotically moved by the rapidity of the deal.” (560)

16. The most hazardous moment was when he and she moved to another villa, with a new staff and new neighbors, and his senses would be exposed in icy, fantastic detail, to the gipsy girl poaching peaches or the laundry woman’s bold daughter [...] Yet he knew that by daring to satisfy the corresponding desire for a young wench he risked wrecking his life with Ada. (610)

In a 1969 New York *Times Book Review*, Alfred Appel, Jr. referred to *Ada* as an "erotic masterpiece" that put Nabokov on par with Kafka, Proust and Joyce. However, Boyd related in *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* that Philip Toynbee, a British writer, opined that *Ada* was "an appalling piece of unremitting exhibitionism."
Here's Martin Amis' book description on Amazon of Nabokov's *Transparent Things*:

"*Transparent Things* revolves around the four visits of the hero--sullen, gawky Hugh Person--to Switzerland [...] As a young [sic] publisher, Hugh is sent to interview R., falls in love with Armande on the way, wrests her, after multiple humiliations, from a grinning Scandinavian and returns to NY with his bride [...] Eight years later-following a murder, a period of madness and a brief imprisonment--Hugh makes a lone sentimental journey to wheedle out his past [...]

1. In addition to being a publisher, Hugh Person was a writer too. He had: "an unfinished short story in a Russian copybook [...] parts of a philosophical essay in a blue cahier [...] and the loose sheets of a rudimentary novel under the title *Faust in Moscow.*" (18) Hugh was unpublished except for a poem that was published in a college magazine. (22) But forty-year-old Person "had courted a thirty-eight-year-old mother and her sixteen-year-old daughter but had been impotent with the first and not audacious enough with the second." (17)

2. Person met twenty-three-year-old Armande, who had: "dark eyes, fair hair, a honey-hued skin. Twin dimples [...] in a Swiss railway carriage." (25) They were subsequently married, but the age-discrepant marriage ended very badly.
3. Mr. R, a much older published writer took Julia Moore's virginity when she was thirteen. By the way, Julia was Mr. R's step-daughter. "[...] Julia, who according to Phil had been debauched at thirteen by R., right at the start of her mother's disastrous marriage." (35)

4. Mr. R's affair with his step-daughter lasted until she was eighteen, which was when he discovered that his wife and step-daughter were: "having an affair with Christian Pines, son of the well-known cinema man who had directed the film Golden Windows (precariously based on the best of the author's novels)." (32)

5. Person had a one-night-stand with eighteen-year-old Julia, who had a doll face, slanting eyes, "and topaz -teared earlobes" (34) in his upper-east side apartment after meeting her at a party in Manhattan. (35) Interestingly, Armande and Julia were friends and "had both taught in the winter at a school for foreign ladies in the Tessin." (27)

6. Armande's: "parents and aunts, the insatiable takers of cute pictures, believed in fact that a girl child of ten, the dream of a Lutwidgean, had the same right to total nudity as an infant." (40) Person had the pleasure of perusing the photo album that contained nude photos of Armande during her nymphet years.

The Lutwidgean reference was to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson whose pen name was Lewis Carroll. As mentioned previously, Carroll famously wrote Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, which Nabokov translated into Russian.
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland may have been inspired by Alice Liddell. Caroll took suggestive photographs of pre-teen Liddell, as well as other nymphets, and Morton Cohen alleged in Lewis Carroll: A Biography that Carroll desired to marry eleven-year-old Liddell. (30-35)
LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS! (1974)

Richard Poirier wrote in a New York Times review of Look at the Harlequins!: “After Joyce with his “portrait” of Stephen, after Proust with his “remembrance” of Marcel, there are few reasons to be surprised […] by the complicated interplay between Vladimir Nabokov and the narrator of this, his 37th book. Vadim Vadimovitch is a Russian émigré writer and a mirror image or “double” of Nabokov as man and writer”.

