

# PILGRIMAGE, MEMORY AND DEATH IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S SHORT STORY "THE AURELIAN"\*

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Maxim D. Shrayer, Boston College

The protagonist of "Pil'gram" ("The Aurelian," 1930), a German shopkeeper and entomologist, dies of a stroke at the threshold of his perfect dream. The fifty-year old owner of a butterfly store in Weimar Berlin, Pil'gram spends his entire adult life attempting to undertake a collecting trip to one of the regions renowned for its rich butterfly population. All of his attempts fail for various reasons: his poor health disqualifies him from being sent to the colonies during World War One; the post-war crisis destroys his hard-earned savings; his business deteriorates plunging him into debt. Finally, when Pil'gram has all but given up on his obsessive plan, good fortune brings him a rich collector, one Sommer, who buys from Pil'gram a major collection of lepidoptera. The sum would only allow Pil'gram several months of economical travel, but he embraces the salutary opportunity without hesitation. Leaving his pitiful wife Eleanor behind without a source of income, Pil'gram sets out to go to Spain. A fatal stroke (he had suffered one before) halts his journey. In the morning, Eleanor finds him dead sitting on the floor of his shop.

Such is the outline of this fascinating story, the first since December 1928, which Nabokov wrote in ten days between March 10 and 20, 1930 in Berlin.<sup>1</sup> Later in 1930, "The Aurelian" appeared in issue 43 of *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals*) to become Nabokov's second short story featured in the best journal of the Russian emigration. "The Aurelian" elicited numerous responses in émigré reviews, including a separate essay in a Parisian newspaper, *Rossija i slavjanstvo* (*Russia and Slavdom*).<sup>2</sup> In his milestone study of Russian émigré literature, Gleb Struve referred to "The Aurelian" as one of Nabokov's best and most emblematic stories.<sup>3</sup> Georgij Adamovič praised the story for its "economy of means" and absence of gratuitous ornamentation—the qualities the critic valued most.<sup>4</sup> Nabokov included "The Aurelian" in his second collection of short stories, *Sogljadataj* (*The Eye*; 1938), and chose it as one of the first to be translated into English. The

translation was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1941 and thereafter reprinted twice in Nabokov's original English-language collections.<sup>5</sup>

"The Aurelian" opens Nabokov's Middle Period and represents a turning point in terms of its relationship between formal composition and projected metaphysical outlook.<sup>6</sup> In the final paragraph of "The Aurelian," the reader faces a *textual opening* that invites to follow the protagonist into his otherworldly journey. Although the otherworldly vistas in such early texts as "Roždestvo" ("Christmas," 1924) or "Katastrofa" ("Details of a Sunset"; literally "The Catastrophe," 1924) anticipate the textual opening in "The Aurelian," only in the latter do we see a critical dichotomy between the *metaphysical opening*, through which Pil'gram enters the *otherworld*, and the *closed physical ending*, that tells of Pil'gram's *death*:

Yes, Pil'gram had gone far, very far. Most probably he visited Granada and Murcia and Albarracin, and then traveled farther still, to Surinam or Taprobane; and one can hardly doubt that he saw all the glorious bugs he had longed to see—velvety black butterflies soaring over the jungles, and a tiny moth in Tasmania, and that Chinese 'skipper' said to smell of crushed roses when alive, and the short-clubbed beauty that a Mr. Baron had just discovered in Mexico. So, in a certain sense, it is quite irrelevant that some time later, upon wandering into the shop, Eleanor saw the chequered suitcase, and then her husband, sprawling on the floor with his back to the counter, among scattered coins, his livid face knocked out of shape by death. (Stories 254/ND 87)

The paradox of "The Aurelian," its mesmerizing power, lies in the fact that as far as the plot goes, the narrative is over when the reader learns of Pil'gram's death. At the same time, the text of Pil'gram's otherworldly travels continues in the reader's memory. A narrative split occurs at the story's physical ending. Along with Pil'gram's dead body—symbolizing here the end of the plot—the reader leaves behind a near-linear narrative of a Buninesque type, Ivan Bunin being one of Nabokov's masters of the short story. On the one hand, like many a Bunin short story with a closed ending, "The Aurelian" ends with a stunning death. On the other hand, Nabokov's metaphysical text continues beyond its closed physical ending. The narrative split between the closed ending and the textual opening in "The Aurelian" corresponds to a complex inner split within Pil'gram's own existence between his mundane "dreary" Berlin life ("berlinskim prozjabanien") and the "phantom of perfect happiness" ("prizrakom pronzitel'nogo sčast'ja"; S 193; Stories 248/ND 80). After the initial act of reading, Pil'gram's death records itself in the reader's memory as a distant recollection, while the text of Pil'gram's otherworldly dream goes on as he continues his longed-for expedition across Spain, South America, Ceylon, or eternity. In "The Aurelian," Nabokov foregrounds a new model of a short story which—from the point of view of the "ideal reader," the author's double in Nabokov's terms—*never ends*.<sup>7</sup>

My purpose in this essay is to inquire into the motif and design of

entering the otherworld in the poetics of “The Aurelian.” I will do so by considering first the ways the protagonist’s characterization supports the story’s acute dichotomy between the idealized otherworldly dimension that underwrites the structure of a textual opening, and the oppressive quotidian reality which warrants a closed ending. I will then explore pilgrimage not only as an allegory and a structural embodiment of Pil’gram’s dream, but also a recurrent motif in Nabokov’s life and oeuvre. My next concern will be with the Russian text’s transformation from the draft to the fair copy to the final version, as well as the latter’s revamping into an English-language short story. I will evaluate the extent to which the changes in the surviving Russian versions, but also the translators’ decisions in the English, shape the *sui generis* nature of the story’s central motifs. Finally, I will assess the connections between the story and Nabokov’s experience as an exile as well as his career as a lepidopterist.

The two-world architecture of Pil’gram’s existence is signaled to the reader as early as the first paragraph. Inscribed into the otherwise inconspicuous cityscape of a Berlin residential street, Pil’gram’s butterfly store stands apart from the other shops surrounding it, “a fruitier’s [. . .] a tobacconist’s [. . .] a delicatessen” (Stories 244/ND 75). The passers-by—noticing the bright colors of the butterflies on display—would “stop for a second before that symbol of fair weather” (Stories 244/ND 75). They “would say to themselves, ‘What colors—amazing!’ and plod on through the drizzle. Eyed wings wide-open in wonder, shimmering blue satin, black magic—these lingered for a while floating in one’s vision [“zaderživalis’ u nego v pamjati,” literally: “lingered for a while in one’s memory”] until one boarded the trolley or bought a newspaper” (S 185; Stories 244/ND 75). The centrality of memory in fixating the opposition between the radiant otherworld of butterflies and the mundane world of city routine is underscored both in the Russian and English versions. The opening passage suggests that although beatitude may be only one step off the everyday route, very few individuals allow it to remain as part of their memory.

The protagonist enters the space of the narrative through the door to his neighborhood pub where the street’s other shopkeepers imbibe their daily dose of alcohol while also playing cards. Pil’gram, a “flabby elderly man with a florid face, lank hair, and a greyish mustache” (Stories 245/ND 76), enters the pub on Saturdays and undergoes his weekly routine of ordering rum, smoking his pipe, and watching the game. His is a familiar presence at the pub where no one suspects Pil’gram’s otherworldly dreams. Although he may not blend completely with the other frequenters of the pub, he appears an integral part of their established existence. He is a “Herr Professor,” a more learned burgher, but a good old burgher all the same. He emblemizes a shopkeeper’s sensibility, hard work during the week and a

weekend's rest at the pub. He makes sure not to miss a chance at having "a go at [the owner's daughter's] elusive hip"; his jokes are rude and devoid of humor. He is mindful of clock time and checks his "thick silver watch" against the cuckoo clock. His Saturday pub ritual ends "punctually at eleven" (Stories 245/ND 76), after which he proceeds to his apartment where a brass plate on the door announces his name.

