

Title: Nabokov's American Gut

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Abstract:

On September 27<sup>th</sup> 1945, in the same letter in which he announced that he had 'passed all [my] citizenship examinations', Nabokov wrote to Edmund Wilson: 'I have given up smoking and have grown tremendously fat.' It was during the 1940s that Nabokov acquired what Brian Boyd euphemises as the 'cozily round' silhouette with which his American readers grew to associate him. The first Anglophone Nabokov, the Cambridge undergraduate, was visibly athletic. When Trinity College's 'Who's Who' of June 1922 notes that 'Nabokoff, V. has made the College his home', it calls to mind his efforts and prowess as a footballer and tennis player in college teams. Nabokov continued to play tennis throughout his life, but he also spent his lectures at Wellesley College 'compulsively devouring molasses candy' – as Boyd puts it. Nabokov's gut was an American terrain: its substance was American – 'blackstrap molasses' being a sugar type invented in America (in Louisiana in 1873) and a prominent ingredient in mass-manufactured American candy (hence the song of 1951, 'Blackstrap Molasses') – and it was American in the story it told about his sedentary lifestyle. Nabokov had come to Massachusetts to lecture, and his gut was the graph of a proportional, interdependent increase in his immobility and access to sugar-dense food. In this conference paper, I will attempt to trace the imprint of Nabokov's expanded waistline into the language and preoccupations of the first novels he wrote after he qualified as an American citizen in 1945; namely, *Lolita* (1955), *Pnin* (1957), and *Pale Fire* (1962). The aim of the paper will be to think between the Americanisation of Nabokov's body and that of his work.