1. Vadim and Iris, his future first wife, were sunbathing on the French Riviera when Vadim spotted a nymphet: “There was a child of ten or so cradling a large yellow beach ball in her bare arms. She seemed to be wearing nothing but a kind of frilly harness and a very short pleated skirt revealing her trim thighs. She was what in a later era amateurs were to call a ‘nymphet’.” As she caught my glance she gave me, over our sunny globe, a sweet lewd smile from under her auburn fringe.” (29)

Couturier wrote in Nabokov's Eros and the Poetics of Desire that Vadim is referring to Nabokov as the later era amateur. (73)

To impress Vadim, Iris shared: “At eleven or twelve […] I was as pretty as that French orphan […] I let smelly gentlemen fondle me.” (29)

2. After Vadim moved in with Mr. and Mrs. Stepanov, he became attracted to Dolly, the Stepanov's eleven-year-old grand-daughter.
Vadim wrote in his (fictional) autobiography: “Those were nice, nice interludes! [...] I had a box of chocolate-coated biscuits to supplement the zwiebacks and tempt my little visitor. The writing board was put aside and replaced by her folded limbs [...] she dangled one leg and bit her biscuit, to the ordinary questions one puts to a child; and then quite suddenly in the midst of our chat, she would wriggle out of my arms and make for the door as if somebody were summoning her”. (78)

Couturier wrote in Nabokov’s *Eros and the Poetics of Desire* that Dolly: “is evidently an avatar of Emmie in *Invitation to a Beheading*, and of Lolita herself, a true nymphet” and that Vadim: “a farcical avatar of Nabokov, will wait for her to grow up before undertaking to make love to her.” (78)

3. Subsequently, Vadim became more and more attracted to Isabel, his twelve-year-old daughter. “One change, one gradational trend I must note, however. This was my growing awareness of her beauty. Scarcely a month after her arrival I was already at a loss to understand how she could have struck me as ‘plain.’” (168)

Vadim doesn’t consummate with his biological daughter; however: “During his cohabitation with Bel, he is very happy and sexually aroused most of the time, but he only caresses her: ‘Save for a few insignificant lapses – a few hot drops of overflowing tenderness, a gasp masked by a cough and that sort of stuff – my relations with her remained essentially innocent’” (173)
4. Vadim was invited by Mrs. King to an "impromptu soirée". (175). At the gathering were: "only six people in a spacious parlor, not counting two painted girl-children in Tyrolean dress [...]" (176) Subsequently: "[...] The two cold-thighed chessy-necked girleens were now engaged in a quarrelsome game as to who would sit on my left knee, that side of my lap where the honey was, trying to straddle Left Knee, warbling in Tyrolese and pushing each other off, and cousin Fay kept bending toward me and saying in a macabre accent: "Elles vous aiment tant! Finally I pinched and twisted the nearest buttock, and with a squeal they resumed their running around, like the eternal little pleasure-park train, brushing the brambles." (180)

Couturier noted that “that side of [his] lap where the honey was” was another poetic metaphor to avoid naming the real thing. (86)

5. Couturier wrote: "Dolly, whom he had fondled but not possessed at the time when she was a nymphet, reappears at this point in the story; she is now twenty-four. She claims she had 'always had a crush' on him when he mesmerized her on his lap, 'playing sweet Uncle Gasper'". (83)

"One day, she walks into his office at the university and challenges him to make love to her, emulating Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters: Smiling, she swept the examination books off the desk and perched upon it with her bare shins in my face. What might have promised the most refined ardors turned out to be the tritest
scene in this memoir. I hastened to quench a thirst that had been burning a hole in the mixed metaphor of my life ever since I had fondled a quite different Dolly thirteen years earlier [when she was eleven]. The ultimate convulsion rocked the desk lamp, and from the class just across the corridor came a burst of applause at the end of Professor King’s last lecture of the season." (139–40)
Before Nabokov's death in 1977, he instructed his wife to burn the unfinished first draft—handwritten on 138 index cards—of what would be his final novel. She did not, and now Nabokov's son, Dmitri, is releasing them to the world [...] It would be a mistake for readers to come to this expecting anything resembling a novel, though the few actual scenes here are unmistakably Nabokovian—a character named Hubert H. Hubert molesting a girl, a decaying old man's strained attempt at perfunctory sex with his younger wife. The story appears to be about a woman named Flora (spelled, once, as Flaura), who has Lolita-like moments in her childhood and is later the subject of a scandalous novel, Laura, written by a former lover. Mostly, this amounts to a peek inside the author's process and mindset as he neared death. Indeed, mortality, suicide, impotence, a disgust with the male human body—and an appreciation of the fit, young female body—figure prominently.