As the reader follows Pil'gram into his apartment, more is discovered about his mundane existence. He resides in a "tiny dingy" apartment (Stories 245/ND 76) with a wife to whom he has been married for twenty-five years. Very little seems to connect Pil'gram and his wife. In fact, the only word he ever says to her in the story is "that guttural 'Ruhe!' ['Be quiet!'] several times, more and more fiercely" (Stories 245/ND 77). Even Pil'gram's wife, faceless, loyal, and all-enduring, misreads his character. In fact, Nabokov's narrator stresses Pil'gram's singularity vis-à-vis his "butterfly" dream. The first authorial statement regarding Pil'gram's existing in two worlds appears precisely during a description of his sleep, the time—as some metaphysical systems believe—when a man's soul joins God:

Он спал всегда на спине, низко надвинув на лоб ночной колпак,—и это был сон по шаблону, прочный и шумный сон лавочника, доброго бюргера, и, глядя на него, можно было предположить, что сон с такой пристойной внешностью совершенно лишён видений. На самом же деле этот сорокапятiletний, тяжёлый, грубый человек, питавшийся гороховой колбасой да варёным картофелем, мирно доверявший своей газете, благополучно невежественный во всём, что не касалось его одинокой бессмысленной страсти, видел—без ведома жены и соседей—необыкновенные сны. (S 189)

("He slept on his back with an old-fashioned night-cap coming down on his forehead; it was to all appearances the solid and sonorous sleep that might be expected in an elderly German shopkeeper, and one could readily suppose that his quilted torpor was entirely devoid of visions; but actually this churlish, heavy man, who fed mainly on *Erbswurst* and boiled potatoes, placidly believing in his newspaper and quite ignorant of the world (in so far as his secret passion was not involved), dreamed of things that would have seemed utterly unintelligible to his wife or his neighbors. . . ." (Stories 246/ND 77).

Set against the gray oppressive background of all of the above, Pil'gram's inner life not only gives him, an otherworldly daydreamer, strength to lead a shopkeeper's existence, but also redeems him in the eyes of the reader.

For Nabokov and his privileged characters, to recall the emblematic poem "Vljublennost'" ("Being in Love," 1974), the otherworld conflates love, the transcendent, and perfect memories in an open moment of blissful eternity:

Мы забываем, что влюбленность  
 Не просто поворот лица  
 А под купавами бездонность,  
 Ночная паника пловца.  
 [. . .]  
 Напоминаю, что влюбленность

Не явь, что метины не те,  
 Что может быть потусторонность  
 Приотворилась в темноте. (*Sixi* 317–8; LATH 26)

The protagonist and narrator of the novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), a Russian émigré writer, Vadim Vadimych, composes “on the night of [. . .] a more oblique, more metaphysical little poem” which he recites—first in Russian—to a young English woman named Iris. Below is Vadim Vadimych’s English rendition of the poem:

We forget—or rather tend to forget—that being in love (*vlyublyonnost’*) does not depend on the facial angle of the loved one, but is a bottomless spot under the nenuphars, a swimmer’s panic in the night (here the iambic tetrameter happens to be rendered—last line of the first stanza, *nochnáya pánika plovtzá*). [. . .] Now comes the last stanza of this philosophical love poem. [. . .] *Napomináyu*, I remind you, that *vlyublyonnost’* is not wide-awake reality, that the markings are not the same (a moon-striped ceiling, *polosatyy ot luny potolok*), is, for instance, not the same kind of reality as a ceiling by day, and that, maybe, the hereafter stands slightly ajar in the dark (LATH 26).

In keeping with Nabokov’s paradigmatic formulation of an otherworldly state in the poem “Being in Love,” it seems fruitful to inquire into the meaning of Pil’gram’s dream in terms of love, passion, and happiness. Indeed, his plan for a butterfly-collecting expedition is characterized as *strastnaja mečta* (“passionate daydream”) and *ljubov’* (“love”), and referred to as *sčast’e* (“happiness”) nine times in the Russian text. The story’s omniscient narrator presents the history of Pil’gram’s private otherworldly dream as originating in his childhood. Butterflies figure in Pil’gram’s earliest childhood memories: “[Pil’gram] ljubil baboček s tex por, kak suščestvuet” (literally: “Pil’gram loved butterflies since he has existed”; S 191; note that Nabokov’s use of the verb “to exist” cements the opposition between Pil’gram’s otherworldly love for butterflies and his mundane existence). Pil’gram might have inherited a thirst for travel from his father, a “sailor, a rover, a bit of a rogue” (Stories 247/ND 78) and his mother, a Dutch woman from Indonesia. After his father’s death, Pil’gram converted their colonial souvenir shop into a butterfly store with rich holdings and collections. He had had, the reader is told, several opportunities to start a more lucrative business, but clung to his butterfly trade as “the only symbolic link between his dreary existence and the phantom of perfect happiness” (Stories 248/ND 79–80). Very few outside the closed circuit of entomologists, and none within his shopkeeper’s circle, know that Pil’gram is a “first-class entomologist” (Stories 247–8/ND 79) with several discoveries and contributions to his credit. Remarkably, given Pil’gram’s status as a butterfly expert, he has never left his native Prussia. His only experiences at butterfly-collecting were those limited to Sunday summer trips to the outskirts of Berlin. Waves of nostalgic childhood memories overcome Pil’gram during his little trips:

[. . .] Вспоминал детство, поимки, казавшиеся ему тогда такими необыкновенными, и с грустью смотрел на бабочек, все виды которых ему были давным-давно известны, прочно, безнадежно соответствовали пейзажу,—или же на ивовом кусте отыскивал большую, голубовато-зелёную, шероховатую на ощупь гусеницу с маленьким фарфоровым рогом на задке. Он держал её, оцепеневшую, на ладони, вспоминал такую же находку в детстве,—замирание, приговорки восторга,—и, как вещь, ставил её обратно на сучок. (S 192)

“[. . .] and he would be reminded of captures that had seemed to him so miraculous in his boyhood as he melancholically gazed at the familiar fauna about him, limited by a familiar landscape, to which it corresponded as hopelessly as he to his street [this last clause Nabokov added in the English version; it recalls the opening description of Pil’gram’s shop amidst the other ones on his street and augments the note of hopelessness]. From a roadside shrub he would pick up a large turquoise-green caterpillar with a china-blue horn on the last ring; there it lay on the palm of his hand, and [\*] presently, with a sigh, he would put it back on its twig as if it were some dead trinket”; *Stories* 248/ND 79).

In the English, Nabokov decided to tone down the Russian version’s deeply lyrical recollection of Pil’gram’s childhood discovery of a caterpillar, marked above with an asterisk. In a literal translation, the omission would read as follows: “he recalled finding the same caterpillar in his childhood,—feeling numb, mumbling words of rapture.” Perfect childhood memories charge Pil’gram’s life-long anticipations of a real collecting trip with ideal characteristics. His dream of perfect happiness consists in netting “the rarest butterflies of distant countries, to see them in flight with his own eyes [. . .] and feel the follow-through of the swishing net and then the furious throbbing of wings through a clutched fold of the gauze” (*Stories* 248/ND 80). In a sense Pil’gram longs to regain the lost Paradise of his childhood—a leitmotif of Nabokov’s works from the earliest stories to the latest, from the novels *Glory* (1931–32) and *The Gift* (1937–38) to *Lolita* (1955) and *Ada* (1969).

Pil’gram refers to the possibility of a real trip as nothing other than *sčast’e* (“happiness”). Like Germann in Puškin’s “Pikovaja dama” (“The Queen of Spades,” 1833) whose inflamed mind endows surrounding objects with signs of “three, seven, ace,” Pil’gram also sees everything in terms of the way it relates to his “phantom” of happiness. At one point, when he fails yet again to set out on a lepidopterological expedition, Pil’gram’s savings, which inflation turns into worthless paper, are described as “real’naja sguščennaja vozmožnost’ sčast’ja” (S 194; literally: “real concentrated possibility of happiness”).

Unable to travel, Pil’gram cognizes and maps the world outside Prussia in terms of its butterfly population and relationship to his dream. Completely oblivious to anything except lepidoptera, Pil’gram creates in his memory an esoteric map of the world, a guide book to the space of his dream trips. In surveying his representative butterfly and moth collections, Pil’gram revisits the native region(s) of certain species. The English version omits two seminal sentences describing Pil’gram’s “longing/yearning” (“tomlenie,” in the

Russian frequently used with sensuous connotations) for the places he has visited only in his mind:

Всякая чужая страна представлялась ему исключительно как родина той или иной бабочки,—и томление, которое он при этом испытывал, можно только сравнить с тоской по родине. Мир он знал совершенно по-своему, в особом разрезе, удивительно отчётливом и другим недоступном. (S 196)

(“He envisioned any foreign country exclusively as the homeland of one butterfly or another,—and his yearning can only be compared to a longing for one’s homeland. He knew the world in his peculiar way, from a unique perspective, surprisingly clear and yet unattainable for the others”).

The importance of the notion of “longing for one’s homeland” could not be overestimated given Nabokov’s status as a Russian émigré in the 1930s and the story’s appearances in émigré publications. In the Russian text, the word *rodina* (“homeland”) figures in two different contexts. First it refers to Pil’gram’s real homeland, Prussia (“vsju žizn’ on prožil na rodine”; S 192), the territory which he tries to leave behind. Later, *rodina* refers to his ideal homeland, an enchanting moveable dreamscape inhabited with perfectly beautiful butterflies.

