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Title: Pnin: The Perils of Repetition

Repetition, in its many temporal, material and philosophical permutations constitutes a central trope in Nabokov's work. The case of *Pnin* (1955) is offered as illustrative, but not exhaustive example of this device. In 1965 in Montreux, Nabokov inscribed the title page of the Danish edition of *Pnin* to his wife Vera: "Не говори что дни твои – уроды,/ Тюремщиком Володю не зови!/ Перед мной – другие переводы,/ Перед тобой – все бабочки мои!" Here in a somewhat jocular verse inscription, which nevertheless invokes a serious poem by Nikolai A. Nekrasov (1855) on love, jealousy and death, Nabokov focuses on the centripetal, spiraling pull of repetition: our days; the repetition of translation; the intricate, repetitive, often camouflaging patterns on the wings of butterflies. Professor Timofey Pnin has no less a passion for repetition than his creator. One notes among an array of repetitions, Pnin's "constant war with insensate objects," his passion for timetables (blissful notations promising order, unless out of date and thus falsely repetitive); his insomniac repetitive turnings from side to side; squirrels with penetrating eye in life, lifeless in photographic image and just plain stuffed; memory's pull of Pnin back to St. Petersburg, attended repeatedly by spells of tachycardia; Pnin's *petite histoire* of Russia, an attempt to recreate a culture, repeated in brief in a distorted mirror at Cook's Castle. Repetitions and their possibly transcendent meaning for Nabokov's work will be explored not only in *Pnin*, but in the artistically revelatory autobiographies *Drugie berega*, *Speak*, *Memory*, and in *Pale Fire*, where Pnin appears for an albeit brief repeat performance.