

UDC 821.161.1.09.3"19"Bitov A.+821.161.1.09-3"19"Nabokov V.

[Research Paper Citations](#)

ANDREJ BITOV AND VLADIMIR NABOKOV: *PUŠKIN HOUSE*, THE PLACE OF A (FALSE) MEETING

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Abstract

*The paper considers Nabokov's reminiscences in one of the most important works of Russian postmodernism – the novel *Puškin House* by Andrej Bitov. Special attention is paid to the Bitov's ambivalent dependence / independence from Nabokov.*

Keywords: *Vladimir Nabokov, Andrej Bitov, self-commentary, intertextuality, reminiscence, composition*

Rezumat

Articolul ia în considerare reminiscențele lui Nabokov într-una dintre cele mai importante lucrări ale postmodernismului rus: romanul „Casa Pușkin » de Andrei Bitov. O atenție deosebită este acordată ambivalenței lui Bitov, adică dependenței și, totodată, independenței lui față de Nabokov.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Vladimir Nabokov, Andrei Bitov, auto-comentariu, intertextualitate, reminiscență, compoziție*

Introduction

The specificity of the most famous novel by Andrej Bitov (1937-2018) – *Puškin House* (1971), first published in 1978 – reminds literary critics of Vladimir Nabokov.

John Updike supposes: “The novel is associated with *The Gift* because you can see the moral and aesthetic development of a sensitive young man through the allusions which connect the narration to the past Russian literature. ...As in one of the multilayer texts of Nabokov, the character of Bitov’s novel starts seeing he lives in the imaginary, fiction world” (Updike, 1989, p. 4). Mariâ A. Černâk writes about the common attitude of Nabokov and Bitov to Alexander Pușkin (Chernjak, 1999, pp. 365-372).

Rolf Hellebast supposes Bitov used “the Nabokov’s exposure of the artificial narration” (Lipoveckij, 1997, p. 122). This idea is supported by Irina Sko-ropanova: “The impact of *The Gift* and *Invitation to a Beheading* by Nabokov which Bitov read when the *Puškin House* was three fourth ready was obvious in “making the finale” following the traditions of ludic literature, built on

the exposure of a strategy, giving the “way out of the novel” into the psychology of creation” (Skoropanova, 2001, p. 129).

Mark Lipoveckij asks a question: “What are the links of the Bitov’s novel to the Russian metaprose experience – from Rozanov to Nabokov? What is the difference between them?” (Lipoveckij, 1997, p. 152). The answer is the following: “In the metaprosaic works by Vaginov, Mandelštam, Šklovskij, Kržižanovskij, Harms... *the author’s death* was the metaphor of creation, *absorbed* the death and came over it with the text, congruent and independent from the total chaos. In Nabokov’s works this logic is expressed in more abstract way, but it is more explicit there – as a theme, as a metaplot. While his character-creator is less and less free from one novel to another, the text made by Godunov-Čerdyncev, Sebastian Knight, Adam Krug or Humbert Humbert, which got farther and farther from its creator, remains the only alive and truthful substance in contrast with vulgarity and death. Moreover, a dangerous, but inevitable condition of this paradoxical turn, starting from *The Gift*, is the dialogical openness of the character’s creative works to the strange and hostile world of chaos around him.

Bitov substitutes death for the life simulation, and it drastically changes the tone of his metaprose: instead of a tragedy there are (self)-irony, bitter grin, sarcastic analyticity. ...It is hard to avoid the following hypothesis: if the metaprose of the 1920-30s formed the *culture dead line* by its own poetics body, then Bitov in the semantics and poetics of *Puškin House* had fixed the “culture afterlife existence” (Lipoveckij, 1997, pp. 153-154).