Because it's an unfinished first draft, The Original of Laura can be difficult to read, but some of the themes of nympholepsy are clear. For example, Adam Lind, a photographer and the son of the painter Lev Linde, married Lanskaya, a ballerina. After Adam committed suicide, Lanskaya found an "elderly but still vigorous" lover in Hubert H. Hubert, who was deeply attracted to Flora, Lanskaya's "lovely" 12-year-old daughter.

Flora was "alone in the house with Mr. Hubert, who constantly "prowled" around her: [...] she did not dare to let her arms hang aimlessly lest her knuckles came into contact with some horrible part of that kindly but smelly and "pushing" old male." (57)
"In one scene, while Flora, with her dark blue eyes and silky blondish hair, was in bed "with a chest cold," (63) Hubert "brought his pet a thoughtful present: a miniature chess set" (65) but the game didn't last long because "[a]fter a few minutes of play Flora grew tired of it, put a rook in her mouth, ejected it [...] Then, with a father's sudden concern, he said, "I'm afraid you are chilly my love," and plunging a hand under the bedclothes from his vantage point at the footboard, he felt her shins. Flora uttered a yelp and then a few screams." (71)

Hubert never got his wish to be with Flora, but she: "was barely fourteen when she lost her virginity". (77) And she had a lipstick lesbian fling with a “fun loving little Japanese [girl] who would twist her limbs into a pretzel”. (95)

By the time Flora was 24, she was "extravagantly slender," had "cup-sized breasts," and due to her beauty she "seemed a dozen years younger" i.e., Flora looked like a beautiful twelve-year-old. (15)

According to Couturier, The Original of Laura's Hubert H. Hubert is: “an obvious replica of Humbert Humbert…He was the perfect nympholept, obviously, but contrary to Humbert, he never managed to become sexually intimate with his stepdaughter.” (91)
In the poem "Lilith", a nymphet leaves a man flabbergasted after she suddenly ends copulation:

I died. The sycamores and shutters along the dusty street were teased by torrid Aeolus.

I walked, and fauns walked, and in every faun god Pan I seemed to recognize: Good. I must be in Paradise.

Shielding her face and to the sparkling sun showing a russet armpit, in a doorway there stood a naked little girl. She had a water-lily in her curls and was as graceful as a woman. Tenderly her nipples bloomed, and I recalled the springtime of my life on earth, when through the alders on the river brink so very closely I could watch the miller’s youngest daughter as she stepped out of the water, and she was all golden, with a wet fleece between her legs.

And now, still wearing the same dress coat that I had on when killed last night, with a rake’s predatory twinkle, toward my Lilith I advanced. She turned upon me a green eye over her shoulder, and my clothes were set on fire and in a trice
dispersed like ashes.

In the room behind
one glimpsed a shaggy Greek divan,
on a small table wine, pomegranates,
and some lewd frescoes covering the wall.
With two cold fingers childishly
she took me by my emberhead [пламя – i.e., erect penis]:
“now come along with me,” she said.

Without inducement, without effort,
Just with the slowest of pert glee,
like wings she gradually opened
her pretty knees in front of me.
And how enticing, and how merry,
her upturned face! And with a wild
lunge of my loins I penetrated
into an unforgotten child.
Snake within snake, vessel in vessel,
smooth-fitting part, I moved in her,
through the ascending itch forefeeling
unutterable pleasure [восторг – i.e., approaching orgasm] stir.
But suddenly she lightly flinched,
retreated, drew her legs together,
and grasped a veil and twisted it
around herself up to the hips,
and full of strength, at half the distance
to rapture [блаженству - i.e., orgasm], I was left with nothing.
I hurtled forward. A strange wind
caused me to stagger. “Let me in!”
I shouted, noticing with horror
that I stood again outside in the dust
and that obscenely bleating youngsters
were staring at my pommeled lust [булаву – mace i.e., erect penis].
“Let me come in!” And the goat-hoofed,
copper-curlèd crowd increased. “Oh, let me in,”
I pleaded, “otherwise I shall go mad!”
The door stayed silent, and for all to see
writhing in agony I spilled my seed
and knew abruptly that I was in Hell.
Note: The words in the brackets are from Maxim D. Shrayer's *Russian Literature* journal article "Nabokov's Sexography".

