

Title: Interpreting Voids: Vladimir Nabokov's Unfinished Novel *The Original of Laura*
Author: Yuri Leving, Dalhousie University

To date public discussion of Nabokov's unfinished novel, *The Original of Laura*, has mainly been concerned with the question of whether the author's expressed wish to have the incomplete manuscript destroyed upon his death should be granted. The debate over the fate of the manuscript will be the focus of my presentation, animated by Dmitri Nabokov's description of *Laura* as "in the literary sense very different from the rest of [my father's] oeuvre" and a "distillation of [Nabokov's] art."

Interest in Nabokov's manuscript is fueled by conflicting statements, injecting vague (dis)information into the discourse. This ongoing debate, in turn, promotes public interest in Nabokov, ensuring continued sales of his already *published* works. If the interpretative reception of a text always presupposes a text for discussion within the public domain, then the ongoing discussion of *The Original of Laura* is suspiciously lacking. This suggests that the manuscript may play a larger role as a marketing strategy than a literary text.

Pierre Bourdieu, who explicitly deals with the politics of culture and the symbolic capital of linguistic utterances, asserts that discourse can only exist within a given state of production and circulation. This means that the market fixes the price for a linguistic product. As such, anticipation helps to determine the objective value of Nabokov's unread manuscript regardless of its artistic quality. After its publication it will be either a disappointment or a unique glimpse into the author's creative laboratory, but until then it seems to be a valuable marketing tool.

Works Cited

- Boyarin, Daniel. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.
Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.
Boyd, Brian. *Vladimir Nabokov: American years*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
Eco, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1979.
Iser, Wolfgang. "The Authority of the Canon" *The Range of Interpretation*. NY: Columbia UP, 2000.
Jauss, Hans Robert. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
Nabokov, D. "*Laura* Is Not Even the Original's Name." An Interview with Dmitri Nabokov by Suellen Stringer-Hye. *The Nabokov Online Journal*. Vol. II, 2008.
Rosenbaum, Ron. "Dmitri's Choice." *The New York Observer*. 16 January 2008.