Although Pil’gram never “traveled farther than Peacock Island on a neighboring lake” (Stories 247/ND 79), he seems very much aware of the tremendous, almost prohibitive, differences between the dull familiar look of Prussian landscapes and the otherworldly landscapes of his “journeys.” The atlas of his private trips via memory and imagination includes a variety of territories including such famous sites for butterfly collecting as Digne in southern France, Ragusa (Dubrovnik) in Dalmatia or Sarepta on the Volga. Pil’gram has mastered the space of his projected journeys to the point of knowing their most intricate details. In his mind, he visits the Canary Islands, Corsica, Lapland, Italy, Spain, the Ussurian region in the Far East, Congo, Indonesia, and many other lands. In Pil’gram’s visions, the butterfly collecting sites are marked with signs of exceptionality, singularity, mysteriousness, and blissfulness. Lifting a stone to find “a plump sleepy moth of a still undescribed species” is described as “no greater delight” (“net bol’šego naslaždenija”; Stories 250/ND 82). Gravel in Italian gardens crunches “invitingly” (“tainstvenno,” literally “mysteriously”). The Ussurian region is referred to as “volšebnyj” (“magical”; “enchanted”). Thus, Pil’gram’s unparalleled atlas of world lepidoptera actually becomes a map of his own private otherworld created and preserved in his memory.<sup>8</sup>

Also noteworthy is the very language that Nabokov employs to map the dreamscape of Pil’gram’s travels. Each ecological niche that Pil’gram visits, Corsica or Sumatra alike, centers upon a particular species of butterfly or moth: “[. . .] the Islands of the Blessed, where in the hot ravines that cut the lower slopes [. . .] there occurs a weird local race of the cabbage white; and also that other island, those railway banks near Vizzanova and the pine

woods farther up, which are the haunts of the squat and dusky Corsican swallowtail" (Stories 250/ND 82). The lepidoptera color their native landscape (or cityscape as in the case of mothing in Seville) with ethereal beauty, and transfer upon the surroundings their own phenomenal features. In the case of Pil'gram's lepidoptera, the very language that he uses charges the butterflies with anthropomorphic details. The Corsican swallowtail ("korsikankij maxaon") is described in the Russian as "smuglyj," literally "dark-complexioned," used exclusively in reference to human skin as in "smugloe litso" ("dark-complexioned" or "dark-skinned face"). Grass on an Alpine meadow is called "koltunnaja," which the Englished text renders as "matted" for the lack of an appropriate English adjective; in the Russian, "koltunnyj" derives from "koltun"="plica," a human hair disease, and can mean "tousled" (as in "tousled hair"). Another species, a moth, is characterized as "tolsten'kaja" and "sonnaja" ("plump" and "sleepy"); both adjectives in the Russian are normally used in reference to people, not fauna. The English is of course not equipped with diminutives to the extent as Russian is; "tolsten'kaja" ("plump"), from "tolstaja" ("fat"), adds a great deal of affection to the description of the moth.

The anthropomorphic characterization of Pil'gram's butterflies lays ground for a key statement regarding his communication with the lepidopterological otherworld. When the rich collector Sommer expresses interest in purchasing a large collection, Pil'gram negotiates the price while also contemplating the particulars of his would-be journey:

И теперь, тонко торгуясь с Зоммером, он ощущал волнение, тяжесть в висках, чёрные пятна плыли перед глазами,—и предчувствие счастья, предчувствие отъезда было едва выносимо. Он знал отлично, что это безумие, знал, что оставляет нищую жену, долги, магазин, который и продать нельзя, знал, что две-три тысячи, которые он выручит за коллекцию, позволят ему странствовать не больше года,—и всё же он шёл на это, как человек, чувствующий, что завтра—старость, и что счастье, пославшее за ним, уже больше никогда не повторит приглашения. (added emphases; S 201–2)

("[And now, as he skillfully negotiated the price with Sommer, he felt excitement, heaviness in his temples, black spots floating before his eyes,—and a foretaste of happiness, foretaste of departure was almost unbearable; this sentence, omitted in the English version, is provided in my literal translation—MDS]. He knew it was madness; he knew he was leaving a helpless Eleanor, debts, unpaid taxes, a store at which only trash was bought; he knew that the 950 marks he might get would permit him to travel for no longer than a few months; and still he accepted it all as a man who felt that tomorrow would bring dreary old age and that the good fortune [literally: "happiness"—MDS] which now beckoned would never again repeat its invitation"; Stories 252/ND 84.)

Pil'gram feels that the otherworld—the haven of perfect happiness—communicates with him, calls for him, summons him to undertake an expedition. As with many of Nabokov's privileged characters, Pil'gram's contacts with the otherworld affect him physically. Earlier in the story, the reader learns about the liminal fainting spells that Pil'gram would go through when

trying to imagine the tropics: “[. . .] попытка туда проникнуть мечтой вызывала сердцебиение и чувство, почти нестерпимое, сладкое, обморочное [. . .]” (S 198).<sup>9</sup> Pil’gram’s “pangs,” his heart pains, link him with the otherworldly experiences of such characters as Ivanov in “Soveršenstvo” (“Perfection,” 1932), Vasilij Ivanovič in “Oblako, ozero, bašnja” (“Cloud, Castle, Lake,” 1937) or Pnin in the eponymous novel (1957).

Nabokov’s description of Pil’gram’s imminent happiness points to another “butterfly” story, the early masterpiece “Christmas.” In both texts, an otherworldly experience is presented as a butterfly imago coming out of a cocoon. Here is a comment by the protagonist of “The Aurelian”: “Когда наконец Зоммер сказал, что через три дня даст окончательный ответ, Пильграм решил, что мечта вот сейчас, сейчас из куколки вылупится” (“When finally Sommer said that on the fourth he would give a definite answer, Pil’gram decided that the dream of his life was about to break at last from its old crinkly cocoon”; S 202; Stories 252/ND 84). In “Christmas,” the metamorphosis occurs at the end of the story, amounts to a textual opening, and offers its protagonist a modicum of consolation. In “The Aurelian,” whose English title derives from the now obsolete *aurelia*, a pupa or chrysalis, the metaphor of Pil’gram’s lifetime dream—“about to break at last from its old crinkly cocoon”—awards a foretaste of his liberation at the end of the story. The “old crinkly cocoon” stands for Pil’gram’s mundane existence, while he himself is that *aurelia* trapped and dormant inside the boundaries of its dark and narrow world. Coming out of the cocoon to become a beautiful butterfly allegorizes Pil’gram’s dream of exiting the constraints of this world and entering the otherworld.

The motif of pilgrimage is central in the signification of the protagonist’s otherworldly journey. The name of the protagonist draws immediate attention due to its foreign sound to a Russian ear. Nabokov’s passion for dictionary research might have yielded a fitting name for his protagonist. “Pilgram” (or “pilgerame”) is the Scots word for “pilgrim.”<sup>10</sup> In Russian, two different words are used, the native Slavic “palomnik” and the Latin-derived “pilgrim.” While an English speaker seems quite likely to apprehend the *pilgram-pilgrim* connection, fewer Russian speakers might be able to sense that the name Pil’gram encodes pilgrimage. Since the story’s commentators have not noticed the highly meaningful link, the evolution of the protagonist’s name deserves a closer look. In the first, heavily marked draft of the story, Nabokov uses the name Karl Gruber.<sup>11</sup> On the first few pages of the fair copy, Nabokov refers to his protagonist as Alfred Zommer (Sommer) but then decides to change it to Pil’gram, just Pil’gram without any first name. The fair copy has preserved Nabokov’s changes: he heavily crossed out the name Sommer and corrected it to Pil’gram. The

name Sommer was given to the rich amateur sent by destiny to buy from Pil'gram a collection of "those small clear-winged moths that mimic wasps or mosquitoes" (Stories 251/ND 83); the collector's name was originally Krechmar (Kretscmar)—the name of the German protagonist of the novel *Kamera Obskura* (1932–33).<sup>12</sup> In the fair copy, the story also bears a different title, "Palomnik," which is precisely the native Russian term for "pilgrim." Nabokov must have put much stock into the title and its special relationship to the protagonist's name. The first draft contains no title whatsoever. In the fair copy, from which a typescript was presumably made and sent to *Contemporary Annals*, two alternative titles (or two words of a single earlier title) are so heavily crossed out that it is difficult to make out what lies underneath the heavy layer of ink.<sup>13</sup> The final title, "Palomnik" ("The Pilgrim"), was written above the two crossed-out words. Beneath the titles Nabokov wrote *rasskaz* ("short story")—something he does not usually do in other manuscripts. Perhaps the ecclesiastically-charged title did not quite agree with Nabokov's authorial and fictional intentions; by adding a clear genre label he must have hoped to avoid his piece being taken for an essay on pilgrimage.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, neither the typescript of the story nor the corrected proofs seem to have survived. My guess is that Nabokov changed the title to "Pil'gram" either at the stage of a typescript, or the galley proofs.<sup>15</sup> In the English version, Nabokov changed the title from "Pil'gram" to "The Aurelian." The fact that Nabokov opted for such a rare word as "aurelian" bespeaks his authorial wish to maintain an aura of mystery about the story's title.