It is interesting that for Bitov, this “afterlife existence” is the state of Nabokov-creator. Bitov says about Nabokov’s life beyond Russia: “For Nabokov it is the afterlife existence. In the afterlife existence, it is impossible to exist, it is possible only to be, and to be invisible, but all see you. The transfer from life to death in Nabokov’s works is the transfer from the feeling, blind and poor with details, to the vision which is crammed and oversaturated with details” (Bitov, 1990b, p. 8); see also translated into English (Bitov, 1998). The afterlife existence of the Nabokov’s character is not simulated, but, vice versa, it is “the perfect touch of life” (the story *Perfection*). The death in Nabokov’s world, as Bitov summarizes, can be “the happiness” (*ibidem*) or “the text” (Bitov, 1997). But it does not come in the contrary to the hypothesis of Mark Lipoveckij, because he spoke not about the personal after-death existence, but about the cultural one. The Soviet culture as the after-death existence of Russian culture is a notion of the Nabokov’s (sub)texts presented there in a contracted way.

The suggestions in the research field “Bitov and Nabokov” are generally the researchers’ thoughts on the Bitov’s self-commentary: they do or do not admit “the ambivalent dependence/independence from Nabokov” (Lipoveckij, 1995, p. 231). This way is chosen by Tat’âna L. Rybal’čenko, too: “The

interchange of the two novels, divided by the crucial 30 years (*The Gift* – 1937, *Puškin House* – 1971), was remarked and commented by the author of *Puškin House* in his “Commentary” which was part of the novel. Bitov, seeing his similarity to Nabokov, speaks about its objective characteristics excluding reminiscences” (Rybal’čenko, 2000, p. 64). The comparison of the two books is held by the researcher because “Bitov and Nabokov emphasized the metaplot in their novels that means not only “the plot of the reality”, but “the plot-reflection” on the creation of the text about the reality and on the literature as it is. Bitov called *Puškin House* the novel-reminiscence, the novel-museum, the museum of Russian literature. Nabokov wrote about his last “Russian novel”: “The main heroine of it is not Zina, but it is Russian literature” (Rybal’čenko, 2000, pp. 64-65). Tat’ana L. Rybal’čenko emphasizes the differences in the views of Bitov and Nabokov.

Theoretical Framework and Methods

Andrej Bitov's novel *Puškin's House* has a reputation of one of the fundamental texts of Russian postmodernism. A generally recognized feature of the poetics of postmodernism is its intense intertextuality, therefore, intertextual analysis was used as the main method in the study. The experience of well-known theorists and practitioners of intertextuality was taken into account (Barthes 1972; Bloom, 1997; Eco, 1989; Gasparov, 1993; Žolkovskij, 1993, 1994; Riffaterre, 1992; Smirnov, 2000, 2001; Šeglov, 1995; Tammi, 1995; Toker, 1989; Vries, 2016; Yampoľskij, 1993; etc.). During the intertextual analysis of the *Puškin House*, a number of factors were taken into consideration: the presence/absence of verbatim quotations; coincidences at the level of structures of large fragments or structures of entire works; functional and teleological convergence of text elements (see also: (Alexander, 2002)); comparison of the actual meaning of works; the (im)probability of typological coincidences in the literary practices of two authors, when referring, for example, to one and the same “descriptive system” (M. Riffaterre), etc. In general, our understanding of intertextuality differs from the original meaning of this term – the meaning formed in the works of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. Speaking about intertextuality, we follow Ūrij K. Šeglov and do not deny the idea of the author's intentions, but at the same time we are not inclined to fully trust the author’s statements.

Discussion

Andrej Bitov (the ex-President of the Nabokov’s Fund in Russia) spoke a lot about Nabokov (Bitov 1992; 1996; 1998). In Bitov’s essay, Nabokov is put to be sacred. It is the deliberate attitude of one writer to another, but just to some degree. At the beginning of the essay “The Clarity of Immortality-2” Bitov says that Nabokov *prescribed* Hodasevič to be “the first poet of the 20th century” (Bitov, 1996, p. 135). At the end of the essay the word *prescription* gets its central position, capitalized, and becomes obviously providential:

“The mystery which closes inlet and outlet for us, birth and death, is the gift, the energy of delusion (for the definition given by L. Tolstoj), with which we overcome our life to fulfill the Prescription” (Bitov, 1996, p. 139).