Nabokov shared in *Poems and Problems* that “Lilith” was composed “to amuse a friend.” And that: “Intelligent readers will abstain from examining this impersonal fantasy for any links with my later fiction.” (243) However, Couturier revealed in *Nabokov's Eros and the Poetics of Desire* that different versions of last six lines of “Lilith” were used "[...] throughout Nabokov's novels which may suggest that he, as an author, was probably reenacting an event belonging to his own past or a fantasy he had nursed." (79)

In *Pniniad*, Marc Szeftel, whom many claim was the model for Nabokov's *Pnin*, shared an anecdote that was related to him by Gleb Struve, an associate of Nabokov:

“Struve tells about a private evening devoted to Nabokov's erotic (or even pornographical) poetry, read by him. Of these poems only “Lilith” has been published in N.'s 'Poems and Problems'...This reading happened when N. was not yet married...What was on young Nabokov's mind before he married Vera, I do not know. Probably, quite a few frivolous things, to expect from a very handsome, young Russian.”
“The Fight” (1925)

In “The Fight”, a writer sunbathing on a German beach is intrigued by Mr. Kraus. The writer discovered that Mr. Kraus owned a tavern where he was assisted by Emma: “a young girl in a checkered dress, fair-haired, with pointed pink elbows”.

Emma’s lover was an electrician who had a “malevolent wrinkle beside his mouth”. The writer narrated that what he liked the most about Emma, with her “small birdlike face” and “vapid” and “tender eyes” was the way that she looked at her lover “as he lazily leaned on the bar”.

After Emma’s father and her lover got into a brawl, the writer couldn’t resist consoling the young girl by stroking and kissing her kitchen scented fair hair.

“Skazka” [“A Nursery Tale”] (1926)

Nabokov wrote “Skazka” [“A Nursery Tale”] in 1926 before it was published in Rul', a Berlin emigre newspaper that was founded by his father. When Nabokov translated the story before it was published in Details of a Sunset (1976) and Playboy (1974), he aggressively titled it “A Nursery Tale” and noted in Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories that when he was translating the story he was: “eerily startled to meet a somewhat decrepit but unmistakable Humbert escorting his nymphet in the story he wrote almost half a century ago”.
In “A Nursery Tale”, on his ride to work, Erwin habitually gazed through the tram's window and picked young girls for his imaginary harem. Eventually, Erwin was offered the opportunity to have his dreams come true after he met Frau Monde, a female Devil, who promised Erwin that he could have all the girls he wanted in “a villa with a walled garden” upon "cushions and rugs” but that it was “essential and final” that he selects an odd number of girls between noon and midnight. Consequently, Erwin started collecting slave girls. Here's a partial, yet relevant, list:

1. A maiden in a white dress with chestnut hair and palish lips who was playing with her “fat shaggy pup”.
2. “[T]wo young ladies-sisters, or even twins...Both were small and slim...with saucy eyes and painted lips.” Erwin referred to the Twins as “Gay, painted, young things.”
3. And: “[a] child of fourteen or so in a low-cut black party dress.” She was walking with a tall elderly man who was a: “famous poet, a senile swan, living all alone in a distant suburb.”
“Terror” (1926)

In “Terror”, the poet’s mistress is described as a “naive little maiden” with “unassuming prettiness, gaiety, friendliness”. Their affair lasted almost three years until the poet departed by train only to have to return to her bedside and consequently save himself from “insanity.

“The Aurelian” (1930)

In “The Aurelian”, Paul Pilgram, a “flabby elderly man”, had a habit of ordering a drink and filling his pipe after entering the town’s “small bar”. And: “[i]f the bartender’s daughter, a pretty freckled girl in a polka-dotted frock, happened to pass close enough, he had a go at her elusive hip, and, whether the slap succeeded or not, his gloomy expression never changed, although the veins on his temple grew purple.”

“Music” (1930s)

In “Music”, Victor noticed his estranged wife in the audience at the music hall. He reminisced about the time they were “talking about some trifle” when she interjected: “Let’s separate for a while. We can’t go on like this.’ The neighbors’ little daughter burst into the room to show her kitten (the sole survivor of a litter that had been drowned.)" Victor’s wife confessed: “The first time [that she had cheated on him] had been in the park, then at his place.”
I was ripped about including “Music”, but my gut tells me that “kitten” is a Nabokovian sexual innuendo\pun.

“A Dashing Fellow” (1930s)

Early in “A Dashing Fellow” the protagonist asked: “What is better: the experience of a sexy thirty-year-old brunette, or the silly young bloom of a bright curled romp?” But by the end of the short story he exclaimed, “That old bitch. No, we like only small blonds - remember that once for all.”