In the English version of the story, Nabokov also added the first name "Paul" to the name "Pil'gram" on the brass plate of the protagonist's door, thereby converting "Pil'gram" into a last name. This circumstance may have had something to do with the fact that such a last name does exist in Germany and Great Britain. Several dictionaries of British surnames list Pil'gram as a possible variant of the name Pilgrim, originally given to someone who has made a pilgrimage to Rome or the Holy Land. A German *Deutsches Namenlexicon* also lists Pil'gram as a possible variant of a last name. Consequently, at least for English and German readers, the last name "Pil'gram" is a speaking name that also preserves an outlandish aura. As for Russian readers, the name "Pil'gram" is virtually unreadable while such a title as "Palomnik," which Nabokov rejected, would have obviated the meaning of the story. It was not surprising to discover therefore that the English version is missing a passage that suggest pilgrimage, but not as directly as would the Russian word "palomnik," had it remained the title of the story.

The following long sentence—omitted in the English text—occurs as part of the narrator's lengthy explication of how Pil'gram maps the dreamspace of his journeys:

Если бы он побывал в какойнибудь [sic] прославленной местности, Пильграм заметил бы только то, что относилось к его добыче, служило для неё естественным фоном,—и только тогда запомнил бы Эректеон, если бы с листа оливы, растущей в глубине святилища, слетела и была подхвачена свистящим сачком греческая достопримечательность, которую лишь он, специалист, мог оценить. (S 196)

(“If he were to visit some renowned place, Pil’gram would only notice what relates to the objects of his collecting and serves as its natural background; he would only remember Erechtheum if a Greek rarity—which he alone could appreciate as a specialist—were to fall off an olive branch growing in the depth of the sanctuary and be caught by a whistling net.”)

Erechtheum is an ancient Greek sanctuary, the original temple of tutelary deities, situated on the North side of the Acropolis of Athens.<sup>16</sup> As a holy place in ancient Greek cults, Erechtheum symbolizes a site of pilgrimage. The notion of pilgrimage is organic to the otherworldly dreams of Paul Pil’gram, the story’s modern pilgrim. Pilgrimage implies a visit to a place with which one is already familiar through cultural memory. A trip to a holy place, be it Jerusalem, Rome, or Mecca, promises a pilgrim liberation from various burdens of his everyday existence. The goal of any pilgrimage, be it a sinful monarch’s or a pious nun’s, is to reach a space that is charged with the timeless presence of holiness. During a pilgrimage, a pilgrim matches up a set of expectations based on the information obtained via various sources (oral history, books, sermons, etc.) with the actual holy place s/he visits. Pilgrimages are said to have a purifying effect upon those who undertake them because they offer cognitive keys to one’s existence. In the case of Nabokov’s protagonist, the reader observes a kindred relationship between Pil’gram’s earlier knowledge of the otherworldly spaces that he strives to visit and the physical realities of the actual locales. In the Russian version, the narrator explains that Pil’gram possesses a brilliant memory that stores a great deal of information about world lepidoptera. Based on his vast knowledge, and owing to his fine memory, Pil’gram has compiled in his mind a matchless map of his would-be pilgrimages. In anticipation of a real pilgrimage after Sommer’s visit, Pil’gram begins to examine a real map on the wall of his shop, “choosing a route, estimating the time of appearances of this or that species” (Stories 252/ND 84). Suddenly, we are told, “something black and blinding welled before his eyes” (Stories 252/ND 84)—a prefiguration of Pil’gram’s fatal stroke. Thus, an anticipation of a real pilgrimage has a powerful impact upon Pil’gram. At this point, since the reader does not know the end of the story, s/he can wonder about the shock of recognition that Pil’gram would experience during his pilgrimage.

The larger context of Nabokov’s oeuvre yields at least one more major exploration of the motif of pilgrimage (“palomničestvo” in Russian). The 1927 poem “Palomnik” (“The Pilgrim”), originally published in the Berlin newspaper *Rul’* (*The Rudder*) and later included in Nabokov’s first collection of stories and poems, *Vozvraščenie Corba* (*The Return of Chorb*,

1930), bears a dedication to the critic Julij Ajxenval’d, a friend of Nabokov’s and a fellow émigré. In the poem, the lyrical persona, probably an exile, travels in his mind to the country estate (“usad’ba”) of his childhood where he stays amid perfect memories. At one point, the Nabokovian protagonist of the poem hears a summoning signal:

И я тогда услышу: вспомни-ка  
 рыдающий вагон  
 и счастье странного паломника,  
 чья Мекка там, где он.  
 Он рад бывал, скитаясь по миру,  
 озерам под луной,  
 вокзалам громовым и номеру  
 в гостинице ночной. (VČ 232/*Stixi* 197–8)

(“And then I will hear: do recall/ the sobbing train car/ and the happiness of a strange pilgrim/ whose Mecca is where he is. || He used to rejoice, wandering around the world,/ around lakes beneath the moon,/ in thunderous train stations and a room/ in a hotel at night”)

One notices several parallels between the pilgrim’s experiences in the poem and Pil’gram’s in the story. I have spoken earlier about the marked use of the word happiness in “The Aurelian” to refer to Pil’gram’s otherworldly expectations. The adjective “strannyj”—in reference to a pilgrim—also surfaces in the story: “strannye ljudi, priexavšie izdaleka” (S 196; literally: “strange people who have come from afar”). Finally, the image of a pilgrim in a hotel at night also enters into the text of the story: “[. . .] Pil’gram saw himself troubling the sleep of a little hotel [. . .]” (Stories 250/ND 82). In the story, Pil’gram’s otherworld fills his room with its presence when a gray moth flies in through an open window. In the poem, the lyrical pilgrim walks to the window (heavily, like Pil’gram himself) through which some “bright foreign country” beckons him to enter its space:

О, как потянет вдруг на яркую  
 чужбину, в дальний путь . . .  
 Как тяжело к окну прошаркаю,  
 как захочу вернуть  
 всё то, дрожащее, весеннее,  
 что плакало во мне,  
 и—всякой яви совершеннее—  
 —сон о родной стране. (VC 232; *Stixi* 198)

(“Oh, how suddenly I would be drawn to the bright/ foreign country, to take a long trip. . . / How I would shuffle heavily to the window,/ how I would wish to bring back || all those trembling, springtime things/ which wept inside me,/ and more perfect than any reality—/ is a dream about one’s homeland.”)

This poem concludes that an exile’s perfect dream of a distant homeland eclipses the real experiences (“jav’ ”) of visiting such a homeland. Travel-

ing to one's homeland, charged with holy memories and thus akin to a site of pilgrimage, allows the poem's protagonist to realize the superiority of a moveable pilgrimage, the kind he used to undertake in his dreams, over a physical journey. The poem uses the noun "jav" ("wide-awake reality"), which would later figure in the poem "Being in Love" as Nabokov's primary opposition between this world (*jav*) and the otherworld (*potustoronnost'*). This, in turn, links the motif of pilgrimage in "The Pilgrim" and "The Aurelian" with Nabokov's larger project of writing the otherworld. A pilgrim, the space of whose holy land is always with him—etched in his memory—does not need to set out on an actual physical pilgrimage.<sup>17</sup> This is why the story of Pil'gram's pilgrimage to a perfect idealized homeland of his beloved butterflies ends the way it does at the narrative's culmination, with Pil'gram's closed-ended death and open journey across the reader's memory.

Nabokov's short fiction makes a leap between the loose texture of "Roždestvenskij rasskaz" ("A Christmas Story," 1928) and the astounding power of "The Aurelian" (1930). Such an artistic transformation took a great deal of searching. Prior to "The Aurelian," Nabokov had not written any short stories for one and a half years. The hiatus, separating the Early and Middle Periods, gave Nabokov time to capitalize on the achievements of such stories as "Christmas" and "The Return of Chorb" and leave behind the emblematic shortcomings of "Kartofel'nyj Elf" ("The Potato Elf," 1924) or "Skazka" ("A Nursery Tale," 1926). Although the story took just ten days to write, the surviving manuscripts tell an extraordinary story.