Another example of a lexical coincidence (this time, it is clearly not accidental). Bitov tells how he searched in Nabokov’s *Glory* for a page with an “open confession of Faith”: “Wishing to quote this passage right away, I immediately did not find it. As if it fell through the page... as if he did not write it, but *whispered* it” (Bitov, 1996, p. 136) (emphasis added. – V. D., V. K.). After a few paragraphs, he says: “if we look at the Gospel as a genre, then the plot retold by four eyewitnesses under one cover will surpass any avant-garde delights, but how and by whom it was dictated or whispered is another matter” (Bitov, 1996, p. 138).

Bitov has built the triad of the immortal in his essay: the God, Pushkin, and Nabokov. In Bitov’s attitude for all the three immortal there is an element of apophatic and the taboo for the direct contact. Bitov quotes at last the fragment found of *Glory*: “She (Sofia Dmitrievna, Martin’s mother. – A. B.) firmly believed in a certain power that bore the same resemblance to God as a house of a man one has never seen, his belongings, his greenhouse and beehives, his distant voice heard by a chance in an open field, bear to their owner” (Bitov, 1996, p. 137). At the previous page Bitov confessed: “I have got such a subconscious talisman: never been in the flat in the Mojka, never been in Mihajlovskoe, so, never been to Roždestveno, too...” (Bitov, 1996, p. 136). After the Nabokovs’ estate had been burnt in Roždestveno, Bitov happened to get there and found a half-burnt book by Pushkin.

The Bitov’s meetings to Nabokov (and Puškin) are virtual as the meetings of Nabokov’s characters to the God. The first Bitov’s essay about Nabokov had a subtitle “The memories of an unacquainted”. To the most famous Nabokov’s leitmotifs (a butterfly, a nymph) Bitov adds one more motif – a false meeting: “As all the emperors, he took something to himself: a butterfly, a nymph, a false meeting, an occasion, a coincidence, a lateness, a mistake... The poet of the false meeting, he wove from all of it the net, through the veil of which we see the world somehow more clearly, but not more blurred” (Bitov, 1997, p. 13).

The false meeting was shown in many Nabokov’s works from the early ones: in the story *A Matter of Chance* (1924; included into the *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories* (1975)), in the novel *Mary* (1926), in the stories *Blagost’*, *A Letter That Never Reached Russia*, *A Nursery Tale* (included into *The Return of Chorb*). In Nabokov’s stories the physical meeting of relatives turns into the spiritual false meeting (stories *The Reunion*, *The Doorbell*), and vice versa, as in the cases of the Potato Elf and his son (Desjatov, 2006, pp. 217-220), of Fedor Godunov-Cherdyntsev and his father. The Fedor’s meeting to his father appeared to be a dream, but it did not lose its highest meaning, in

such a case. Bitov said he had a dream about Nabokov: “Once I have seen him in a dream when he was still alive. I could vouch for the truth in the dream: there were two details I had not known yet at that time which were proved later (after his death). ...He was higher than me (physically) and came to Leningrad incognito as an entomologist” (Bitov, 1996, p. 138). The word *truth* means there that Bitov met *real* Nabokov in his dream. But real Nabokov has never been to Leningrad, although he had described his visit to his native land in his numerous works. The reality of the dream and the fiction is more undoubted than the physical reality for Nabokov and Bitov, both. Fedor Godunov-Čerdyncev could not have the real talk to Končeev in his physical reality (but it happened successfully in the imaginary world). Nabokov did not have a talk to Bunin (*Speak, Memory*). The Knight brothers did not meet physically at the end of the novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (but they had a spiritual coincidence, see also: (Vries, 2016)). The examples with Končeev, Bunin, the Knight brothers are given in the Bitov’s essays (Bitov, 1996, p. 134), (Bitov, 1990b, pp. 12-14). The idea of a false meeting is quite close to Bitov as a writer. It is very important in *Puškin House*, as we will see later.