Nabokov wrote in A Russian Beauty and Other Stories that “A Dashing Fellow” was rejected by Rul’ (Berlin) and Poslednie Novosti (Paris) for being “improper and brutal” before it was published in Segodnya (Riga) and in the December 1971 issue of Playboy.

“Perfection” (1932)

An excerpt from “Perfection” reads: “During those first warm days everything seemed beautiful and touching: the leggy little girls playing hopscotch on the sidewalk, the old men on the benches, the green confetti that sumptuous lindens scattered every time the air stretched its invisible limbs.”

In addition, the old men on the benches reminded me of the protagonist in The Enchanter who: “[...] seated himself on a bench in a city park” where he ogled his nymphet.
Count Konstantin Godunov-Cherdyntsev of “The Circle”: “was spending the summer at Leshino, his estate in the Government of St. Petersburg, with his young wife (at forty he was twice as old as she).”

In “Solus Rex” “Prince Fig enjoyed a kind of smutty popularity [...] The more lewdly Fig romped, the louder folks guffawed [...] A characteristic detail: one day when the prince, passing on horseback, a cigar between his teeth, through a backwoodsy hamlet, noticed a comely little girl to whom he offered a ride, and notwithstanding her parents’ horror [...] swept her away [...] the child returned after an hour’s absence, holding a hundred-krun note in one hand, and, in the other, a fledgling that had fallen out of its nest in a desolate grove where she had picked it up on her way back to the village.”

In “Lips to Lips”, Ilya Borisovich, a naive aspiring novelist, is writing a novel in which “elderly” Dolinin meets Irina, “a girl in black” with a “supple young body”, at the theater. After the move to Dolinin’s flat, Irina exclaimed: “Take me, take my purity, take my torment [...] because I love you.”
Commenting on the manuscript: “I suppose he’ll deflower her,” mused Euphratski “an émigré journalist”.

And the narrator opines: “One of the many issues with Ilya’s novel is that he too frequently uses the adjective ‘young’ (feminine gender), replacing it here and there by ‘youthful’”.

“THAT IN ALLEPO ONCE…” (1958)

Lastly, the poet of “THAT IN ALLEPO ONCE…” had a “much younger” wife but: “[...] not as much younger as was Nathalie of the lovely bare shoulders and long earrings in relation to swarthy Pushkin.”

After he: “[...] held her slender young hips (she was combing her soft hair and tossing her head back with every stroke)” she informed him: “I’ve been lying to you, dear [...] Ya Igunia. I stayed for several nights in Montpellier with a brute of a man I met on the train. I did not want it at all. He sold hair lotions.”
Chapter Three
Was Nabokov a Nympholept?

Before we attempt to answer, “Was Nabokov a nympholept?”, it may be helpful to note some additional nympholepts whom Nabokov admired.

Brian Boyd shared in *Vladimir Nabokov, The American Years* that when Nabokov taught at Stanford his evenings were often spent attending formal parties and playing chess with Henry Lanz, the head of the Slavic department. Nabokov found Lanz: "[...] delicate, cultured and talented." In addition, Nabokov found that Lanz was a nympholept who would: "[...] drive off on the weekends, neat and dapper in his blazer, to orgiastic parties with nymphets." (33)

Nabokov was asked in a 1964 *Playboy* interview: "Are there any contemporary authors you do enjoy reading?" Nabokov replied: "I do have a few favorites—for example, Robbe-Grillet and Borges. How freely and gratefully one breathes in their marvelous labyrinths! I love their lucidity of thought, the purity and poetry, the mirage in the mirror." Unsurprisingly, Robbe-Grillet writes about nymphets too. Here's an exemplary excerpt from his *Recollections of the Golden Triangle* [French: Souvenirs du Triangle d'Or]:

To celebrate her 17th birthday, Caroline's father took a whole box at the Opera House. Caroline was commanded to face the stage while straddling two armless red-velvet chairs before her father: "pressed himself shamelessly against her buttocks in order to caress her in greater comfort [...] The insidious fingers are no longer satisfied with stroking [...] They pass back and forth in wave after
wave, tirelessly, over the bivalvular lips [...] One tiny, fragile rock resists and stiffens".