A comparison of Nabokov's edited first draft with the clean fair copy yields the first level of changes. Below, I would like to concentrate on those of Nabokov's artistic decisions that alter Pil'gram's characterization and the story's narrative structure. I have already spoken of Nabokov's decision to change his protagonist's name from Karl Gruber to Alfred Sommer to Pil'gram. Several changes—both large- and small-scale—emphasize Pil'gram's fixation upon his dream and enhance the motif of pilgrimage.

In the first draft, Pil'gram and his wife are said to have tried to have children. Eleanor first had a stillborn baby, then a miscarriage, then another serious medical problem. Only then is Pil'gram reported to have "left her alone" ("ostavil ee v pokoe") after which for a while he betrayed his wife with an old seamstress. Such a cluster of prosaic details—had it indeed remained in the final Russian version—would take the reader's attention away from Pil'gram's otherwise monomaniacal nature. To use a different example, the first draft allows an insight into the shaping of the seminal formulation about Pil'gram's butterfly store as the only link between his "dreary" mundane existence and the otherworldly "phantom of perfect

happiness" (Stories 248/ND 80). Originally, Nabokov described the space of Pil'gram's longed-for pilgrimage as "živ[oj] èntomologičeski[j] ra[j]" (literally: "live entomological paradise"). As Nabokov's otherworld was becoming more and more *sui generis*, he experienced a growing need to write it without relying on readily-available formulas. A reference to an "entomological paradise" would have simplified and literalized Nabokov's metaphorical private codes. Hence Nabokov's decision to leave out a reference to paradise, a traditional religious concept.

One more important editorial decision is related to the entomological sign system in the story. The first draft contained an epigraph from the second stanza of Afanasii Fet's often-anthologized poem "Бабочка" ("The Butterfly," 1884): "Не спрашивай: откуда появилась?/ Куда спешу?" ("Don't ask: whence I come?/ Where I hurry?").<sup>18</sup> Apparently, Nabokov originally intended to keep the epigraph in the fair copy but then changed his mind—after writing out the first verse—and marked it out diligently. Nabokov knew Fet's heritage intimately and would later translate three poems by Fet into English.<sup>19</sup> Although Nabokov omitted the epigraph from Fet in his final version, he did leave a covert trace of the poem. While not disrupting the unity of the text, the following Russian sentence uses Fet's motif of a breathing butterfly as a subtext. The sentence is omitted in the English text:

[. . .] Пильграм ясно почувствовал, что он никогда никуда не уедет, подумал, что ему скоро пятьдесят, что он должен всем соседям, что нечем платить налог,—и ему показалось дикой выдумкой, невозможным бредом, что сейчас, вот в этот миг, садится южная бабочка на базальтовый осколок и дышит крыльями. (S 199)

("Pil'gram felt it clearly that he would never go anywhere; he thought that he was going to be fifty soon, that he owes all the neighbors, that there is no money to pay taxes,—and it seemed a wild fantasy, an impossible delirium that right now, at that very moment, a southern butterfly descends onto a basalt rock and breathes with her wings").<sup>20</sup>

Two important changes signal the growing perfection of Nabokov's poetics. In the first draft, one finds a passage—omitted in the fair copy—which describes the logical steps Pil'gram undertakes in preparation for his departure. He purchases a convenient suitcase (in the final version he ends up using his father's old one). He goes to the local precinct to "sign out." He goes to the consulates of the countries he hopes to visit (France, Spain, etc.). Although such preparations may indeed be necessary, the focus on the minute details of Pil'gram's preparations make his trip look like one of the tourist excursions that he vehemently resents.

Reading the final Russian version, the reader is never completely sure whether Pil'gram is indeed planning a real trip. The reader wonders whether Pil'gram is capable of separating the reality of his otherworldly dreams and the actuality of a butterfly-collecting expedition. In this connection, the following paragraph, which Nabokov chose to omit in the fair copy, appears especially gratifying and illuminating. In the first draft it is

found on the last page, right after the sentence in which Pil'gram drops a money-pot and bends to pick up the coins:

Никто не видел, как он вышел из дома. Вечерняя, еще солнечная улица была полна народа—соседи запирали лавки, шорник напротив играл со своей собакой, две девушки высокими голосами о чем-то оживленно разговаривали. И у всех были прилежные глаза, все знали свою улицу, знали кто когда проходит мимо, готовы были потом обсуждать всякую необыкновенную мелочь,—и всё таки никто ничего не увидел.

(“Now one saw him leave the house. The evening street, still sunny, was crowded; the neighbors locked up their shops, the harness-maker across the street played with his dog, two young women discussed something animatedly in their high voices. And everyone had watchful eyes, they all knew their street, knew who passes by where, and were prepared afterward to discuss any conspicuous trifle; but still no one saw anything.”)

In the first draft, Nabokov must have still felt compelled to justify his decision to create a narrative split between the textual opening of Pil'gram's departure and his death that engenders a closed ending. The quoted passage reads like a section of a detective story and prompts the readers to investigate the hidden possibilities of Pil'gram's disappearance. Conversely, the effect of the last “split” paragraph in the printed version is to launch the reader on an endless journey along with the protagonist, to enter a privileged textual zone that I have termed, here and elsewhere, *textual otherworldly opening*.<sup>21</sup> By leaving the explanatory passage out of the final version, Nabokov decided not to “cater” to what he would later label “commonsense”—the enemy of artistic creation (and of reading by the same token). Just as Nabokov ends his seminal lecture “The Art of Literature and Commonsense” with a call to “shoot [commonsense] dead” (LL 380), he concludes “The Aurelian” with Pil'gram's death. The philistine in Pil'gram remains on the floor of his shop with his face “knocked out of shape” not by death, but by a burgher's commonsense, by a commonsensical cause—a money-pot that he drops on the floor. However, the idealist dreamer in Pil'gram defies the constraints of philistine commonsense and sets out on an endless journey across the memory of the reader (provided, of course, that the reader realizes that commonsense could never justify genuine artistic imagination).

Finally, I will mention one change which I find regrettable. In both the first draft and the final Russian version, Eleanor sees Pil'gram's note (“Off to Spain”; Stories 254/ND 87) and bursts into tears. In the first draft, the narrator offers the following remark: “Мысль, что муж действительно уехал [и уехал в такую неведомую страну, которую можно увидеть только в кинематографе, долго] не умещалась у нее в мозг” (“The thought that her husband has really left [and has left for some incomprehensible country which one can only see in the movies] could not fit in her brain (the brackets indicate the omitted phrase; S 206–7). Nabokov's decision to omit the above clause is understandable: he was trying to avoid clichés and easily accessible metaphors, like the one comparing Spain to a

movie. For Eleanor, Spain is at best an exotic country of bull fights and castanets which she knows from newsreels, and not the home of remarkable lepidoptera. Still, ironically, Eleanor's cinematic perception of where her husband went (she had just learned it from his note and still does not know he is dead) would only enhance the story's dramatization of the prohibitive gap between Pil'gram and his wife. As the émigré critic A. Savel'ev aptly remarked in his review of issue 43 of *Contemporary Annals*, Pil'gram's wife also dreams ("tože mečtaet"), but her dreams are quite innocuous and do not threaten to destroy their philistine routine.<sup>22</sup>

The revision that Nabokov undertook while translating the story are among the most radical, comparable only to the transformation of the Russian novel, *Kamera Obskura* (1931), into the Anglo-American novel, *Laughter in the Dark* (1938). I have already identified several passages that Nabokov chose to exclude from the translation as well as his additions to the English text. Jane Grayson, in a ground-breaking study of Nabokov's poetics of self-translation, noticed several structural changes Nabokov made in the English version. In addition to the fact that the story was now divided into four parts marked with Roman numerals, Grayson also mentions that Nabokov tightened the plot and added dates to provide a temporal framework.<sup>23</sup> The American version of "The Aurelian" reads quite differently from its Russian counterpart, almost like a new story. Nabokov translated it in 1941 together with Peter Pertzoff; it was the second translation of a short story that Nabokov supervised to be published in the United States.<sup>24</sup> I would venture to propose that Nabokov was Englishing his Russian story with the American reader, if not with a specific magazine audience (*Atlantic Monthly*), in mind. This might explain Nabokov's insistence on contextualizing, historicizing, and overexplaining the details of the story's pre-World War Two European milieu.