Bitov regularly says his favorite Nabokov’s novel is *Glory* (see also: (Tammi, 1995)), but the novel does not have the stable literary reputation. Nabokov called it in different ways sometimes: “a spew” (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 715), “the height of clearness and sadness” (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 716). Russian and foreign reviewers were critical about the *Glory*: “In the critical reviews of the 1930s, the *Glory* was met with a rather skeptic reception” (Dolinin & Utgof, 2000, p. 714). What does Bitov feel for the novel, though? We think Bitov found out some ideas in this novel which were close to his views.

We should cite quite a large extract from the Bitov’s self-commentary (1971-1978) to *Puškin House*: “I will take a chance to say some words on the tricky question of literary influence, on which you should never say any word yourself not being suspected exactly in the influence you deny. ...*The Process* by Kafka is stronger than *Invitation to a Beheading*, but it would have been a pity if Nabokov had read Kafka “in time” and had not started writing *Invitation*... I do not want to deny Nabokov’s influence. But, taking into consideration all that I said before and after it, I should do it: I have heard his name for the first time in, maybe, 1960, and read him in December, 1970. How I could manage not to read him during these ten years I do not know, it is fate. It could be bad or good, but if I had read Nabokov earlier, there would not have been any *Puškin House*, and I cannot imagine what could have been at its place. To the moment I have opened *The Gift*, I had had my novel three fourth ready, and all the rest of it – in scraps and drafts. I read one after another *The Gift* and *Invitation to a Beheading* – and shut up, and it was half a year passed before I revived not from the impression – from the

strike, and started to finish up the end. ...Nabokov wrote on June, 25, 1959 on the same occasion in the preface of the *Invitation to a Beheading* translated into English (1934) recalling the release of that book in Russian: "Emigrant critics, who were puzzled by this thing although they liked it, thought they found out the "Kafkian" line in it, but they did not know I spoke no German, was absolutely ignorant of modern German literature, and did not read any French or English translations of Kafka. No doubt, there are definite stylistic links of this book and, to say, my early stories (or the late ones...): but there are no links connected it to *The Castle* or *The Process*. In my concept of literary criticism, there is no place to the category of "spiritual connection", but if I should find a kindred soul, I would choose this great artist but not G. Orwell or any other provider of illustrated ideas and publicistic belles-lettres. By the way, I could never see why any book of mine, with no difference, made critics to run fussily for more or less famous names to the wild comparisons. In the last thirty years they hung up to me..."

And then goes the list of two dozens of contradictory names, comprising five centuries and five literatures, which includes Charlie Chaplin and the Nabokov's character, a writer by profession... Imitating him (now being sound in mind), I send a reader to the commentary at page 116 (85, 33)" (Bitov, 1990a, pp. 405-06).

The logic of Bitov is clear: *Puškin House* could be a bit inferior to *The Gift*, but *The Process* is also more powerful than *Invitation to a Beheading*. The intended echoing of Nabokov appears when the self-commentator refers to the notes at pages 116, 85, 33. The note to page 116 says:

"...In this quiet moonlit night de Saint-Avis killed Morange..."

Cf. "...In this dark lonely street the driver let Lyova have it..."

The structure and music of the phrase is the same. The only writer influenced the author was Pierre Benois (1886-1962). The author denies all the other influences. He is very sensitive and stupidly honest at this point: he confesses in everything he can. More details are in the commentaries at pages 180, 343" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 383).

Speaking about Nabokov's influence in an unvoiced way, Bitov copies the Nabokov's gesture denying all the influences. But Bitov is more ironical and sly (*The structure and music of the phrase is the same*). Definitely denied all the allusions, he gives us at the same time the comments to pages 180, 343. There is no need to search for them, because there are no comments to those pages in Bitov's text. Telling the truth, the allusion leads us to Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* (1962). It consists of the poem, the comments to it, and the index. There are cross-references in the index, appealing to each other. The reader, for example, could go such a way: *The Treasures of the Crown - Closet - Potaynik - Hiding - The Treasures of the Crown*.