Alexander Pushkin was one of Nabokov’s most favorite poets. So much so that, the Paris Review posted that Nabokov spent two months in Cambridge working on the English translation and commentary of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin - for over seventeen hours per day.

In the novel in verse, the poet Lensky invited Eugene Onegin, a twenty-six-year-old dandy, to dinner with Olga, his fiancée, and her family. During the dinner Tatyana, Olga's sister, became infatuated with Onegin, but her innocent love for the older man was (initially) unrequited.

Despite the fact that Pushkin didn’t explicitly reveal Tatyana’s age, most are of the understanding that she was an older nymphet (e.g., approximately eighteen), but sexologist A. Kotrovsky and columnist E. Tchernych deduced from the Russian word otrokovitsa, which during Pushkin’s time referred to children between the ages of seven and fifteen-years-old, and other textual clues that Tatyana was [arguably] thirteen-years-old.

Now onto the question at hand. According to Matt Ridley’s New York Times Notable Book The Red Queen, men are nympholepts by nature. Thus, maybe the question should be - Was Nabokov an acting nympholept? And did he ever have an affair with a nymphet?

Andrew Field wrote in Nabokov, His Life in Art that there is a narrow distance between Nabokov and his stories and novels. When asked about this Nabokov replied: “that, yes, the stories were
perhaps one tenth autobiographical,” but like Field wrote: "that leaves one with the problem of deciding which tenth". (48)

In Nabokov’s Eros and the Poetics of Desire, Couturier related three different scenarios that would give one the impression that Nabokov wasn’t an acting nympholept:

1. “Nabokov’s sexuality, whether or not he ever acted on it, and the novelist was well aware of the risks he was running in giving imaginative expression to this kind of sexual desire. He hesitated to publish Lolita, and at one point nearly destroyed it. Having taken the plunge and released it to the world, he tried to defend himself against the charge of encouraging paedophilia by inserting an exculpatory Foreword to the novel by the fictitious psychiatrist John Ray, and by adding to later editions an Afterword in his own name with the same purpose. Couturier exposes flaws, and an element of bad faith, in these arguments and in the obiter dicta on the subject that Nabokov uttered subsequently, and wishes he had adopted a different stance.” (12)

2. “Nabokov finished writing The Gift in January 1938 – that is, four months after his idyll with Irina Guadanini ended. After revising its English translation, he said in an interview: “It portrays the adventures, literary and romantic, of a young Russian expatriate in Berlin, in the twenties; but he’s not myself. I am very careful to keep my characters beyond the limits of my own identity. Only the background of the novel can be said to contain some biographical touches.” (12) He had not taken the precaution of keeping his “characters beyond the limits of [his] own identity” in Mary, Glory and in some of his short stories, though. The Gift is more autobiographical than he was ready to acknowledge. Mrs. Nabokov, too, was a great beauty, a highly cultivated and refined lady, who often was her husband’s “conscience” as well as his muse. He loved her dearly but not as he had loved Irina who continued to haunt him. The comic ending of The Gift reads, I suggest, as an oblique comment on Nabokov’s relationship with his wife who remained his loving and indispensable companion throughout his life but whom he may have found too much of a bluestocking at times.” (59)
3. “When he says that the throb at the origin of *The Enchanter* “began to plague [him] again” ten years later, there is no need to be a Freudian to prick one’s ears at the word “plague”: the fantasy, for that is what it is, had gradually festered in such a ways as to become almost a canker, a disease; and writing *Lolita* was his only way of getting rid of it, apart, of course, from surrendering to this disturbing fantasy and seeking out a nymphet to love, which he was not ready or even tempted to do, probably.” (322)

However, just as I was about declare that Nabokov was an inactive nympholept I happened upon Byran Marquard’s “Katherine Reese Peebles, 93; captured Nabokov in heart and words” in the *Boston Globe*.

Peebles, “a talented writer”, was a nineteen-year-old student in 1943 when she took Nabokov’s Russian course at Wellesley College where she profiled Nabokov in “We”, a college publication, as: “Fortyish, tall and thin, shoulders hunched forward, he resembles the romantic, American conception of a real artist […] His face is like one of those which are often ascribed to geniuses and mad scientists in mystery novels.”