A number of examples of the ways Nabokov Americanized certain European cultural concepts may be found in the text. The "skinny" and unappealing owner of Pil'gram's neighborhood pub becomes a good American "bartender, a dashing fellow in a . . . green sweater" (Stories 244/ND 75); while the German pub owner has a knack for pouring cheap cognac into the snifters, his American coeval "was deft at shaving off with one stroke the foam topping the glass under the beer tap" (Stories 244/ND 75). The pub owner's ample daughter ("krupnaja devica") metamorphoses into the bartender's "pretty girl" who now wears a "polka-dotted frock" (Stories 245/ND 76) rather than a plaid wool dress. Pil'gram's dingy apartment is now equipped with a palm tree "that looked as bleak as if it were growing on Heligoland" (Stories 245/ND 76). Several additions specify the time and the amounts of money involved in the story. The American reader is told that Pil'gram and Eleanor were married in 1905, which—along with the

time they have been married—yields the exact year when the story takes place: 1930. The day on which Sommer walks into Pil'gram's shop to change his fortune is specified to be "a certain first of April, of all dates" (Stories 251/ND 83). The pupae Pil'gram sells are assigned a price, one mark, instead of the Russian "nedorogo" ("inexpensively"). A female species of a rare butterfly which Pil'gram discusses with a colleague is said to have cost 14 pounds at an auction. The sum of money that Pil'gram hopes to get from Sommer has been lowered from "two-three thousand" to 950 marks. Certain other details must have been deemed insignificant for the American audience and dropped or revamped. Pil'gram's 8:29 train is no longer referred to as the Cologne train. The English version excludes the important reference to the ancient Greek sanctuary of Erechtheum but adds another one roughly in the same part of the text. The symbolic weight of a holy site is now assigned to Tatsienlu, East Tibet; Tatsienlu, better known as Kangting, is located in the Tibetan Autonomous District, a center of Buddhism. Nabokov adds a long sentence explaining the meaning of the term "aurelian" and its relationship to Pil'gram's occupation. Other examples may be found in the text.

The above additions tune the story up to the wavelength of the American reader circa 1940s. They do not affect the meaning of Pil'gram's otherworldly dream. Conversely, the second group of changes does address the story's central cluster of motifs. On the whole, the English version deemphasizes the focus of the Russian text upon the absolute happiness which Pil'gram hopes to achieve during his expedition.

The English version also leaves out the childhood flashback Pil'gram experiences when he picks up a caterpillar from a tree. Nabokov's change alters the history of Pil'gram's otherworldly dream, which in the Russian text is grounded in the protagonist's earliest perfect memories; the Russian story depicts Pil'gram's first caterpillar as a boy's first love. The very word "sčast'e" ("happiness") occurs nine times in the Russian text, and only twice in the translation. While Nabokov might have been trying to avoid redundancy, the Russian text's insistence upon using the same term over and over again supports the idea of Pil'gram's fixation upon his dream. The English text depolarizes the original's crucial opposition between the world of Pil'gram's everyday existence and the perfect otherworld mapped in his memory. In the end, the American story with its "dashing" bartender and Pil'gram's savior, the rich amateur Sommer ("a sunburned, bespectacled man in an old macintosh and without any hat"; Stories 251/ND 83) appears as less of a tragedy and more of a tale with a mysterious ending than its Russian ancestor.

Nabokov shares with his privileged characters a capacity to partake in otherworldly experiences. "The Aurelian" enjoys a special status, since

both Pil'gram and his creator are entomologists, living in Berlin in the 1930s. One finds numerous connections between Pil'gram's and Nabokov's own lifelong passions for butterflies exhibited through their professional activities as lepidopterists, as well as in Nabokov's discursive statements in *Speak, Memory* and elsewhere.

Characteristic is Nabokov's utilization of his entomological expertise. First, every name of an entomologist implicated in the story corresponds to the name of a real scientist. Dr. Rebel, the Viennese entomologist who names a species after Pil'gram, refers to Hans Rebel (1861–1940). Dr. Staudinger, whom Pil'gram praises for his learning, points to a major German entomologist Otto Staudinger (1830–1900). A reference to a certain Eisner, who is said to have purchased a rare butterfly at an auction, recalls the name of Nabokov's (and Pil'gram's) fellow entomologist, Gustavus August Eisen (1847–1940). Even Farther Dejean, mentioned in the English version as an explorer of Tibet, appears to have been a historical personage, Pierre François Marie August Dejean (1780–1845). Finally, "a Mr. Baron," a discoverer of a Mexican butterfly, probably refers to Oscar Theodor Baron (1847–1926). Even more fascinating are the entomological transformations of the names of the story's characters. Pil'gram's name had originally been Gruber; a Fritz Gruber is listed in the biographical dictionary of entomologists.<sup>25</sup> In the final version, Nabokov opted for the name Sommer; two entomologists with this name lived in the nineteenth century. The name Sommer was later assigned to the rich collector. Finally, the English version adds the name of "a certain rare moth" that Dr. Rebel named after Pil'gram, *Agrotis Pil'grami*. *Agrotis* is in fact a representative genus in the Subfamily *Noctuinae*.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Nabokov the scientist incorporates precise information into the story's geographical and entomological dimensions. Nabokov the poet balances the scientific slant with the story's otherworldly radiance.

Chapter Six of Nabokov's autobiography presents the history of Nabokov's passion for butterflies as going back to his childhood. Like Pil'gram, who loved butterflies literally since he "began to exist" ("Ijubil baboček s tex por, kak suščestvuet"; S 190), Nabokov's existence "from the age of seven . . . was dominated by a single passion" (SM 119). "If my first glance of the morning was for the sun," Nabokov reports, "my first thought was for the butterflies it would engender" (SM 119–20). Both Pil'gram and Nabokov experience recurrent flashbacks to the "original event," the formative moment of their careers in lepidopterology. During his Sunday trips to the outskirts of Berlin, Pil'gram recalls the rapture of finding "a large turquoise-green caterpillar" (Stories 248/ND 79). Nabokov reminisces about locating "a rare visitor, a splendid, pale-yellow creature with black blotches, blue crenels, and a cinnabar eyespot above each chrome-rimmed black tail. As it probed the inclined flower from which it hung . . . , my

desire for it was one of the most intense I have ever experienced" (SM 120). Nabokov's dream butterfly, his first Swallowtail ("maxaon"), also figures in "The Aurelian." The memories of Nabokov's and Pil'gram's growing interest in butterflies are rendered in a markedly romantic language employing such words as love, passion, desire, ecstasy. The fifty-year old Pil'gram sighs as he envisions himself as a child enamored with butterflies; Nabokov, "as a grown man . . . under ether during appendectomy . . . saw [his own self] in a sailor suit mounting a freshly emerged Emperor moth . . ." (SM 121). As a researcher at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, the forty-five year old Nabokov experienced joys of discovery that are comparable to the blissful memories of his "Russian boyhood" (SM 125).

Pil'gram and his creator also share the highly private and individual nature of their passion. Nabokov recalls the "[a]cute desire to be alone, since any companion, no matter how quiet, interfered with the concentrated enjoyment of my mania" (SM 126; cf. Pil'gram's "obsession"). At times, both Pil'gram and Nabokov despair over "how little the ordinary person notices butterflies" (SM 129). A Swiss hiker replies to Nabokov that he saw "none" while descending the same trail as Nabokov. In the first draft of "The Aurelian," Pil'gram experiences an attack of bile when his acquaintance, a doctor, insists that there are no butterflies in Greece, for it is too hot ("sliškom žarko"). At best, people notice the most obvious features of the butterflies, their bright colors. Pil'gram's customers predominantly go for "popular stars among butterflies, some of them set on plaster and framed—intended merely for ornamenting the home" (Stories 247/ND 78). Nabokov's Mademoiselle buys for him ("something better than your cabbage butterflies") a "banal Urania moth mounted on plaster" (SM 128). The fact that for the most part people understand nothing about butterflies' beauty only enhances Pil'gram's—and Nabokov's own—sense of being privileged *vis-à-vis* their perfect and private lepidopterological otherworld.<sup>27</sup>

In places, the "butterfly" chapter of Nabokov's memoir/autobiography, *Speak, Memory* (1960), reads as a post-textual commentary on those details that the genre of "The Aurelian" did not allow the writer to elaborate. In fact, the term "Aurelian" figures directly in the text of the memoir as if pointing back to the short story; Nabokov recalls a particular subspecies that preoccupied him in Russia: "Those were the dung-loving males of what *the old Aurelians* used to call the Poplar Admirable" (added emphasis; SM 133). Given the fact that Nabokov's consciousness to some extent informs that of Pil'gram, one expects to find the same names of the butterfly and moth species in both texts. Moreover, Nabokov provides the names of entomological treatises that he read in his childhood; they give one an idea of where Pil'gram might have obtained his encyclopedic knowledge. Several names of

entomologists, mentioned only in passing in the story, are reintroduced in the memoir. For instance, Nabokov provides the background on the name of Dr. Staudinger, of whom Pil'gram speaks with awe. One also finds a reference to the Grand Duke Nikolaj Mixajlovič's *Mémoires* of Asiatic lepidoptera, which might have informed Pil'gram's maps of the Far East; in the first draft of the story Pil'gram frets over the fact that only rich collectors, like the Grand Duke Nikolaj Mixajlovič, get a chance to travel. And those readers curious about the source of the name Kretschmar, which Nabokov originally intended for his protagonist, learn from the memoir that an entomologist with such a name had described a butterfly, *Plusia excelsa*, which Nabokov rediscovered as a Russian teenager.