Similar are the principles of Bitov's and Nabokov's commenting. Kinbot (the same for Botkin) starts commenting on the poem of Shade, but he comments mostly the realities of the faraway Northern country of Zembla, somehow referring to Soviet Russia. Bitov comments on "the commonly known things" explaining the realities of the 1950-60s Soviet life. There are the drafts for the Shade's poem in the comments of Kinbot. The novel of Bitov has "Version and Variant" of each part as a must-be. *Pale Fire* is a kind of self-parody in Nabokov's works, reflecting his experience in commenting *Eugène Onegin* by Puškin, and so, the analogy to self-comments of Bitov on his *Puškin House* would be even more obvious).

Puškin House has the circular plot, taken from *The Gift*. The "Nabokov's" fragment finishes the Bitov's commentary. The last words in it are the emphasized words "What is to do?", which turn the reader to "The Prologue, Or the Chapter, Written After All the Others" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 5). The title of the prologue is "What is to do"?

The life story of Nikolaj Černyševsky is encircled in *The Gift*. It starts from the second part of the sonnet and ends with its first part. The story *The Circle* is joined with *The Gift*, as the author noticed, and the story has the same design. The first sentence of the story starts from "Secondly, ...", the last one - from "Firstly, ...". The strategy was copied by Bitov in the preface to the selected collection of Nabokov's works *The Circle* (1990) which starts from the phrase "Secondly, it was he who forgot nothing..." (Bitov, 1990a, p. 3).

The characters of *The Circle* and "The Life of Černyševskij" are commoners who cannot break the vicious circle. The character of *Puškin House*, Ljova Odoevcev, is a declassed aristocrat. In the second part of the novel Bitov says: "It is impossible here to avoid the story about the ring. As a symbol at least it is very important. Because all the Ljova's plot is easily encircled making a cable tier or a sleeping snake" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 140).

The *Puškin House* prologue is "rhymed" to the final part of the comment, and to the epilogue "The Shot" with its refrains. The plot circles made by Bitov are overlapped, and it made the difference from the only one (in one novel) Nabokov's circle plot.

The second passage of "The Prologue" is made using the pattern of *The Gift* beginning which can be recognized as a typical beginning of a Russian novel. *Puškin House*: "And really, the morning of November, 8 196- matched up to such presentiments" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 5). *The Gift*: "In a cloudy, but bright day some minutes to 5 p.m. on April, 1 192- (a foreign critic said once that although many novels, all the German ones, e.g., start at the date, only Russian writers - due to the specific honesty of our literature - omit the last date numbers..." (Nabokov, 2000b, p. 191). Both authors start their novels at the very important dates. Nabokov starts at April 1, the "bright day" of laugh and jokes. The beginning matches the whole atmosphere of the novel

- lively, spring-like, optimistic. The first passage of *Puškin House* dates the events on November 7, the October Socialist Revolution anniversary, and then the "Autumn", "cloudy" mood predominates in the novel. The victory in the duel (held on the October Socialist Revolution anniversary) taken by the "plebeian" Mitishaťev at the aristocrat Lyova is the mockery of the 1917th situation. "Cloudless" weather on November, 7 "was practically made with the special planes" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 5) and forecast nothing good: "it would be paid for soon" (*ibidem*). On November, 8 a wind "falls down" the city. It blows "following the way of the yesterday's demonstration", flies "into the revolutionary gateway" (Bitov, 1990, p. 6). Then Bitov quotes Majakovskij: "...The wind flies on like a thief, and its cloak waved" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 7). The extract of the poem *About It* by Majakovskij:

"The boy was searched by a thief-wind. / The wind has got the boy's note. / The wind started to call to the Petrov's Park: / Farewell... / I am finishing... / Do not blame it on me... The next extract of the poem is titled "There Is Nothing to Do", and it says the boy who tried to commit suicide was alive: He was so / Like me! / Terrible. / But that was it! / Made a jerk to the puddle. / Started to take off his wet jacket" (Majakovskij, 1982, p. 171).

The quote from Majakovskij's poem (and the epigraph from the novel *What Is to Do?* by Černyševskij) would prompt to a thoughtful reader that Lyova, who had appeared to be "dead" in the Prologue of the Bitov's novel, would "resurrect".