Marquard wrote that Peebles': “piece on Nabokov, meanwhile, hinted that she and her Russian-born professor would soon fall into a flirtatious romance, if they hadn’t already.” Peebles wrote: “Some of the students are rather confused by his nervousness and subtle remarks [...] He pretends that he can’t imagine why we are laughing and looks very worried and appealing. We see the sham and giggle harder; a mutual understanding”.

Furthermore, Peebles shared in Stacy Schiff’s Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Nabokov’s wife, *Véra: (Mrs. Vladimir
Nabokov: “I took a course in Russian, and I got sidetracked on a course on Vladimir Nabokov.”

Schiff revealed that during the year in which Nabokov and Vera were celebrating their 18th year of marriage, forty-three-year-old Nabokov and Peebles: “traipsed around campus, ‘stumbling and bumbling’ through the winter dark” and that their affair “entailed a fair amount of kissing”.

And in reference to Lolita, Peebles stated factually: “He did like young girls. Just not little girls.” In other words, Peebles knew that Nabokov wasn’t a pedophile but a (acting) nympholept.

I wrote in The Allure of Nymphets that it’s just as easy to lose a nymphet as it is to procure one. And that it must be the nymphet’s idea to advance the relationship. Otherwise, a nympholept may make the same mistake that Mr. Middlewood (Chris Kattan) made in Tanner Hall (2009) where Victoria, Mr. Middlewood’s boarding school student, (unsurprisingly) initiated the affair by feigning a fall in the shower; so, that Mr. Middlewood, a literature teacher, would rescue her.

After chomping onto the bait, Mr. Middlewood carried his student’s half nude and dripping wet body to the nurse’s office while the other boarding school nymphets gawked and giggled.

Initially, Mr. Middlewood was reserved and had a standoffish attitude in reaction to Victoria's advances, that was even after Victoria suggested that the class read Lolita while she invitingly performed fellatio on a pencil. However, things took a turn for the worse after Mr. Middlewood didn’t have enough patience to allow Victoria to advance the relationship at her own pace. He made a
fatal error and took the enormous step of giving Victoria a car for
her birthday; so, that they could: “go away together somewhere.
Anywhere [...] Finally, you're of legal age. I know you want it as
much as I do. We don't have to fight this anymore.”

Victoria replied: “Mr. Middlewood you're scaring me. Just
forget about me, okay?”

Mr. Middlewood was correct in assuming that Victoria
wanted it as much as he did, but that should have been his firm but
unspoken mindset.

And I wrote that in Solitary Man (2009), Ben Kalmen
(Michael Douglas) became “clingy” after he had sex with Allyson,
his teenaged step-daughter. The short affair began while on a trip
to Kalmen’s alma mater to speak to the Dean of Admissions on
behalf his lovely step-daughter. Upon returning to Manhattan,
Kalmen sent Allyson several (unanswered) messages to inform her
that he wanted to continue “seeing” her. However, she rejected her
step-father’s advances by stating: “Come on Ben. You know what
it was in Boston. It was a kick. It was really, really fun, but [...] come
on. I thought there was going to be a little difference between you
and the guys my age. You wouldn't go simple and be all clingy and
stuff [...] Ben you need to forget about it.”

Interestingly, Schiff related that Nabokov made the same
mistake that Mr. Middlewood and Ben Kalmen made. She wrote of
Peebles: “After class one day, she commented on the half-
heartedness with which her professor erased the blackboard. At
least one Cyrillic always shone through the next.
“Then can you read this?” Nabokov asked, scrawling three words on the board and just as quickly erasing them.

He had written ‘I love you,’ in Russian. Consequently, Peebles dropped the course, and the professor.”

Despite, Nabokov’s nympholept faux pas, we now know that he was in fact an acting nympholept! Some may be disappointed that Pebbles was an aging nymphet but her affair with Nabokov doesn’t prevent one from suspecting that there were other affairs because frankly, we can’t believe everything that Nabokov relates. For example, Boyd wrote in Vladimir Nabokov, The American Years that Nabokov said: “I had not much contact with the students, and that was something I liked.” (172) But that contradicts Boyd writing that: “Nabokov and his wife often dined with the Wellesley students in the college dormitories or in clubs. His bold opinions and his wide-ranging interests fascinated his young listeners, and he basked in their admiration. The young women---plaid skirts, bobby socks, buttoned sweaters with sleeves pushed up---thought him charming, handsome, and by the standards of well-to-do Wellesley, romantically poor. (37)
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