Why does wrongdoing have such a timeless allure, both for those who cross over into the realm of transgression and for the law-abiding citizens who are fascinated by crime in fact and fiction? One way to approach this question is to consider the possibility of crime as a work of art. In his lecture “The Art of Literature and Commonsense,” Nabokov bluntly states that crime stems from a failure of the imagination, and that art and crime are mutually exclusive; however, I would suggest that Nabokov’s fictional work paints a more complex portrait. My paper engages with existing approaches to Nabokov’s depiction of crime (in particular, the scholarly treatments of Despair), and in this way joins the debate about the relationship between Nabokovian aesthetics and ethics. Taking into account the critical discussion of Nabokov’s dialogue with Dostoevsky, I propose a heretofore overlooked source for Nabokov’s juxtaposition of art and crime: I argue that the protagonist of Despair, who views the murder that he commits in aesthetic terms, has a prototype in the hero of Chekhov’s stylistically transgressive novel The Shooting Party. I draw upon theoretical perspectives from De Quincey and Wilde and consider the broader context of Nabokov’s exploration of the interplay between artistic creation and criminality, particularly in Lolita (Humbert quipping that “you can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” but later insisting that “poets do not kill”) and Pale Fire (Kinbote’s argument that John Shade’s verse creation generates a kind of golem who comes to destroy the poet). In the conclusion, I use Lanchester’s novel The Debt to Pleasure to show how the “artful criminal” paradigm has developed in recent fiction and to articulate what Nabokov can teach us about the artistic aspect of crime.