In *The Gift*, as Al. Dolinin suggested (Dolinin, 2000, p. 662), the same line from Majakovskij is cited: "At the moment the wind searched him roughly..." (Nabokov, 2000b, p. 267). Nabokov associates the wind with the revolutionary element. In *Despair* the "Soviet wind" was mentioned (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 424). In *Glory*, it is said that the Zoorlanders recognized the wind "as a positive force", because it, "by championing equality in not tolerating towers and tall trees, <...> only subserved the public aspirations of atmospheric strata that kept diligent watch over the uniformity of temperature" (Nabokov, 1991, p. 148). The revolutionary November wind of Bitov has the predecessor - the blizzard of Puškin's poem *The Demons*. Two lines of it are the epigraph to the chapter "Demons Invisible to the Eye": Swam around the demons diverse / Like the leaves in November (Bitov, 1990a, p. 271).

Ljova Odoevcev takes the position between the opposite characters of *The Gift* - F. K. Godunov-Čerdyncev and N. G. Černyševskij. On the one side, Ljova, as Fedor, is a connoisseur of Russian literature, especially of Puškin. In both novels we see the works of Ljova and Fedor. Fyodor uncrowns Černyševskij, Ljova tries to uncrown Tûtčev. But Bitov suggests Lyova's try as an unjustified one.

On the other side, Lyova belongs to the culture which Černyševskij had implanted. Both of them are unlucky in their private lives, they fell in love

with flirt women. The friends of Černyševskij and Ljova became their love rivals. The main character fights with his friend in the same way in both novels. *The Gift*: Černyševskij and Dobrolúbov “were fighting for a long time, both weak, skinny, sweaty, – slapped at the floor, at the furniture, – all that in silence, only sniffing was heard...” (Nabokov, 2000b, p. 437). *Puškin House*: “They were fighting long, they were doing it thoroughly and carefully – ugly and awkwardly from the outside. It was careful, a bit boring, unusual and regular work” (Bitov, 1990a, p. 308).

“The pre-mortem” feelings of Lyova resemble the feelings of Cincinnatus C., the main character of Nabokov’s *Invitation to a Beheading*. Leningrad seems to be the dream scenery to Lyova: “We liked to light our scenery as well as in the theater... he, really, understood he dreamed about all it: these leftover soaps of faces (blurred background of the dummies in a dream); these splits in the scenery (it was blowing from them); this card-board, intentionally pulled up on its haunches horse (close to it, when being at the stage, – it is obvious to be drawn!); those wrinkles, bubbling shadow on the backdrop of the Admiralty; all this general negligence, even hackwork of a dream...” (Bitov, 1990a, pp. 289-90, see also p. 340).

Commenting on this “dreaming” fragment (in which the tune of *The Danube Waves* sounds), Bitov puts together marches and waltzes: “The snobism of melomanes came to that: the disk of old waltzes and marches was recorded to be heard in the most inappropriate interiors. Played by the combined orchestra, headed by Major General, and with the colonel as a Principal Musician. With the marches on the one side and the waltzes on the other” (Bitov, 1990a, pp. 394-95).

The title *Invitation to a Beheading* is made on the model of *Invitation to a Waltz* (the composition by Karl Weber). On the second page of the book the warden Rodion invites the prisoner (in the prisoner’s delirium) to the waltz tour (Nabokov, 2000b, p. 48). In the fifth chapter the wardens march: “the vague shapes ran around without a sound, called each other without a sound, built in lines, and, like the buckets, went their many soft legs getting ready to go out” (Nabokov, 2000b, p. 78).

At the moment of Ljova’s “false death” the novel world reality shudders: “The fire-cracker clapped. ...There was the groan, the scrape, the author’s squeak... The space moved aside behind the author’s shoulders. Lost its balance, swung” (Bitov, 1990a, p. 318). In the Cincinnatus’s beheading the scenery of the “reality” crushes: “All quaked. All crushed” (Nabokov, 2000b, p. 187). The following Ljova’s “resurrection” travesties the Cincinnatus’s “waking up”.

