

Title: *Ruslan and Liudmila's Next of Kin: Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading*  
Author: Molly Peeney, University of Notre Dame

Pushkin's 1820 *Ruslan and Liudmila* is commonly held as the watershed piece of both Pushkin's own oeuvre and his era, as discussed, for example, in Tynianov's critical article "The Archaists and Pushkin." Tynianov regards the *poema* as the dividing line between Russian Classicism and Romanticism and says the piece marks Pushkin's crossing over from small to large forms. One of the central debates surrounding the *poema* in its time was the question of its "rod," which in the context meant "genre" but can also mean "gender" in Russian. This paper suggests that Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* plays with the question of "rod" from *Ruslan and Liudmila*, which results in *Invitation to a Beheading* itself reproducing *Ruslan and Liudmila's* critical cacophony.

Although some scholars have identified certain connections between Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* and Pushkin's *Ruslan and Liudmila*, the interplay of the two pieces remains relatively unexplored. This paper details the intimate connections between the novel and the *poema* in two ways. First, Cincinnatus C.'s life in prison will be read as a partial re-writing of the *fabula* of *Ruslan and Liudmila*; the title characters of Pushkin's *poema* find new life in the "doubled" Cincinnatus, who is both the hero and the damsel in distress. Second, the two works are read as comparable in terms of their formal contraventions and "errors," so to speak; both pieces are coups against the literary establishments of their times. In both content and form, *Invitation to a Beheading* is "akin" to *Ruslan and Liudmila*.