Finally, the autobiography quotes a stanza from Fet's "soliloquizing" poem, "The Butterfly," in Nabokov's translation: "Whence have I come and whither am I hasting/ Do not inquire;/ Now on a graceful flower I have settled/ And now respire" (SM 129). What used to flutter over the surface of "The Aurelian," has descended—some fifteen years later—on a page of Nabokov's autobiography. Thus, "The Aurelian" may be considered a "future recollection" ("buduščee vospominanie"), as Nabokov put it both in "Putevoditel' po Berlinu" ("A Guide to Berlin," 1925) and "Tjaželyj dym" ("Torpil Smoke," 1935),—a study for Nabokov's future memoir.

In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov also alludes to several butterfly collecting trips that illumine Pil'gram's plans in the story. "In the summer of 1929," Nabokov reminisces, "every time I walked through a village in the Eastern Pyrénées, and happened to look back, I would see in my wake the villagers frozen in the various attitudes my passage had caught them in, as if I were Sodom and they Lot's wife" (SM 131). In the Russian version of "The Aurelian," one finds a similar description of the locals' reaction ("udivlenie i strax aborigenov," literally: "the aborigines' surprise and fear") to the "strange people who have come from afar" (S 196). Nabokov's 1929 trip to the Eastern Pyrénées near the Spanish border is also important because several of Pil'gram's plans concern an expedition to Southern France and to Spain. His final trip into eternity is also camouflaged as a trip to Spain, during which "he visited Granada, Murcia, and Albarracin" (Stories 254/ND 87).

Two more references to Nabokov's life may elucidate the poetics of "The Aurelian." One has to do with Nabokov's recurrent dream of undertaking a tropical expedition that he never realized, much like his privileged character Pil'gram. Nikolaj Raevskij, a writer who knew Nabokov in the 1920s in Prague and shared his professional interest in lepidoptera, recalled how an excited Nabokov told him about his dream of an expedition to New Guinea, French Equatorial Africa, and the Solomon Islands: "The climate there is wretched everywhere, but I am young, healthy, physically trained, so I would hope to survive and bring back remarkable collections."<sup>28</sup>

Raevskij also recalled warning Nabokov in the 1920s against undertaking a long expedition to exotic lands because “the writer Nabokov could die an untimely death” in a dangerous climate. Raevskij’s memoir contains insightful remarks about the relationship between Pil’gram and his creator. Raevskij suggests that “The Aurelian” tells a story of Nabokov’s own “unrealized entomological dream.” Raevskij speaks of the strength and irresistibility of Pil’gram’s (and Nabokov’s) passion which preserved for life “the pure child’s perception of nature.”<sup>29</sup>

A former émigré who was repatriated to the USSR after World War Two, Raevskij wrote his memoir at the end of 1980s. Although Raevskij apparently corresponded with Nabokov until the latter’s death, Raevskij’s knowledge of Nabokov’s American years was sporadic. Perhaps this lack of information explains Raevskij’s insistence that in “The Aurelian” the central motif of an unrequited and deferred dream underlies Nabokov’s career in entomology. Raevskij apparently did not know that coming to America gave Nabokov a chance to go on the kinds of collecting trips that he had dreamed about as an émigré in Europe—to the American West and Southwest,—during which Nabokov reexperienced the joys of his childhood.<sup>30</sup>

One experience of catching butterflies in the United States, a visit to the Grand Canyon in 1941, during which Nabokov discovered a new species of the *Neonympha* genus, inspired an English poem, “On Discovering a Butterfly.”<sup>31</sup> Written in 1943 and anticipating an equally rewarding trip to Utah, the poem appeared in *The New Yorker* and ended with the following stanza:

Dark pictures, thrones, the stones that pilgrims kiss,  
poems that take a thousand years to die  
but ape the immortality of this  
red label on a little butterfly. (PP 156)<sup>32</sup>

The motif of pilgrimage bridges—yet from another angle—Nabokov’s biography and poetics. Chronologically, “The Aurelian” (1930) follows Nabokov’s Russian poem “The Pilgrim” (1927) and precedes “On Discovering a Butterfly” (1943). Although Nabokov’s artistic aspirations did not remain unchanged over these years, one finds that all three texts share a unique feature. I am speaking of the way the perfect dream—uniting Pil’gram and the lyrical personae of the two poems—awards a taste of timelessness, a window into otherworldly eternity. The three variants of the same human type, the optimistic young pilgrim of the Russian poem, the middle-aged deferred pilgrim of the story, and the clairvoyant ex-pilgrim of the English poem, may not see the meaning of their pilgrimages in the same terms. But they would all agree with what their creator, Vladimir Nabokov, writes at the end of Chapter Six of *Speak, Memory*,

the chapter bringing his life-long experiences of butterfly collecting to a common artistic denominator. In this remarkable passage, the teenage Nabokov pursues a butterfly on a northern bog outside Petersburg (cf. Pil'gram's bogs in Lapland) and . . . sees that miraculously, "in the distance, fleeting cloud shadows dappled the dull green of slopes above timber line, and the gray and white of Longs Peak" (SM 139). Having transcended both the time and the space separating Russia of the 1910s from the Colorado of the 1940s, Nabokov continues:

I confess I do not believe in time, I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip. And the highest enjoyment of *timelessness*—in a landscape selected at random—is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is *ecstasy*, and behind the *ecstasy* is *something else, which is hard to explain*. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes *all that I love*. A sense of oneness with sun and stone. A *thrill* of gratitude to whom it may concern—to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to tender ghosts humoring a lucky human. (SM 139; added emphases)

Chapter Six of the autobiography stands as an monument to Nabokov's lifelong passions, writing and butterflies. As in "The Aurelian," Nabokov places a major textual opening right at the end of his chapter, printed in *The New Yorker* as a separate piece under the title "Butterflies."<sup>33</sup> The textual openings at the end of both pieces, the story and the autobiography, allow the reader access to eternity by alluding to what Nabokov identified as the otherworldly source of his art in the 1942 poem "Fame":

But one day while disrupting the strata of sense  
and descending deep down to my wellspring  
I saw mirrored, besides my own self and the world  
something else, something else, something else. (PP 113)

Exhibiting intimate connections with Nabokov's biographic and literary contexts, "The Aurelian" celebrates the success of a new poetics. Artistically speaking, the most appealing quality of "The Aurelian," its beauty, grace and magnetism, is that it states what Aristotle favored in his *Poetics*, the impossible but plausible "Yes, Pil'gram had gone far, very far" (Stories 254/ND 87). This narrative split between the story's otherworldly textual opening and its commonsensical closure, rendered in such convincing and penetrating language, highlights Nabokov at his best. Possibly Nabokov's most idealistic short story, "The Aurelian" typifies Nabokov's Middle Period, when Germany was still a relatively safe haven for the Russian exile, when there was hope for a Russian writer in Europe, when Nabokov still felt as a happy "pilgrim whose Mecca is where he is."

## NOTES

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1 Boyd, RY 351–52.

2 L'vov, " 'Pil'gram V. Sirina."

3 Struve, *Russkaja literatura v izgnanii* 283. Useful discussions of the story are found in Boyd, *The Russian Years* 351–52; Zimmermann 311–17; Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics* 54; Grayson, *Nabokov Translated* 134; Williams, "Nabokov's Dozen Short Stories" 220–221; Adamovich, "Sovremennye zapiski. Kn. 43–ja"; Savel'ev, " 'Sovremennye zapiski.' Kn. 43–ja"; Field, *VN: The Life and Art* 145; Hüller 119; 125.