In the third part of the Bitov’s novel the cinema motifs become obvious (Bitov, 1990a, p. 284). They remind Nabokov’s cinenovel *Camera Obscura*, where one of the characters spoke to the film actress *Dorianna Karenina* (compare the phonetics of Bitov’s word-play game with the actress’s name

and the literary character's name, *Doronina - Anna Karenina* (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 340).

Nabokov's Dorianna Karenina has a harsh voice (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 339). Bitov's "Anna Karenina performing Doronina" speaks in a "bass voice" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 284). Bitov did not let the reader have any doubt about the source of reminiscence calling the surname of Nabokov at one and the same episode (and at the same page of the novel):

1) To differ from Viktor Nabutov, my dear, - said Ljova at the moment, - Vladimir Nabokov is a writer (Bitov, 1990a, p. 284).

The absurd, at first sight, necessity to differ Nabokov from the football commentator, when time passes, makes the reader think there is something in common between Nabokov and Nabutov: In *Glory* the author comments the football match in which the main character took part. In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov told us about his experience as a goalkeeper.

Camera Obscura should attract Bitov's attention, because it had been built, as *Puškin House*, on the "Proustian" blind love theme. In *Camera Obscura* there is a large fragment parodying Proust (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 353). The surname of Proust had been called before (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 350). The phrase "love is blind" comes clear in *Camera Obscura* (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 338) and in *Puškin House* (Bitov, 1990a, p. 154). The plot invariant of these two novels is the following: "Blind" Ljova and Krečmar fall in love with vulgar flirt women who cheated on them (in fact or in a dream of a character) with Horn or Mitišat'ev. Horn and Mitišat'ev are being demonized. This demonism differs them from Proust's Forcheville with whom Odette betrays Swan.

In the *Puškin House* Prologue (which is also a part of the epilogue "The Shot") the dynamic author's point of view corresponds to the cinema principles. Bitov reveals the cinema analogy in the "Prologue": "As if it were a movie..." (Bitov, 1990a, p. 6) and in the comments to it where the Eizenshtein's name appears (Bitov, 1990a, p. 366). The circle of the Prologue and the Epilogue describing the body of Ljova "shot" with the gun corresponds, besides *The Gift*, to the narrative circle of *Camera Obscura*. The Nabokov's novel last episode is the description of the corps of Krečmar shot with the gun. The denouement, as always in Nabokov's works, is foretold at the beginning when Krečmar sees on the screen "himself" but does not realize the truth: "somebody wide-shouldered went to the coming backwards woman blindly" (Nabokov, 2000a, p. 259). Bitov combines design strategies of Nabokov and his opposite, Černyševskij (the false death of the hero at the beginning of *What Is to Do?*).

Modest Platonovič Odoevcev evokes the ideas of Nabokov's Archibald Moon. *Puškin House*: "You think the 1917th crushed, ruined the culture of the past, but it did not do it, it has preserved the culture, kept it" (Bitov 1990a 66). This thought is crucial for the "museum novel", and Bitov emphasizes it

once again in the final notes of Modest Odoevcev, "The Sphinx": "You claim the Russian culture crash. Vice versa, it has just emerged! The revolution does not crash the past, it keeps the past behind. All has been ruined – but at the moment the great Russian culture has been born, now forever, because it will not have been developed anymore" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 359).

One of the *Glory* characters, an English professor in Russian studies, Archibald Moon, "saw in the Bolchevist insurrection a certain clear-cut finality. ...he... maintained that Russia was concluded and unrepeatable, that you could embrace it like a splendid amphora and put it behind glass. The clay kitchen pot, which was being baked there, had nothing in common with it" (Nabokov, 1991, p. 64). Martin was charmed by Moon at the beginning, but soon got annoyed with him: "He would recall with involuntarily admiration the artistry of Moon's discourse, but the moment after would perceive as a vivid reality the picture of Moon carrying away to his rooms a sarcophagus with Russia's mummy" (Nabokov, 1991, p. 98).

Modest Odoevcev writes that after the 1917th the classical Russian culture would become a Sphinx: "Some time will pass, and it will have a legendary taste, as some yolk in a fresco-painting, lead in a brick, slave's soul in the balm – a secret! Russian culture will be the same Sphinx for the descendants as Pushkin was the Sphinx of Russian culture" (Bitov, 1990a, p. 359). So, Archibald Moon and Modest Odoevcev see the pre-revolutionary Russian culture as a completed (museum) culture, which is filled in with Puškin's spirit and is old and mysterious as the Egyptian culture (a Sphinx, a mummy).

Puškin House has the allusions to the other works of Nabokov, too. In the poetic synopsis of *Pushkin House* there are such lines:

The life goes on damned bad.

The granddad – after the grandson, the turnip – after the grandma,
the leader clenches to his cap... (Bitov, 1990a, p. 411).

The totalitarian state as a wonder-tale (about the turnip) put into reality was described in the Nabokov's *Tyrants Destroyed*: the old woman grown an eighty-pound turnip was awarded by the audience of the ruler where "for ten unforgettable minutes, she narrated how she had planted the turnip; how she tugged and tugged without being able to get it out of the ground, even though she thought she saw her deceased husband tugging with her; how she had had to call first her son, then her nephew and even a couple of firemen who were resting in the hayloft; and how, finally, backing in tandem arrangement, they had extracted the monster" (Nabokov, 2010, p. 512).

But the Nabokov's motif of a "false meeting" is specially noted by Bitov. Al'bina who guided the firemen through the museum is the unrecognized choice of Ljova Odoevcev. He understood that when it was too late: "And Ljova has seen at last that Al'bina was beautiful, long neck... that she would

be desirable and beloved... for the first and for the last time, that innate image of eternal love really appeared before him, with the personification of which he so persistently came at the first address he knew..." (Bitov, 1990a, pp. 189-190), i.e. to Faina.

The central episode of Nabokov's *A Nursery Tale* is a false meeting of the main character and his choice. Be more precise, the choice girl, as well as in *Puškin House*, was met, but was not recognized as the only one by the main character. Her status is revealed in the following fragment: "Erwin sat down on a bench and cast a timid and avid glance at her face. He saw her so clearly, with such piercing and perfect force of perception, that, it seemed, nothing new about her features might have been disclosed by years of previous intimacy" (Nabokov, 2010, p. 186). The girl wore a white dress (as a bride), and she had left "a sunnier mark" in the character's soul (Nabokov, 2010, p. 187). The girl's features and her vicinity make her the predecessor of Zina Merc - the choice of Fedor Godunov-Čerdyncev. The false meeting motif is one of the most persistent in *Puškin House*. The false meeting of Lyova and his grandfather was inevitable, Puškin "did not meet" Tûtčev (as Ljova's imaginary Tûtčev (Bitov, 1990a, pp. 240-241)), Ljova did not meet the American writer he adored (Bitov, 1990a, pp. 342-344)).

Conclusion

The most interesting moment in Bitov's attitude to Nabokov is, following the idea of Mark Lipoveckij, "the admission of the ambivalent dependence / independence from Nabokov" (Lipoveckij, 1995, p. 231). The Bitov's gesture of denying any influence is a quotation. When making the basic text of *Puškin House*, Bitov suggested he knew only *The Gift* and *Invitation to a Beheading* by Nabokov. But it's difficult to go beyond the thought that Bitov quotes *Camera Obscura* and *Glory*, too. Speaking clearly about the subtexts of their works, the writers hide some of subtexts. They understand the playing character of art which was emphasized by Nabokov: a literary author is analogical to a chess composer, and a reader - to a chess problem decipherer. To ask the author about his intertext, in such a case, means to violate the game rules. And the most sincere author, even if he knows his work well¹, in such a situation will be quite economical with the truth to let a reader (a critic, a researcher) enjoy the independent "answers".

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¹Alexander Žolkovskij wrote to us: "You know my texts better than me. When I was a friend of Saša Sokolov and wrote my works about him, I knew him better than he did" (from a letter to Vâčeslav V. Desâtov and Alexander I. Kulâpin, June 16, 2000).

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