4 Adamovič, "Sovremennye zapiski. Kn. 43–aja."

5 All page references to Nabokov's works are given in the text. The following abbreviations have been adopted throughout the main text and the footnotes: 1. editions of Nabokov's works: LATH=*Look at the Harlequins!*; LL=*Lectures on Literature*; ND=*Nabokov's Dozen*; PP=*Poems and Problems*; S=*Sogljadataj*; SM=*Speak, Memory*; SSoč=*Sobranie sočinenij v četyrex tomax*; Stories=*The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*; VC=*Vozvraščenie Čorba*; 2. Nabokov's archives: VN LC=Vladimir Nabokov Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Parenthetical dates refer to dates of publication. Pre-1918 Russian orthography (staryjstil') has been silently updated where necessary. If a source of an English translation is not shown, the translation is mine—MDS.

6 I divide Nabokov's Russian short stories into three periods, the Early (1921–1929), the Middle (1930–1935), and the High (1935–1939), each centering on Nabokov's three Russian collections of short stories, *Vozvraščenie Čorba* (*The Return of Chorb*, 1930), *Sogljadataj* (*The Eye*, 1938), and *Vesna v Fialte* (*Spring in Fialta*, scheduled to appear in 1939 but not published until 1956).

7 In unpublished notes for a course in creative writing, Nabokov insisted that the material of fiction "necessarily includes the the mind of the reader." Nabokov emphasized that "a writer has an idea of a reader, and in this respect the idea of a reader may be said to be one of the characters of the book. But this ideal reader is really the author's double—and has nothing to do with any readers an author imagines in terms of [ . . . ] time, race, local interests, etc." See Vladimir Nabokov, "Lectures," ms, VN LC, Library of Congress, container 8, folder 11.

8 I should mention that although one sometimes gets the feeling that Nabokov invents his details, like the names of the exotic locales, most of the details in the story are actually informed by genuine facts. In the case of the geography of Pil'gram's dream-travels, Nabokov at times creates the illusion of strangeness by using names that are obsolete or less known to the Russian and/or American reader. Thus, for instance, he uses the ancient Sanskrit name of Ceylon, "Taprobane," or the pre-1913 name of Kangting, Tatsienlu. He adopts Heligoland (Helogland in the *Atlantic Monthly* version), the slightly misspelled Old Norse version of Hálógaland, a region in Norway's Nordland country, the homeland of Knut Hamsun.

- 9 Hüller (115) discusses Pilgram's and Ivanov's heartaches as well as the motif of living on the threshold of being and non-being, the motif originally noted by Khodasevich in "O Sirine"; see *Literaturnye stat'i i vospominanija* 125.
- 10 Several sources were consulted in preparation for this discussion; see *Oxford English Dictionary* VII: 858–59; *Slovar' sovremennogo . . . jazyka* 9 (1959); Bahlow 378; Reaney 273–74; Hanks and Hodges 420.
- 11 See Vladimir Nabokov, "Pilgram" ("Palomnik"), ms, ts, and tear copy of the *Sovremennye zapiski* publication with Nabokov's notes towards an English translation, VN LC, container 7, folders dd, ee, ff.
- 12 I am grateful to *SEEF's* editor, Michael M. Naydan, for pointing out the connection between the last name Sommer and summer, the time when butterflies are transformed and live.
- 13 The second word is *baboček*, genitive plural of *babočka*, "butterfly"; the first word appears to be "ljubitel'" ("lover"). The original title might have been "Ljubitel' baboček" ("A Lover of Butterflies").
- 14 In 1925, following the publication of the short story "Baxman" ("Bachman") in *The Rudder*, Nabokov received a peculiar request from Dr. Bernhard Hirschberg, of Frankfurt a/M. Taking Nabokov's short story to be a memoiristic essay, Hirschberg asked for permission to translate it into German to be published in "one of the local newspapers." See "To Vladimir Nabokov." March 8, 1925. Letter in VN LC, container 8, folder 13.
- 15 It is also possible that Nabokov did not want to have two texts under the same title; in 1927 he wrote and published a poem also entitled "Palomnik."
- 16 Harvey 4–5.
- 17 Alexandrov discusses a similar problem of Nabokov's "escape from emigration" with examples from Nabokov's discursive writings, *Speak, Memory, The Defense, The Gift, and Lolita*, in a recent Russian article; see Aleksandrov (Alexandrov), "Spasenie ot èmigracii u Nabokova."
- 18 See Fet, *Polnoe sobranie stixotvorenij* 303.
- 19 The poems by Fet which Nabokov translated are: "Alter Ego" (1878), "Izmučen žizn'ju, kovarstvom nadeždy . . ." ("When life is torture, when hope is a traitor . . .," 1864), and "Lastočki" ("The Swallows," 1884); all three were published in *The Russian Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 1943): 31–33. For a discussion of Fet's "The Butterfly" in Nabokov's oeuvre see Bethea, "Izgnanie kak uxod v konon: obraz babočki u Nabokova i Brodskogo" 175, fn. 6.
- 20 "The Butterfly" also points to Fet's earlier poem, "Ne sprašivaj, nad čem zadumyvajus' ja . . ." ("Don't ask me what occupies my thoughts . . .," 1854) which might have informed the image of Pilgram the dreamer. In Fet's poem, the lyrical voice confesses that 'his soul is filled with an insane dream' ("Mečtoi bezumnoju polna duša moja"); see Fet 262.
- 21 See Shroyer.
- 22 A. Savel'ev, "Sovremennye zapiski. Kn. 43–ja."
- 23 Grayson, *Nabokov Translated* 34. Only a few minor changes were made in the *Contemporary Annals* version, the latter being virtually identical with the text that appeared in Nabokov's second collection, *The Eye*. Since neither the authorized typescript nor the galley proofs have survived, one has to rely on the existing manuscript of Nabokov's fair copy as the final version of the story. The editors of *Contemporary Annals*, and/or Nabokov himself did make a few insignificant changes on the atomistic level. For instance, the adjective "Siberian" ("sibirskij") in reference to lepidoptera was replaced with "foreign" ("insotrannyj") in the description of Pilgram's previous attempts at undertaking a collecting trip; the reference to Siberia might have confused the Russian reader.
- 24 Virtually nothing has been written about the translator of three of Nabokov's best short

stories, "Cloud, Castle, Lake," "The Aurelian," and "Spring in Fialta." At the same time, Nabokov's relationship with Pertzoff goes back as far as 1933 when Michael Karpovich recommended Pertzoff to Nabokov as a skillful translator. Originally, the matter concerned translating Nabokov's novels to be published in the U.S. Then, in 1938 Nabokov and Pertzoff discussed the possibility of translating the entire collection of short stories, *The Eye*. Later, in 1940, Pertzoff tried to help Nabokov with finding a job; there was a possibility of a job at a university library. In 1941 Nabokov suggested that Pertzoff take on a translation of *The Gift*, but the project was never consummated. The first short story which Pertzoff and Nabokov translated and placed in an American magazine was "Cloud, Castle, Lake," printed in *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1941. It was followed by "The Aurelian" which appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* in November 1941. As one can see from the surviving manuscripts and the correspondence, the co-translators followed the same procedure. First, Pertzoff would prepare a more or less literal translation of the Russian original. Then, Nabokov would go over it and edit it very thoroughly, rewriting up to 60% of Pertzoff's English. Nabokov called the process *drakonii'* (≈ "to dragonize"). Despite the number of emendations, Nabokov was very pleased with Pertzoff's work and hoped to continue their collaboration which was beginning to turn into friendship after Nabokov had visited Pertzoff in Ithaca in 1944. In August 1941, Nabokov suggested that Pertzoff start working on "Spring in Fialta." The translation underwent several revisions by Nabokov and was finished by March 1943. *Atlantic Monthly* rejected the story claiming that it was too long for them, and in 1947 the story was printed in *Harper's Bazaar*, predominantly a high-fashion magazine. No correspondence with Pertzoff past 1944 has survived among Nabokov's papers. Nabokov's eleven letters to Peter Pertzoff are deposited in VN LC, container 8, folder 21.

- 25 I have consulted Pamela Gilbert's *A Compendium of the Biographical Literature on Deceased Entomologists*.
- 26 See Covell 181–82.
- 27 For a discussion of the links between insect mimicry and Nabokov's otherworld, see Alexandrov, "Nabokov's Metaphysics of Artifice."
- 28 Raevskij 115.
- 29 See Raevskij 112–117. Also see Boyd's quote from Nabokov's letter to Véra Nabokova about being "drawn to Africa and Asia," Boyd, *The Russian Years* 210.
- 30 On Nabokov's trips, see Boyd, *The American Years* 467–8; 644–6.
- 31 See Boyd, *The American Years* 28–29; 53.
- 32 Nabokov, "On Discovering a Butterfly."
- 33 Nabokov, "Butterflies."

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